Why do we go to school-The Importance of Education

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Why do we go to school-The Importance of Education

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I. Introduction

Defined by experts and scholars, “school is a place for learned intercourse and instruction; a place for acquiring knowledge and mental training”. In other words, school is where we gain knowledge and explore our interests. Like a sponge, we absorb the nutriments in the boundless sea of knowledge. “Purity of personal life is the one indispensable condition for building up a sound education.” (Mohandas Gandhi) School is the cradle of our nation and the small society for us to learn how to cooperating with people. To be specific, profound education is more likely to let people socialize and become intellectual.

However, a school equipped with excellent hardware without experienced software is not functional. That is to say, teachers play a significant role in everyone’s life. Like farmers’ cultivation, without the irrigation of teachers, the seeds can’t grow up successfully and vigorously. An impressive teacher can inspire and lead students to show their talents and explore themselves in different fields. “Genius without education is like silver in the mine.” (Benjamin Franklin) Indeed, a remarkable teacher is one who can make a big difference in a student life by patience and passion of teaching. Teaching is a job which will bring up and train all trades and professions. The devotions educators make will bring an enormous effect to the society and often be crucial to the prosperity and educational standard of a nation.

Erin Gruwell, a well-known teacher starting her teaching career at the age of twenty-five, dedicated herself in the educational field. In the book “Teach With Your Heart” written by Erin Gruwell, vividly described and shared the memoir of the odyssey in her teaching and the freedom writers; and “The Element”, describing how people find their potential and elaborated how great education can influence and inspire students. Through the analysis of the two books I mention above and other comprehensive researches about the influence and significance of education, the writer hopes to illustrate her own perspective about Erin’s pedagogy and come up with a conclusion about why school is essential.

II. Thesis
A. Prologue

Erin Gruwell is a 25-year old student just graduated and got the degree.
Growing up in a mid-class family and encountering no difficulties all her way studying. Rather than choosing other high-salary jobs, Erin determined to be a teacher. Teaching in Wilson High School is one of the biggest challenges in her life. The first semester of teaching freshmen was a multicultural class. It’s a melting pot which combined with teens from various races, different skin color, and even provocative gangs. As a rookie student teacher, Erin dedicated herself to these teenagers and leaded them to a knowledgeable and intellectual exploration which will influence their lives forever.

B. The inspirational education
1. Utilize various kinds of circumstances to arouse learning motivation.
   1.1 Field trip to “The museum of Tolerance”.

   In the first class of the semester, what welcomed Erin in Room 203 was a crowd of 16-year old teens who showed low learning aspiration in a chaotic classroom. Some of them drew in textbooks, making paper airplanes, or just taking naps. What’s worse, a few girls even made humiliating jokes on her. Though underwent frustration on the disastrous first day, she determined to reach their hearts and began to make collaborative approach on the topic they’re interested in. Few days later, a naughty caricature making joke on a student, Sharaud was passed though the whole class. Erin was shocked and reminded of the Holocaust. Surprised that they haven’t heard of anything about Holocaust but nearly every of them have been shot at, Erin decided to hold a field trip to “Museum of Tolerance” despite some teachers opposing. They were like in the actual scene in Auschwitz’s concentration camp in WWII in the museum, seeing all the victims’ pictures on the wall and the documentary of Holocaust, everyone was in solemn silence and strongly connected. Many of them had witnessed homicide of friends or parents so it was quite similar to the reality of their childhoods and lives now. After this meaningful outdoor curriculum, their relationship between each other was gradually developed.

   1.2 The movie appreciation and writing letters to the director, Steven Spielberg.

   Leading them to the museum to experience the atmosphere, Erin also brought them to the local theater to see the movie “Schindler’s List”. Some of them laughed during the scene where a Nazi shoots a Jewish woman in the head. The racial discrimination aggravated the audience’s antipathy. They were escorted by the theater manager and people applauded. Erin reacted to this embarrassing
situation with rationality and compassion, recording that when kids are exposed to and tormented by violence, they often use laughter as a coping mechanism. The following day “Schindler’s List” won the Oscar Academy Award and. A reporter at the Newport Beach Daily Pilot went into their classroom to interview what they faced in the theater. Been on the cover of Daily Pilot, Erin received call from Steven Spielberg’s spokesperson, inviting her to write a letter to explain why her class was so special.

“How rather than identifying my students by a singular color- black, crown, yellow, or white, I described them as crayons. And even if they wore rough around the edges, or were broken in the middle, they figured out a way to hold the pieces together, smooth out those rough edges, and even sharpen themselves.” (Teach With Your Heart p.57) Writing back to Steven Spielberg, Erin simply recorded the odyssey she had gone through with the students by then and the specialty of her teaching methods. Triggering an astonishing response, the letter was novel and led to Steven’s request for visiting her students.

Arranging for another field trip, Erin began to inspire students to dive into the autobiography projects to “earn” for their upcoming field trip to meet the great director, Steven Spielberg. The project not only intrigued their writing aspirations but also led them to experience a profound personal epiphany like each protagonist they’ve studied in “To Kill a Mockingbird”, “The Catcher in the Rye” and the Oscar Award, “Schindler’s list”.

