



Ideals, Lifelong Learning, and Professional Development

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Abstract

Ideals can and do empower people to transcend their limitations and accomplish feats that inspire many. Political activists devote their lives to help achieve their utopian vision of social equity and people of faith struggle hard to bear witness to the ideal of selfless love of their neighbors. Ideals also serve an important role in education, as many teachers try to realize their dreams and hopes in the classroom. While some find inspiration from caring and erudite teachers they personally encountered as students, others are inspired by theoretical ideas proposed by philosophers and scientists. The purpose of this study is to propose lifelong learning as an ideal that has the power to stimulate teachers to become more effective in the classroom. After discussing the central characteristics, the importance, and benefits of lifelong learning, we will reflect upon the impediments and complications that can thwart its realization.

Keywords: Lifelong learning; benefits; necessity; impediments

Introduction

Humans vary in many different ways. Our exact tastes and beliefs, along with values and commitments, are not shared by anyone else. Our uniqueness is such that there is nobody else on this planet who embodies and exhibits the same characteristics that define who we are. Despite such differences, however, we share many similarities that help differentiate us from other species. Physiologically, we have a heart that pumps blood and a stomach that digests what we eat. We also share many cognitive traits. We can draw inferences, predict the future, and synthesize disparate ideas. Another commonality is that we are driven to act in very particular ways because of the ideals we uphold. In almost any domain of human activity, ideals shape and direct what we do. In the political realm, Marxists engage in demonstrations, join unions, write newspaper editorials, study works

on hegemony, and cast their vote during election because they want to help establish a society that reflects their ideal of a classless society. When engaging in academic pursuits, researchers and scholars try hard to give an objective and impartial assessment of arguments put forward by others because objectivity and impartiality are both epistemic ideals that characterize quality research. Many couples rearing a family together advise, scold, praise, and encourage their children in particular ways so that they can build an ideal family environment. And as Peshkin (1986) demonstrates, amidst a society infused with secular values, devout followers of a faith tradition try to model their lives after prophets and saints who they believe taught the ideal path for everyone to follow.

Education is also driven by ideals held by teachers. A foreign language teacher encourages and supports students who don't use the target language when doing pair work because it falls short of the ideal where learners communicate in the language they are learning. When planning a lesson, a teacher of history decides to spend the first fifteen minutes of class having a dialogue with the students because the back and forth exchange of ideas is conceived to be the epitome of intellectual engagement. A kindergarten teacher listens attentively and offers constructive advice to a distressed student because being an empathetic, caring teacher is an ideal that influences what he or she does and says. A university professor of philosophy spends hours reading the philosophical tomes of metaphysics in the library because of his or her conviction that an ideal scholar must have an encyclopedic fountain of knowledge which can be imparted to students. Regardless of the educational context or the subject being taught, the ideals teachers endorse can influence how they respond to what they experience in the classroom and how they organize and conduct their lessons. Ideals are not lofty, impractical ideas that have little bearing on everyday teaching. The perceived gap between actuality and ideals spurs teachers to take very specific courses of action.

What sort of ideals can empower teachers and exert a positive impact on teaching? Teachers shouldn't commit themselves to any ideal they happen to come across. Some ideals are morally questionable. We wouldn't want teachers who believe indoctrination to be an effective mode of instruction to structure lessons in light of their distorted ideal. Nor would we want teachers to embrace ideals that are pedagogically counterproductive. Those who believe in true behaviorist fashion that student errors must be discouraged through negative reinforcements are inadvertently suggesting that students shouldn't

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venture beyond their comfort zone and take intellectual risks. Setting aside those that are morally and pedagogically problematic, ideals must provide the optimal level of challenge. Ideals that can be achieved with relative ease won't lead to a lasting sense of accomplishment. Nor would they promote much professional growth. We need ideals that challenge us to stretch our abilities and help build our competence.

Lifelong learning, or the continual learning about education, is an ideal that can positively contribute to teaching. The never-ending quest to learn about assessment, motivation, and learning styles is certainly morally unproblematic. Teachers are following a moral path when they deepen their understanding of how they can help students learn. Delving into the latest research on memory, brain science, and cognitive fallacies can in principle help teachers create more intellectually stimulating lessons. Lifelong learning can also provide a challenge that stimulates professional growth, as there is no end to how teachers can expand the frontiers of what they know. The purpose of this study is to first specify the central characteristics of lifelong learning and its benefits. Thereafter, we will examine the reasons why lifelong learning matters and the challenges that arise during the process of learning about education.

1. Lifelong Learning: What It Is and Its Benefits

In education, a very particular ideal or model is put forward and defended by proponents who think that it can serve as an empowering and worthy goal that promotes professional growth. Many, for example, argue that the ideal of being a reflective practitioner - or a practitioner who habitually reflects critically on his or her own teaching practice - can stimulate teachers to improve their teaching and ultimately result in more learning among students. Those who aspire to become a reflective practitioner are encouraged to keep a journal where they record and reflect on what happened in class. Others stress the importance of teachers regularly filming and examining their lessons so that they might be able to identify and correct ineffective teaching routines. By reflecting on their journal entries and observing how they pose questions and start their lessons, defenders of this model are convinced that teachers can tread the path towards becoming an educator who has a lasting and positive effect on their learners.

There is no denying that the reflective practitioner model can and does challenge teachers to stretch their competence and face instead of avoid the difficulties they

encounter every day. Instead of articulating and defending this ideal, however, we will examine the ideal of becoming lifelong learners, which, as shall be argued, also has the resource to foster professional growth.

