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### Oh Well, Goodbye Intellect

When people get set in their ways, there is little that can change them. Humans are stubborn by nature; we are animals of habit, and we stick to those habits. This is especially apparent in students and the way that they learn. There are many times throughout the average school week where I automatically reject an idea that is presented to me. Oftentimes, it is an idea that is presented by one of my college professors. The reason behind this is because, as a student still in high school, I have a set way in which I have learned for the past six years or so. When I am approached with a new teaching style, it has been difficult to change to fit the teacher's expectations. Though this is a personal issue for me, I have found that it is also difficult for others too. Many students have trouble adapting to new classrooms and education styles, and that presents a very real issue for high school students that are dual enrolled in college courses, or for graduated high school students that are in their freshman year of college. It is imperative that while students are still in high school, they are taught how to become flexible learners that can adapt in order to succeed in college.

College and high school students differ from each other on varied levels, one of them being that younger students struggle with being able to actively change the way that they learn and perceive their education. That struggle then presents difficulties for the high schooler by making it more difficult to adapt to college-level education. High

school students have many frames of reference coming out of high school, as Jack Mezirow would say. A sociologist and a professor of adult and continuing education at Teachers College Columbia, Mezirow explains in his article, “Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice”, that frames of reference are, “the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences” (268). In the article, Mezirow discusses how deeply rooted some frames of reference are, and how one must put in time and work to grow to see beyond the point of view they already have. The “structures” that he refers to are the learning styles teachers have drilled into students from the time they stepped into middle school. Paulo Freire, an accomplished author and philosopher, would likely warn that high school students allow themselves to be “depositories” and that deeply rooted mindset is a frame of reference they carry on with them when they seek higher education. Freire has worked for years to see a change in education, where students take control of their learning. Instead, what he has noticed is that “. . . the more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled the better students they are”. In Freire’s book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, when he uses words such as “depositories” and “receptacles” he is referring to the students that allow teachers total control of putting information irrelevant to them into their heads instead of truly educating them. All too often, high school students take the frames of reference they constructed in high school, such as the banking concept of teaching, with them to college. Their expectation is that education will be “. . . an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. . . .” (Freire). These students still expect that their college education will be memorization for tests, like high school consisted of. That mindset is not accurate, because many college professors expect transformative learners, or

students that are actively “in the process of effecting change in a frame of reference” (268). Instead of having an obedient student that memorizes facts to spit out on the test, professors look for students that can fully comprehend and synthesize information that is given to them, and those who ask questions and can draw conclusions on their own. To fully thrive in college, students must be able to adapt and take control of their education.

Another frame of reference that can be very difficult for students to overcome that is also carried to college is the idea that the way things worked in high school, is the way that it will work in college. Freire would be distraught that so many of today’s students have the mindset that they must continue working the way that their previous teachers had taught them, because he fully believed that all students should be “. . . critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher”. Sadly, it is oftentimes seen that high school students continue to do their schoolwork as if they had never graduated. Mike Rose, a scholar and a research professor at University of California, Los Angeles, has seen too many cases where students are stuck in their old ways. One of the reasons behind this is because “children commonly acquire a foundation of the specific learning to think autonomously” (271) according to Mezirow and as the adolescents grow older, they do not develop the skills to become an autonomous thinker like they should. One young woman, Marita, wrote her first collegiate English paper, and turned it in. Her professor quickly turned it over to the UCLA director of Freshman English, and he declared she had plagiarized it. Marita was lost and confused, adamant that she had in no way cheated: ““You’re supposed to use other people, and I did, and I put the name of the book I used on the back of my paper”” (2). It was very obvious though, that the

paper she had wrote was not in her voice. Rose could see exactly what was happening though, when he summarized, “I imagined that it had pleased her previous teachers that she cared enough about her work to go find sources, to rely on experts” (3). What Marita had done in high school was considered exceptional work, so she assumed that it would apply to her university classes as well. Marita is not alone, because many students do the exact same thing.

In high school, many students, myself included, have one main goal: graduate. If one can survive all of the homework, labs, and exams, and make it to graduation, they are free. To get to graduation, though, there is specific criteria. In Michigan, a student must take four years of English classes, four years of math, three years of science, three of social studies, and so on down the list. A high schooler must pass all of those to make it to the end-goal of graduating. For many high school teachers, their goals are only to get students to pass their classes so they can go on to graduate. They do not fully educate their students, which is what they should be focusing on. Instead, they strive to reach their goal through memorization so students can perform on tests. Freire describes this well when he deconstructs the teaching style: “. . . the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat”. This is especially important because Freire is touching on what educators today refer to as “teaching to the test”. Too many teachers focus on getting the students to memorize facts, and then have them use what they memorized on a test. Soon after, the student forgets everything that they learned. I for one can say I am guilty of that. I learn what I need to pass the test, and in effect, to pass the class. I achieve the short-term goal that the teacher outlined for me. If I was asked to do a problem from my sta-

tistics test a month ago, chances are I would struggle with doing it properly. In college, goals are completely different. It is entirely up to the student to set their own goals, because a teacher is not going to do it for them. That is a prime example of the differences between high school and college students; high schoolers, dual enrollment students, and college freshmen do not know how to set and achieve their own short-term and long-term goals. Mezirow elaborates on goals in education: "It is crucial to recognize that learning needs must be defined so as to recognize both short-term objectives and long-term goals" (271). This is a point where Freire and Mezirow agree; for Freire, it is where he brings about the idea of the problem-posing method. With this teaching and learning method, the students must pose their own questions, and through searching for answers with the help of their educator, they educate themselves. This learning is where the difference lies; high schoolers depend on their teachers to set their short and long term educational goals, whereas many college students have learned the importance that self goal-setting has on their education, and they take the initiative to set such attainable goals.