1.3 Literature Appreciation, Romeo & Juliet

Through the discussion about the world-famous plays, Romeo & Juliet, Shakespeare allowed Erin to make lessons out of language, out of love and out of the concept of civil strife. Letting students think critically about why words change, why people fall in love, and why people fight were the core values of this lesson. More importantly, referring to the realities like the riots and gangs on street are similar to the civil strife and feud between Montague & Capulet. This impressive design is the perfect segue to the lesson on how language changes, and more importantly, stimulate their learning desire through multiple situation learning.

1.4 Reading life related diaries and novels

To make them feel involved when reading, Erin began with the reading
assignments of “To Kill a Mockingbird” and “The Catcher in the Rye” in the first semester. It was gratifying that they started to make a profound connection with misconstrued character and gradually built up interests to read. The two books were just the beginning of the healing process. Afterwards, they enjoyed reading “The Diary of Anne Frank” and “Zlata’s Diary: A Child’s Life in Sarajevo”. The stories of Anne and Zlata made them feel connected and bond with the authors. The diaries inspired them to record their own story happening in their childhood and also made them consider about the true value of life.

Moreover, to invite Miep Gies and Zlata to their classroom, they once again wrote sincere letters to show their true feelings after reading Anne’s diary to fully support this activity. After the interactions with Miep and Zlata who survived after the Holocaust and Bosnian War, the students were more mature and thought of lots of questions they hadn’t thought of before due to the striking chord of losing their beloved ones in the bloodcurdling events. They started to contemplate about the worthiness of life. Walking through the painlessness they encountered in past, they finally started to understand why they need to go to school, for knowing deeper existing value of themselves through all the learning.

“To live forever
And never feel a thing
To wait a million life times
Only to erode and become sands
Wish not for the stone
But for the fire
Last only moments
But Change everything.”  (Teach With Your Heart, p.120)

This was the poem wrote by a student and read when they were hosting Miep in their class. Afterward, they had a touching conversation with the Bosnian girl, Zlata, who was the same age with them and all suffered odious childhood in wars and riots. Going through the plight with the characters in the two books, they echoed their own lives together, building spiritual bonds with the disaster survivors and celebrating “the humanity”. They eventually got priceless passion for reading, learning and even for their miserable lives after these innovative opportunities created by Erin’s endeavor.

2. Freedom writers’ foundation
2.1 Publishing their own stories
Erin suffered the sorrow of divorce when she almost dedicated herself fully to her students. To heal all students’ pains in childhood, Erin decided to use writing to smooth their wounds and welcome a better future. Therefore, she designed the huge project of completing a class book. **The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education. (Martin Luther King, Jr)** Validating their pains through the writing process, they once again knew each other deeper and also let more people know their thrilling stories yet told them how influential could education and an impressive teacher could be.

### 2.2 Journey to Europe

A year after the graduation, Erin designed a journey to take the students to Amsterdam and Ireland to meet Miep and Zlata, prospecting the places they read in Anne Frank’s autobiography. This extraordinary trip is not only time-consuming but also the unique and precious experience for the freedom writers to gather together after they were apart and to be involve in the atmosphere of real concentrate camp of Nazis. When they were in “the annex” in Amsterdam, they were more connected to the author, Ann Frank and could visualize their actual life at that time. Viewing all the scenes in Poland, Netherland, and Bosnia, they swore to tell more people what has happened around the globe and be unify to make a little change to the world.

### 2.3 Turning their stories into the film

After publishing their stories, the freedom writer’s story was even adapted to the film “Freedom Writers”, played by Hilary Swank. A student called Maria said on the advance screening, as I paraphrase, “Though life taught me to see what the real world is like when I was little, in Erin’s class she taught me what life could be instead.” All the respectful and remarkable deed done most by Erin and the memorable journey of a series of self-discovery in all the specialty curriculums they went through together, not only did they have higher respects for themselves but motivated them to find their goals and accomplish them with persistency and perseverance.

### C. Epilogue
“I’d been taught how to “teach to the test” rather than to the student. In this test culture, I was afraid teachers would lose their passion and creativity and become too rigid” (Teach With Your Heart p.33) In Erin’s stories, she did her best to convert the education to a better term and influence many students lives, accompanying them to stumble through the darkness and offering them to overcome a better future with her passion and dedication for education and her inspirational pedagogy.

D. The reform of test culture—Elemental education

1. Reforming Education

Ken Robinson PhD, a British well-known international adviser on education, has a deep influence to my research on this topic and his ideas and suggestions mentioned in one of his writings also corresponded to Erin’s teaching pedagogy, “The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything”. The book refers to the experience of personal talent meeting personal passion. He argues that in this encounter, we feel our true selves, most inspired, and achieve to the peaks of our lives. This book draws on the stories of creative artists such as Paul McCartney, 'Simpsons' creator Matt Groening, and physicist Richard Feynman to demonstrate paradigms of success.