Lifelong learning has several enduring features. First of all, it is a continual process whereby teachers continue learning about education. Since it is a process without an end, teachers cannot reach an acme of learning where there is no room for further learning. However deeply immersed in a subject, there is always more to be learned. Volumes have already been written about every facet of education, whether it be teacher burnout, the effect of technology on learning, or collaborative learning projects, and current research into high-order thinking skills and the role of schemata in reading comprehension is currently building the storehouse of knowledge. In addition to contemporary research, studies on the human brain made possible by more sophisticated brain scanning technology alongside the birth and expansion of interdisciplinary research programs will keep teachers busy making sense of it all. The exponential growth of research on teaching and learning means that teachers will never run out of things to ponder. An additional reason as to why learning is a perpetual process is that seemingly disparate academic themes are tightly linked to each other. The subject of curriculum design, for example, interconnects with motivation because it raises the issue of whether students are motivated to learn when the content is unilaterally decided by teachers. And the subject of student motivation often overlaps with studies exploring the nature of efficacy or how people behave when they sense that they are not in control of their lives. Because subjects and themes are interwoven, academic pursuits can branch off into unpredictable directions. And finally, an interesting feature about learning is that as learners deepen their understanding of a theme in any given field, they realize how much they don't know. Learning something in depth raises more questions than answering the questions learners bring to the subject at hand. When learners explore something at an advanced level, the end of their inquiry is forever postponed, continually eluding their investigations.

The second feature is that lifelong learning is a process whereby something new is learned. Teachers studying an article that doesn't challenge them to rethink their assumptions in any way or rereading a familiar book that simply confirms the views they already have or watching a video of a pundit defending the convictions they similarly hold is not engaged in lifelong learning that is meaningful. Lifelong learning at its best helps

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teachers acquire a new perspective on education, a new instructional strategy that can be used in class, or a new insight that clarifies what in the past was nebulous and fuzzy. To be sure, revisiting and getting reacquainted with the familiar has a place in learning but the challenge is to open new vistas by treading the unfamiliar, unpredictable, or vexing path. A teacher who supports political conservatism can read up on ways to build a curriculum revolving around patriotism and values that uphold the sanctity of same-sex marriage and the nuclear family. The same teacher can, however, delve into the literature on multicultural education or the many challenges raised against the idea of meritocracy in education by Marxists, learning more about unfamiliar views that challenge his or her core beliefs.

In addition to novelty, lifelong learning that supports professional growth consists of studying something that is worthwhile. We would quite rightly think that teachers could be spending more constructive use of their time if they preoccupy themselves with something that lacks importance and meaning. Because the ability to think critically has educational value, teachers devoting their time studying the ways to cultivate the ability to buttress beliefs with evidence and deduce logically from premises are engaging in something more worthwhile than those investigating and mulling over how students can score well on standardized tests that assess their long-term memory. Time spent in the library reading won't amount to much if the works are shallow and bigoted. The experience of listening to a podcast uploaded by an ideologue voicing radical, slanted views can be made more fruitful by attending to views that are more nuanced and well-informed. Because so much empirical research has been done on education over the years, teachers need to allocate more of their time learning from studies that are reliable and unbiased, not those that are skewed.

The fourth characteristic is that it is a process of learning, not the process of being indoctrinated or trained. Teachers can learn in manifold ways. They can, for example, deepen their understanding of teaching by learning about the underlying cause behind something they are familiar with. For instance, students' curiosity is often aroused when there is a cognitive dissonance or a conflict between what they believe and what they are taught. Knowing the cause that sparks intellectual curiosity can in principle help teachers devise more stimulating lessons by imparting facts and information that contradict our commonsensical beliefs about the world. Besides deepening their understanding, teachers

can extend the horizon of what they know by becoming acquainted with a theme or issue that they have never seriously explored before. There are, for example, recent studies documenting the positive effects of evaluating student performance that don't rely on letter grades. This exciting new field can aid teachers to come up with alternative schemes such as portfolios for evaluating their students. Another crucial yet often neglected form of learning is the process of unlearning. Teachers all have deeply ingrained beliefs about teaching and learning that turn out to be misleading or simply wrong. Many offer prizes - stickers, brownie points, medals, book coupons, etc. - as a way of motivating students to read more books and write more creatively. But studies on motivation question this all-too-familiar way of responding to students' academic output. Unbeknownst to many teachers, prizes have a tendency to undermine their students' intrinsic motivation because they come to view learning simply as a means to earn rewards.

The last feature that is shared by lifelong learning is that teachers become proactive in the sense that they seek opportunities that help them grow as educators. They attend workshops on reading pedagogy so that they can help their students become avid readers. They read works on educational psychology in order to learn more about how giving choices to students and respecting their autonomy ignite their interest in learning. Proactive teachers willingly undertake new challenges that expand their minds and try to satisfy their drive to further their own education. Conversely, because lifelong learning at its best is self-driven, it is unwise for school administrators to force teachers to embark on this intellectual journey by dangling carrots in front of their noses.