Frames of reference can be found nearly anywhere in life, especially in the realm of education. Though there is no easy "fix" to rid oneself of a particular frame of reference, Mezirow teaches that there are multiple routes to take that helps to deal with them. One can choose to deepen the beliefs behind said frame of reference, or they can begin to search for a new point of view to change their mind-frame overall, and then begin the process of transformative learning through critical self-reflection, as Mezirow outlines in "Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice":

. . . one process is to elaborate an existing point of view—we can seek further evidence to support our initial bias regarding a group . . . A second way we learn is to establish new points of view . . . A third way we learn is to transform our point of view . . . Finally, we may transform our ethnocentric habit of mind by becoming aware and critically reflective of our generalized bias in the way we view groups . . . (270).

Marita had yet to undergo transformative learning, and rightly so, because Mezirow clearly stated that “We do not make transformative changes in the way that we learn as long as what we learn fits comfortably in our existing frames of reference” (270). Up until being accused of plagiarism, Marita had never experienced anything “uncomfortable” in her educational career. Another woman that Rose worked with faced the choice of staying stuck in her frame of reference, or expanding her mind through critical self reflection and transforming her viewpoints. The student, Lucia, was struggling with her abnormal psychology class. Not because the reading was too difficult, but because all of the experiences in her life were being contested by a book, *The Myth of Mental Illnesses* by Thomas Szasz. Rose himself realizes that Lucia is struggling with her frames of reference being challenged when he writes, “. . . certain elements of his [Szasz] argument, particular assumptions and allusions, were foreign to her—or, more precisely, a frame of mind . . . clashed dramatically with frames of mind and traditions of her own” (7). Lucia had grown up with a brother that had a mental illness, and what the *The Myth of Mental Illnesses* was proposing was so preposterous to her, that she did not believe it and initially rejected it. What Rose convinced her to do, however, was to try what Mezirow considers the third step to becoming a transformative

learner: “. . . a third way we learn is to transform our point of view” (270). Instead of encouraging Lucia to look for confirmation that what she already believed was undoubtedly right, Rose knew that Lucia would become a better student and learner overall if she began to accept, and eventually understand, the point of view of somebody else she did not necessarily agree with. Mezirow would be proud of Lucia for breaking from her own point of view and becoming an autonomous thinker, or somebody who has the, “. . . understanding, skills, and disposition necessary to become critically reflective of one’s own assumptions . . . .” (271). Working to break through ingrained frames of reference and to become an autonomous thinker is no easy feat, but that is exactly what Mezirow teaches at UCLA as a professor of adult and continuing education. He knows that transforming a learning style is a difficult process, and he tries to aid students throughout said process, because it is an integral skill that is needed in life.

Another student that Rose worked with that was not so open-minded was James. He was failing his English class, and had received a C- on a paper. Instead of analyzing and synthesizing John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing*, James summarized it. He did not know any better, as he did not have much experience writing papers that required critical thought over specific ideas. James refused to acknowledge what he did wrong; instead, he continuously insisted that, “I should have gotten better than a C-. I think I deserve way better than that” (15). Instead of taking steps to become a transformative learner, James desperately searched for evidence that proved he was correct, and he was better than a C- student. This is very typical of students and people in general that are not mature enough to become a transformative learner. Mezirow would say that James is not ready to look at himself critically, and to deeply reflect on things that had been

imbedded in him over the years through the banking concept from his previous high school teachers. James reverted back to what Mezirow refers to as the first process of becoming a transformative learner: “. . . one process is to elaborate an existing point of view—we can seek further evidence to support our initial bias regarding a group . . .” (270). Unlike Lucia, who was older than James with more life experience and who decided to expand her points of view, James remained stubborn and fought to prove his very limited view points. That is a cycle many students are stuck in; doggedly trying to prove that they are are right, and not willing to open their minds to new evidence that contradicts their frames of reference.

Students being stuck in their own frames of reference is a problem that is only becoming more prevalent in today’s society, because they are beginning to dual-enroll in college courses as early as their sophomore year in high school. When those students do not understand what their professors are asking of them, or if they reject the material and the teaching style altogether, they begin to fail. One may say that it is important that the students do not fail so they do not have to pay for the college class out of their own pocket, but the more pressing matter is that these students failing college courses so early in their educational career discourages them from wanting to continue their education into college. The reason this issue is being seen so often now in education is because younger and younger students are being treated like transformative learners and autonomous thinkers before they are ready to self-reflect and think critically about their frames of reference. If high school students are not taught to become transformative learners that possess the skills so that they can critically self-reflect, they will only ever be high school students.



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