“The real challenges for education will not only be met by empowering passionate and creative teachers and by firing up the imaginations and motivations of the students.”(The Element p.247) Sir Ken Robinson indicated the wrong ways policymakers promote on the education reform. Many corners around the world, including Europe, America, Asia and many are on the process of education reform. Nevertheless, of the three core components of education, which is, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, almost all the reforms are mainly based on the assessments. In fact, the curriculums are designed for preparing the standardized tests and those tests have the aim for finding work and creating wealth. Since the blooming of the economy in different regions of world, it becomes a trend for the nation to reform their education. Maybe those reforms can bring prosperity for nations; however, they haven’t noticed the potential problem including lacking of creativity and innovation, passion for the interests and jobs, sense of responsibility and morality in this kind of reform.

Standardized tests are like the diagnosis for doctors but not the criterion to proclaim or assert one’s abilities and potentials. In “The Element”, Dr Robinson
has mentioned that any test or program can’t differentiate the certain talent in each field. The assessment is not wrong itself but the problem is the method used. Policymakers somehow regard the standardized test as the ability and potential. Thus, every school under this kind of the testing system are restricted by grades and tests, including students and teachers, all have a sincere hope to educate and learn in a more flexible and diverse educational system just like how Erin influenced all the freedom writers’ life from misery to miracle. On the other hand, real educators are who can distinguish between interest and immediate passion. That is to say, an impressive teacher can identify between passion and the sparkle of joy, therefore understanding an individual’s talent and passion belongs to which area’s certain field as well.

2. Transforming Education

For the challenges we encounter nowadays, the educational system itself doesn’t need to be reformed. It needs to be converted instead. The key to conversion is not the pursuit of coherence of everyone but to fit the individual demand and discover the talent of each child. The teaching environment schools provide need to arouse students’ learning desire and more significantly, finding their passions for certain things naturally.

Dr. Robinson made a critic that “elevating disciplines over others only reinforces outmoded assumptions of industrialism and offends diversity.” *(The Element, p.248)* He pointed out that many students pass through the education but have their natural talents marginalized or ignored. The holistic education all pays central and equal contributions to educate individuals, like great skills and objectivity in art, the intuition in heart of science also share similar core value of educating a person. He emphasized the idea of separating subjects has nothing in common offends the principle of dynamism. Nevertheless, “School systems should base their curriculum not on the idea of separate subjects, but on the much more fertile idea of disciplines.” That is to say, the curriculums ought to be more personalized and encourage kids to follow their heart and intuition to achieve things they have enthusiasm for.

“Mentoring and coaching is the vital pulse of a living system of education.” *(The Element, p.248)* Dr. Robinson also made a unique metaphor of the fast-food model and Michelin guide on how the common existing education around the world and the transforming education are like. The quality of the
fast-food is guaranteed but pitifully it’s all standardized. More severely, “some forms of the fast-food are contributing to the massive explosion of obesity and diabetes across the world.”\textit{(The Element, p.249)} In contrast, the Michelin guide only focused on particular and specific criteria for the pursuit of excellence. Thus it seeks for the real depth of humanity and cultivates distinctiveness instead.

To sum up all the perspectives above, the transformation of education is a pioneer to the vision of elemental education. We must guide each student through catering the specific nutrition they need in school yet create an epochal renaissance of education.

E. Taiwan’s educational reform in recent years

After the efforts made by the government for nearly two decades, the ministry of education finally passes the proposal of 12-year compulsory education. President Ma also announced that this system will be officially carried out in 2014. The aim of this policy is to create a better learning environment for Taiwan’s students. Pursuing the equality learning resource, upgrading the quality of the community high schools, multiple ways of entering schools, tuition-free and test-free policies are the main goals the government hope to accomplish.

In my perspective, this policy will not only benefit the right of being educated for every kid but also encourage the educators to respect each student’s potential and inspire them to find their own way release their passion and unique talent. Like European countries and America, Taiwan is also on its way to make education better. Hence, students are more likely to enjoy acquiring knowledge during their learning process. To be more specific, regard education as the crucial turning point to explore, visualize and achieve dreams.

III. Conclusion

\textit{“To penetrate and dissipate these clouds of darkness, the general mind must be strengthened by education.”}(Thomas Jefferson) Erin’s books remind me to think critically about how education influence and what crucial role it plays in the society all for all the human beings. Through the books I analyses, I saw the dedication and sacrifice teachers make to
enhance the quality of a nation. A successful teacher can bring more positive effects to students during their study process. They can not only make students have higher respect for themselves and feel more hopeful for every individual’s unique goal. They accompany you to stumble through the darkness and be braver to strive for your future. More importantly, teachers play a significant role on your way to pursue your dream. They instruct and inspire you along the journey of your exploration during the adolescence of your lifetime. Conclusively, the significance of going to school contributes to the collaboration of educators, education and the development of future elite. Professional and profound teachers must come from the superb and qualified educational system, illustrating each nation’s crucial element, the importance of education.

IV. Reference

1. Quote from Brainy Quote website on August 20th
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