Now that we have examined the salient characteristics that define lifelong learning, we are in a better position to help uncover its benefits. The first and foremost benefit is that learning itself is its own reward. Even if learning a new theme or issue doesn't result in a new task or technique that can be implemented in the classroom, it satisfies our inbuilt need to be cognitively and intellectually stimulated. We gain immense satisfaction when we understand something that at first seemed counterintuitive and perplexing. We experience a sense of accomplishment when we apply ourselves to a challenging problem and with determination and resilience solve it. We are intellectually satisfied when we are able to relate disparate items and phenomena into a logically coherent whole. We are cognitively mesmerized when a new theoretical outlook or frame of reference helps make sense of what we experience in life. It is also intellectually stimulating to realize that our

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beliefs are erroneous as it often provokes us to correct what is wrong. Moreover, it is often gratifying to become aware of any gap we have in our understanding because it makes us want to fill this gap by exploring the relevant field in more depth. Lifelong learning, in other words, can awaken our intellectual interests and deliver the rewards that are intrinsic to any intellectual exploration.

Another benefit is that it enables teachers to become more understanding of the plight their students find themselves in. It is easy for teachers to forget the many challenges they faced as students - struggling hard to memorize lists of technical words, write original essays about the short stories they read, take copious notes on matters that happened hundreds of years ago, etc. - because they left the classroom as learners some time ago. With the passage of time, it becomes more difficult to recall the hurdles they faced as neophytes. Also, another factor that makes it more challenging for teachers to relate to the challenges their students go through is that they usually excelled and liked the subject they teach when they were students. Their competence in the subject, coupled with their passion for the questions and issues it raises, make it exceedingly difficult to understand how students can fail to understand the foundational principles of the subject or how they can remain uninterested in a field that they think is endlessly fascinating. But by becoming a student of education, they have to grapple with difficult texts and unlearn deeply embedded misconceptions, going through what their students do on a daily basis. Their experience of facing the challenges of intellectual exploration can make them more empathetic towards what their learners face.

The third value behind lifelong learning is that it helps break the monotony many educators experience after spending many years at school. As teachers gradually build their teaching experience, what at first seemed novel and even strange becomes familiar and mundane. Classroom teaching becomes largely routinized and automatic, where teachers resort to the same textbook, setting the same tasks and assessing student learning by reusing the tests and quizzes they made a while back. What happens in the classroom becomes largely predictable. Despite subtle differences, students respond favorably to ice-breaking activities but struggle with texts with dense, academic prose. Outside the classroom, teachers read and mark student essays that contain similar stylistic shortcomings and grammatical errors. Year in and year out, teachers have to counsel rebellious students who find no value in learning and meet their parents to gain support.

As teaching becomes overly familiar and predictable, everything from lesson planning to student counselling becomes a time-consuming chore that leaves teachers bored and unenthused. Teaching, however, doesn't need to be an endless and dreary cycle of uninspiring routines. It can become an exciting and adventurous endeavor, full of surprises and novelties when teachers embark on the challenging road to learn the new and the unknown. Teachers can familiarize themselves with and implement tasks they have never experimented with in class before or replace standard tests filled with multiple choice questions with more innovative assessment measures to gauge student ability. Their way of making sense of the classroom teaching experience can undergo drastic changes when they learn about theories that illuminate what seemed contradictory or inexplicable. New discoveries made in neuroscience or psychology can have important implications that challenge the standardized ways of teaching that typify many classrooms. The educational landscape can regain its novelty when teachers' eyes are reopened and their complacency shaken by restudying the craft of teaching with vigor.

Another value behind lifelong learning is that it can make teachers less dogmatic in their outlook. Educational issues in general are much contested, eliciting a range of responses from researchers and practitioners. For example, while some argue in favor of direct instruction, which mandates teachers to impart facts and information for rote learning and memorization, others regard this mode of teaching as antiquated and counterproductive, insisting that students need to discover truths about the world on their own (with minimal teacher interference) by engaging in fun, meaningful projects. And while there are scholars who are convinced that teachers must create an environment that protects and bolsters their students' sense of self-esteem, vociferous opponents to this overall philosophy argue that teachers shouldn't be too protective of students, praising mediocre work out of fear of harming their egos. Because debates over a wide range of issues abound in education, it is quite natural for teachers studying pedagogy to encounter views they personally endorse criticized by compelling reasons and to come across views they eschew defended with cogent reasons and buttressed by reliable evidence. The experience of becoming aware of drawbacks and shortcomings that are inherent in the views they hold is a salutary reminder that what they regard as self-evident and natural might be erroneous or only partly right. Being aware of the many problems and limitations our views entail, we become less cocksure and more embracing of uncertainty. In other

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words, we become less dogmatic, on the whole, and more open-minded towards ideas we don't necessarily hold. Open-mindedness is certainly an attitude teachers need to adopt given that a wide spectrum of issues ranging from curricular design and assessment to motivation is mooted in the field of education.

Finally, as Barth (1990) argues, by sharing their experiences of following the quest of continuous learning with students, teachers can act as great role models of lifelong learning. Teachers are expected to model behaviors and attitudes for students to emulate. They come to class well-prepared and don't display favoritism in class partly because teachers want students to realize the value of being prepared and the ethicality of fairness. Teachers also show interest in what they are teaching because they want their learners to acquire the same enthusiasm for what is being covered in class. Likewise, teachers can demonstrate the importance of lifelong learning so that students can inherit this overall approach. They can talk about the books they have been reading, the learning difficulties they are facing, and the joys that accompany genuine, meaningful learning. They can also incorporate new pedagogical strategies and learning activities into the classroom and thereby demonstrate their interest in forever learning about their craft. Lifelong learning is a form of learning that is of immense value for students. Regardless of the subject, there is so much for the beginner to learn. What they know is comparable to a tiny speck in the vast ocean of knowledge. To expand their minds and broaden their mental horizons, students can enrich and further their education by following the path taken by their mentors.

In summary, the continual process of learning something new about education is of value for teachers. Learning has intrinsic merit that brings lasting joy and satisfaction. But it can also contribute to classroom teaching. By becoming learners, teachers can become more understanding of the difficulties students face and by venturing into a new intellectual domain, they can experience new fascinations that help introduce variety and novelty to their work. Furthermore, teachers who are lifelong learners can become good role models for students and become less dogmatic in their thinking about educational issues.

2. Why Lifelong Learning is Necessary

There are different ways of learning and the most appropriate mode of learning to

adopt often depends on what is being learnt or what the academic field in question is. Those aspiring to be professional carpenters typically serve many years of apprenticeship under a skilled and experienced carpenter. The budding carpenter carefully observes his or her master sawing and nailing and measuring wood, carefully noting hand movements and speed of execution. After being apprenticed for a while, the mentor will give his or her student tasks which can be completed with a little support. As the novice grows in ability, the expert scaffolds less, giving more room for independent judgement. This model of close observation and imitation under close guidance is most appropriate given the nature of carpentry. When learning how to type efficiently, a different approach to learning is required. Those new to typing typically sit behind the keyboard and engage in repetitive practices that gradually become more demanding. By following a largely mechanical and repetitive program, students become adept at typing efficiently. In a similar way, lifelong learning is an appropriate way of learning about the many issues revolving around pedagogy given some of the salient qualities that characterize education as an academic discipline. In what follows, we will examine some of the more important reasons why teachers need to engage in lifelong learning.

In the not too distant past, sages, philosophers, and gurus propounded definitive views about teaching and learning, seeking converts who would faithfully adhere to their doctrines. These educational prescriptions were largely speculative in nature, reflecting their metaphysical views about human nature and the moral ideals they embraced. Their views also stemmed from anecdotal experiences, reflecting what worked for them personally or the success stories of those they knew in person. However, the gradual advent of education as an independent field of study has brought with it the call and the commitment to base pedagogical prescriptions on empirical evidence. Speculative doctrines rooted in armchair theorizing was to be replaced by mandates firmly anchored to rigorous, detailed empirical studies. Due to this continuing legacy of evidence-based teaching, researchers today encourage teachers to follow a particular reading program, use a video series that raises awareness about global warming, or adopt a specific way of managing problem students because its effectiveness has been ascertained empirically. Though this drive to make educational research empirical is to be welcomed, it does mean that teachers must engage in lifelong learning, forever inquiring into what the latest research has to say about studies conducted in the past. This is because empirically based

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claims are by nature provisional, open to revision or even refutation. Empirical claims about teaching or learning are provisional, for the subjects who partake in experiments that try to determine, say, the effectiveness behind a particular teaching method are finite in number. Researchers have no choice but to base their claims on a finite number of individuals, and as more subjects are tested in the future, it is entirely possible that the earlier findings can be contradicted by the latest and newest data they collate. Even if a teaching method is effective for everyone who partook in the study thus far, the method might fail to yield the same results when tested with a different group of people. Thus, even well-corroborated claims face the possibility of refutation as they get tested by researchers interested in their theoretical veracity. Another reason why the results of empirical research must be accepted tentatively is that studies often measure the short-term consequences of a particular educational program or intervention without conducting longitudinal studies that measure the long-term effects it has on learning. Yet it is entirely possible for a teaching method to engender short-term results that significantly wear off with time. An approach to teaching may help students retain a set of facts for a week, after which they are all forgotten. As many studies in education don't examine whether the effects continue to have an impact on learning, teachers must accept the results with caution and seek newly devised follow-up studies to help determine their viability. Otherwise they can prematurely adopt as pedagogically sound something that can turn out to be limited. Moreover, teachers need to delve into the latest educational literature to find out more about what the most recent cutting-edge research has to say about teaching because experiments need to be replicated in order to test whether the same results can be obtained with participants with characteristics different to those tested before. If previous subjects were all white male adolescents, we need to extend our study and make it more wide-ranging by including subjects who are different in terms of gender, race, and age. What might work for female students from middleclass families attending an Ivy League university, may not yield identical or similar results with Hispanic students living in a poverty-stricken ghetto attending underfunded schools taught primarily by substitutes. As people from different sectors of society are tested, the original claim might need to be amended or qualified. Because studies that are replicated might turn out to be wrong, teachers shouldn't commit to their truth prematurely.

Teachers must never cease to learn about pedagogy and, unless wanting to abrogate

their responsibility as educators, must also inform themselves of the latest studies about education because new research can have important implications for teaching. Education is a rich, multidimensional subject investigated by researchers from different fields of inquiry. Sociologists study the mutual relationship between schools and society, analyzing how society impacts classroom teaching and how schools can be instrumental for social change. Psychologists interested in education try to unveil the psychological factors conducive to learning such as effective learning strategies along with techniques to retrieve information from memory. Historians pay close attention to how schools as institutions have evolved into their present state from the past. Such studies can aid teaching by revealing something very fundamental about education. Teachers can design more powerful, stimulating lessons by incorporating these insights into their classroom or their understanding of complex issues in education can be clarified when studying the latest research. It is an understatement, for example, that many teachers have found the recent sociological findings that uncover the cause behind the academic gap between students from rich and poor families both relevant and illuminating. Generally speaking, students from affluent families continue to outperform academically those from less privileged homes throughout their years of education. Students from privileged families are at an advantage when starting their education because their parents and siblings ask more open-ended questions that invite more analytic thinking, talk to them more frequently, and use language that consists of a richer vocabulary and more complex grammatical structures. Because of this rich linguistic input they are exposed to from an early age, these students find academic work less taxing and they assimilate more of what they are taught, deepening the academic gap over the years. In light of such findings, many teachers try to rectify the problem of academic inequity by providing a linguistically rich and challenging environment to those from unprivileged families. To mention another example, researchers such as Boaler (2019) have uncovered how students' view on intelligence can promote or hamper learning. Some view intelligence as innately fixed and determined, so that effort and practice cannot significantly alter academic competence, whether it be solving math equations or learning a foreign language. Students with this mindset typically avoid challenging tasks in order to save face and fail to put much effort into their work when facing difficulties. Others view intelligence as a competence that can flourish with determination, effort, and resilience. They conceive academic difficulties as challenges to

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overcome, and are therefore less inclined to give up. It is not entirely surprising that those who believe that intelligence can grow with sustained effort and practice tend to do better at schools. Research also shows that students with a deterministic view of intelligence can improve their academic performance when they adopt a mindset that views intelligence as subject to growth. Many classrooms have benefited greatly by instilling this growth mindset to students, advising and encouraging them to construe challenges as opportunities for cognitive growth, where competence accrues through the many errors and mistakes they make. Research on education can result in findings that spark students interest in learning and help them manage and overcome the many difficulties that await them during their educational journey. Teachers who remain ignorant of promising cutting-edge research that can empower students are analogous to physicians who ignore the advances in medical science that can benefit their patients.

Each era raises its distinct array of problems that needs to be addressed by those concerned. If they are ignored or if its gravity is underestimated, problems can easily exacerbate and intensify to such an extent that they become unmanageable. To prevent such a scenario from becoming a reality, we need the courage to calmly face the problems and have the patience to reflect on them with care. Additionally, the problems that beset society are often not isolated incidences that affect only a few, but their impact extends far and wide, exerting their presence to families and workplaces. Schools are not immune to the problems society faces in any given period in history. As an institution deeply woven into the fabric of society and held accountable for transmitting the knowledge, skills, and values deemed important by the higher echelons of society, it stands to reason that schools too are deeply affected by the social context they find themselves in. And as professionals responsible for cultivating the mind and nurturing the heart of the young, teachers must truly understand the social problems that typify each historical epoch so that they can help address them effectively in class. What then are some of these social challenges that are relevant to teachers today? First of all, as Grimes (2021) argues, countless studies reveal that students of today are reared in a society rife with fake news and conspiracy theories and snake oil which their creators promulgate with missionary zeal. These fabricated and fictitious stories and products of dubious worth serve to bolster partisan religious and political agendas, and end up undermining the notion of objective truth and standards of scientific rationality. Students are daily inundated with such fallacious and nonsensical

claims on various media platforms and they are cleverly hidden under a veneer of pseudo-science and impressive jargon. Because students face intellectual deceptions sugarcoated as the truth, educators must address the importance of discerning wishful thinking from analytical thinking, reliable from unreliable sources of information, and science from quackery. If teachers fail to exhort the principles of critical thought, their students can easily succumb to the deceptive rhetoric and become an apologist for harmful dogmas in this post-truth era. Another concern relevant to education is the extent to which students in developed countries are unquestioningly adopting the materialistic, hedonistic values that infuse contemporary society. Students are brought up in a culture where people's worth is measured in terms of what they own and what they can buy. Consequently, those sensitive to how they are outwardly perceived by friends and foes are at pains to convey their wealth and status with their watches, clothes, and cars. To meet this insatiable urge to outshine others and purchase the latest commodity, stores and malls are overflowing with goods and gadgets to suit the taste and preference of every imaginable consumer. What does this materialistic ethos that pervades so many cultural traditions have to do with education? There is a wealth of evidence documenting how youths of today don't, unlike students attending high school and institutions of higher learning twenty or thirty years ago, see their education as opportunities to find a meaningful and lasting philosophy of life or pursue the question of what really brings genuine happiness in life. Unlike students from the previous generation, students of today tend to view education as a necessary yet onerous chore to earn a diploma or a degree so that they can find a respected, high-paying job. And a lucrative job is sought after by many because they are convinced that material possession is the ultimate trophy that awaits the winners of this world. Given this materialistic orientation that is largely unchallenged by students entering schools today, teachers must seriously think how learning can be made more intrinsically meaningful, how education can be understood less in terms of future rewards but in terms of intrinsic value. Otherwise, their students' apathy towards learning will not wane but steadily grow.

Teachers are also obliged to continue their education because the advancement of technology raises new possibilities for teaching. Though technophiles can often overstate the potential technology has for transforming education for the better, there is little denying that it can be a rich source for supporting classroom learning. We wouldn't want

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to transport ourselves back to a time when there were no fridges to store our food and air conditioners to keep us cool. Historically, technology has contributed to the expansion of knowledge in multiple ways. The birth of the printing press enabled people to read quality literature without relying on the painstaking efforts of monks who had to spend hours transcribing words in monasteries. The invention of tape recorders, to mention another example, coincided with the rise of behaviorism as a theory of learning. It wasn't uncommon for students studying a foreign language to be engaged in oral drilling, repeating the recorded phrases and sentences coming out of the machine. The proliferation of televisions within developed countries has also contributed to the education of many. Though there is little denying that many TV programs are devoid of intellectual content, there are documentary programs about the historical past and about our natural environment that cultivate the viewers' interest and deepen their understanding. And we currently live in a fast-paced digital world where electronic gadgets are constantly being replaced with mindboggling speed, making products mass-produced a year ago redundant and antiquated. Students who have access to a smartphone can easily download lectures given by first-rate scientists and debates between atheists and theologians from YouTube. Storing facts in our long-term memory becomes less central in education as we can google any piece of information with amazing ease. Though technology can be misused by serving morally questionable ends, it can be used constructively to benefit students. Teachers need, therefore, to examine the promises inherent in technology and learn to apply its benefits. Teachers simply cannot stop the advances in technology. Nor can they rewind the clock back to an age that had no TVs and laptop computers. They can, however, utilize the latest technologies in ways that promote their learners' educational growth.

To conclude, it is incumbent on teachers to continue their personal education. Because what is regarded as evidence-based educational practice can be falsified or questioned by countervailing facts and data, teachers are obliged to examine whether the latest studies continue to support its viability. Another ground for lifelong learning is that research relevant to education can unveil something useful about teaching and learning in general that can aid teachers. Teachers also cannot rest assured in what they know and do because each succeeding generation poses a new set of problems that can affect the dynamics of the classroom. And the promises of technology need to be reevaluated by teachers as new digital devices fill the stores. Lifelong learning is, therefore, not a gratuitous pursuit for

teachers with time on their hands but a necessary road to follow for those who take education seriously.

3. What Can Impede Lifelong Learning

Pursuing an ideal can be a deeply satisfying experience. We bolster self-esteem and experience a lasting sense of accomplishment when we make progress towards the goal we seek to attain. Yet the pursuit of an ideal is no easy feat. It is often fraught with challenges typical to the ideal in question. Becoming a lifelong learner by upgrading pedagogical skills and deepening understanding of issues related to learning is not without hurdles and impediments. What, then, are some of the important challenges teachers face when partaking in the quest of lifelong learning and how can their effects be mitigated? In what follows, some of the more important barriers to lifelong learning as a means to professional development will be examined.

Complacency is not necessarily a psychological state that must be avoided at all costs. We are justified in being complacent for becoming more knowledgeable and experienced after solving a problem or learning something new. That said, self-complacency can impede personal growth, especially in teaching. Teachers can become satisfied and ensconced in their pedagogy, becoming oblivious to the many possible ways in which their approach to teaching can be improved. There are many reasons why teachers can become prematurely complacent. First, teachers teach the way they were taught when they were learners. Their approach to teaching becomes deeply ingrained as they internalize the routines and conventions that they experienced when they were taught. Once they become teachers themselves, they resort to what they absorbed as students, setting similar tasks and using similar measures of evaluation. As they spend more and more time in the classroom repeating what they usually do, teaching becomes deeply automatized, meaning that they can engage in teaching without thinking too much about what they are doing. Once teaching becomes a habitual routine, it becomes difficult to discern faults and shortcomings with the way you set tasks, orchestrate group work, or elicit responses from students. When teaching becomes second nature, it requires effort to step outside the routines and reflect critically on what ordinarily takes place within the classroom context. Another cause for complacency is that in any given class, there is a group of learners who excel and those who struggle regardless of how well teachers teach. Classes consist of students who

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vary in their willingness to learn, aptitude, and background knowledge. Because of this variation, they differ in how much and what they learn from each lesson. Those who are demotivated with short attention spans struggle with the basics while those who are comfortable taking risks and relish challenging work grow intellectually. Teaching a class of mixed abilities and interests, teachers are bound to intellectually arouse some while failing to elicit interest among others. The incentive to challenge themselves to improve the delivery of their lessons doesn't easily arise if teachers become convinced that those who are capable learn, and those who are not capable fail to learn, no matter how they teach. Another reason behind complacency is that teaching is, as Lieberman and Miller argue (1992), by and large a solitary pursuit, where schools don't usually have an established culture that encourages teachers to get together to discuss and argue about education. For the most part, teachers teach on their own and fulfill other responsibilities like lesson planning and marking quizzes without relying on their colleagues for support. To compound the problem, teachers are viewed as competent if they have the experiences and resources to work independently. The coffee lounge where teachers can congregate is a place to exchange gossips and to let off steam, not a public space for exchanging ideas on teaching and critiquing and objecting to the views on education their coworker espouses. It is easy for teachers to fall into the trap of self-satisfaction because their approach to teaching cannot be subjected to criticism unless there is a critical dialogue between educators who are willing to have critical discussions on education. What is lacking in many schools is a culture that foregrounds the value of interdependence and critical discussions that can be the gateway to new modes of teaching and learning.

Lifelong learning or the willingness to pursue the long and challenging road of learning becomes unnecessary or downright silly if teachers become too satisfied with what they know and how they teach. The antidote to smugness is for teachers to accept a critical frame of mind, scrutinizing their practices so that their limitations and shortcomings can be detected. An invaluable source for interrogating how one teaches is student feedback. Teachers can and should ask students to regularly provide feedback so that they can constantly monitor the extent to which their teaching is making a positive contribution to student learning. Teachers can forever amend their teaching routines and practices in light of what they learn from their students. Their students, in other words, can act as teachers, teaching them how they fail and how they succeed as educators responsible for meaningful

learning.

Another factor that impedes professional growth is for teachers to have a cynical, pessimistic view of their students. Though once full of hope to inspire and instill the love of learning within students, many teachers become disillusioned, viewing teaching not as a calling to serve the young, but a means to pay the bills and make a living. Many teachers lose the passion and commitment they once had because of the quality of students they have to regularly face. Their pessimism colors their outlook towards students as they have to bear the multiple ways in which they can make teaching challenging. They sense their interest in education dampen because their teaching fails to elicit genuine thirst for knowledge or intellectual appetite. Their lectures on the planets orbiting the sun or talks on the philosophical views that are expressed in Sartres novels are met with yawns and the rolling of eyes. The time they spend and the energy they expend planning lessons is significantly reduced. They cannot endure the countless hours devising learning materials when what they create is completed with minimal effort and little interest. Teachers avoid setting essay writing or book report because many blatantly plagiarize materials from the internet and submit them as their own work. As students fail to meet the academic challenges and goals of the class, teachers lower their expectations, giving unchallenging readings and worksheets that keep them busy and occupied. Instead of covering rigorous academic content, many teachers resort to more fun and games to keep their students entertained. Because students level of reading and writing is low, high marks and grades are given to work that is mediocre at best. And in many educational contexts, a silent and tacit mutual agreement is reached between teachers and students: Teachers will give their students a passing grade and won't expect much work from them as long as they follow the classroom rules and are not too disruptive during the lessons.

Teachers willingness to explore the intricacies that surround teaching depends to a large extent on how their students respond to their effort. We cannot expect teachers to sacrifice their time and energy studying about education if their devotion is not reciprocated by students willing to learn. Teachers zest to grow professionally by researching about pedagogy dwindles when they have to daily face students who are not appreciative of their commitment to teaching. Their pessimism concerning student motivation and attitude bars them from deepening their learning. For teachers with this mindset, it simply becomes pointless to search for more creative activities or learn more

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about how to transfer more power to students when they experience a wall of resistance in the classroom. But if lifelong learning is a vital process, teachers have to adopt a less pessimistic mentality and view learners in a more positive light. How is this possible? It is quite natural and understandable for teachers to respond in a knee jerk way to student demotivation by pointing their finger to their students, accusing them of being lazy and disinterested. But a more constructive response is to view their reluctance as an opportunity to improve the quality of the lessons they provide. Instead of blaming students for the difficulties they face in class, teachers should learn to conceive their teaching as the source of the problem. Students don't respond favorably to their education not because they are uninterested in learning but because they find school learning to be irrelevant and lacking in meaning. Students, after all, have interests outside schoolwork - sports, music, fashion, etc. - that ignite their passion for learning and are very knowledgeable about their fascinations. Students can be inspired to work hard if teachers can make the learning purposeful and interesting. Student demotivation should be a source for growth, not a source for cynicism.

The third roadblock that can make lifelong learning a challenge is incuriosity. On the whole, teachers relish cognitive challenges and have a deep love for learning. They are also intellectually curious about a range of issues, seeking opportunities for satisfying their thirst for knowledge. That said, they can be surprisingly incurious about education. Because curiosity drives inquiry, being uninterested in education implies that they won't be inclined to further advance their knowledge and understanding of teaching. Why can teachers be intellectually detached from matters related to schooling? Curiosity is aroused when we come across something puzzling or something that doesn't mesh with our beliefs and expectations. As Sarason (1996) contends, the many conventions and mores that typify education can fail to spark interest among teachers because their presence becomes overly familiar, and what is familiar doesn't evoke any deep sense of bewilderment. Aliens from outer space visiting our schools for the very first time, on the other hand, might become enthralled with the all-too-familiar conventions of grades, lectures, tests, and group work because of their unfamiliarity. Unused to the process of schooling, everything that can be found in the hallowed halls of learning can trigger their interest. Contrary to aliens, teachers, both as learners and educators, have been deeply encultured into the culture of schools, tacitly absorbing the practices and rules that are ubiquitously present in the

corridors and classrooms. Being deeply immersed in the traditions of education, teachers accept them matter-of-factly, as so much natural, normal, and unsurprising features of an overly familiar environment. Quizzes, book reports, and parent-teacher conferences don't prompt them to inquire about their role or rationale. But this type of response to their experiences at schools is not entirely conducive to lifelong learning since an important prerequisite for wanting to explore the multifaceted dimensions of education is to find them perplexing. Probing deeper into educational matters shaped by the questions they pose becomes less common if teachers' sense of bemusement is not fostered by their experiences.

Of course, teachers cannot force themselves to become perplexed by what they actually don't find mystifying. But what they ordinarily take for granted can arouse their curiosity if they become acquainted with unorthodox teaching practices that depart from standardized routines they are accustomed to. Not unlike tourists who realize for the first time how the cultural traditions back home seem a bit odd after spending some time in a foreign country, teachers can become more sensitized and attuned to traditions and conventions found in their schools after learning about unconventional practices found elsewhere. In light of their newly acquired awareness and knowledge of alternative approaches to teaching, what seemed so natural and obvious becomes more puzzling and less palpable. The norms and conventions they are familiar with can appear odd or less etched in stone, given that there are many other ways of organizing and shaping education. As Eyster (2024) documents in detail, teachers used to giving letter grades to assignments and quizzes might find this practice a little odd after learning about schools that have gotten rid of grades altogether on the grounds that the pressure to earn good grades forces many students to cheat and cut corners. The very idea of teachers having the exclusive prerogative to determine grades can become a little odd when they find out more about collaborative grading, a system where students determine their grades with their teachers. Some teachers might start to rethink the fairness of assessing their students' understanding with the same written multiple-choice test when there are many alternative schools that give the learners the freedom to choose how they want to demonstrate their understanding of the material covered. Or giving students only a single chance to show what they know on a high-stakes test before they are given a grade for the unit or module can seem rather perplexing when more and more schools are using portfolios as a means of

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assessment, giving students multiple chances to improve on a particular assignment or project in light of teacher feedback. As these examples from the field of testing hopefully show, teachers can become inquisitive, wanting to learn more about the familiar educational traditions they are surrounded with, when unfamiliar, unconventional conventions are brought to their awareness.

In order for teachers to become lifelong learners and study education in more depth, they must value the research that is relevant to pedagogy. If teachers become skeptical of the value behind studies on classroom discourse that reveal how much time teachers spend talking in a typical class or works on learning strategies that can facilitate learning when students are stuck, they won't venture into research touching upon education, keeping abreast of the latest discoveries. Yet herein lies the problem because it isn't entirely uncommon for teachers to attach little importance to educational scholarship. They ignore or pay very little attention to what is being explored in such disparate fields like psychology and sociology, focusing more of their attention on the everyday realities of classroom life.

What accounts for this skeptical attitude shared by many teachers? Some question the point of investigating education with surveys, questionnaires, experiments, and interviews because much of the research is contested, failing to yield a body of reliable knowledge acceptable to most researchers. Unlike physics or biology which has over the years amassed a wealth of knowledge about a wide spectrum of issues, research on education, for skeptics, has not been able to give us definite results concerning the most effective way of teaching reading or whether or not homogeneous classes are better than classes consisting of students with mixed abilities. Another reason why teachers remain unconvinced regarding the importance of research is that it seems for the most part irrelevant to what they have to face daily in class. Because research done by those in the ivory tower of academia is too abstract and theoretical, their findings cannot be translated into concrete teaching practices to help cultivate learning. Skeptics of educational research would be more willing to engage in its findings if they had clear implications for how they should conduct their lessons. Otherwise valuable time can be spent more meaningfully by marking essays and preparing for tomorrow's lessons. The third cause that makes teachers hesitant to seek the latest findings on motivation or the effect of poverty on learning is that sometimes the top-down prescriptions about how to teach made by

researchers are not seen to be applicable given the reality of the classroom. As some researchers recommend, trying to provide an optimal learning environment by tailoring the mode of instruction to the kind of intelligence - visual, musical, mathematical, etc. - most developed in each student seems unrealistic if teachers face a group of twenty students who markedly differ in terms of how they are cognitively predisposed to process information. For the reasons just mentioned, it is not entirely wrong to claim that there are teachers who remain steadfastly committed to their skeptical stance towards research unless a compelling case can be made for its value.

Because lifelong learning involves wrestling with studies investigating the multifaceted features of education, we need a reason for taking such studies seriously. Though the point can at times be exaggerated, it is true, as critics point out, that thoughts and opinions about pedagogy and learning don't often converge as researchers gather more data. And one also cannot deny that there is much educational research that has no direct or immediate bearing on classroom teaching. That said, there might be a more fruitful way of understanding the value of educational research. That is, instead of assessing it in terms of its practical contribution to classroom teaching, it might be better to find value in how educational scholarship helps raise our awareness of things that might otherwise go unnoticed. In what ways, then, have educational studies helped us realize what remained concealed and hidden?

Though one can obviously handpick particular findings made by feminist scholars and dispute their truth, there is little denying that feminist scholarship overall has over the years amassed a wealth of evidence documenting in detail how women have been socially marginalized. In the past, women were not granted the right to attend schools since academic studies were thought to be unnecessary for rearing children. The stigma of being intellectually inferior to men was something they continued to carry with them even after they were granted the political right to earn an education. Studies on stereotype threat shows that women perform significantly lower than men in math when their incompetence in this subject - a negative stereotype associated with women - is brought to their awareness before taking a test. Furthermore, studies on classroom discourse shows that teachers are inclined to pick men more than women when posing oral questions in class and men tend to dominate group discussions, giving little room or time for women to contribute. Thanks to the pioneering work of feminism in education by such researchers

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like Gore (1993), the plight women have suffered over the years in schools is now common knowledge for many. It is doubtful whether we would find such gender biases noticeable if they first weren't unveiled and articulated by feminists.

Furthermore, though the specific claims made by the proponents of the theory of multiple intelligences are open to dispute, the theory has helped many realize that the educational system is skewed towards students who have an analytical frame of mind. After all, students spend an inordinate amount of time analyzing texts and answering questions that test their reading comprehension. Because of this curricular bias toward reading, those who are adept at reading and analyzing language are at an advantage while those who struggle decoding language cannot perform at the same level. Students who are musically gifted or those with a high kinesthetic intelligence can find schoolwork extremely challenging because their cognitive propensity to learn through specific channels are not being met at school. As a result, extremely gifted and bright students fail to flourish academically and realize their true potential. As Darling-Hammond (1997) rightly observes, the variation that exists between learners and the deeply entrenched bias towards analytical thought that can be found in our schooling system would have remained outside our awareness had it not been for those who discerned and enunciated their presence.

The simple lesson that can be drawn from these two examples is that educational research has merit because it offers us a theoretical framework that can give us a sharp and clear focus of what is actually taking place in our schools. Without the framework and the clear vision it allows, many things go unnoticed, giving us a one-sided and imprecise view of the world of education.

In summary, there are many obstacles that make it difficult for teachers to continue their education. Teachers can become reluctant to explore new pathways if they become too satisfied with their performance as educators. Their willingness to expand their understanding will weaken if they view their students and educational research negatively. And an incurious mindset can block the road to professional development. To become more competent educators, teachers need to view their teaching critically and must construe student demotivation as a pretext for improving what they do in class. Moreover, they can learn to reexamine the conventions that characterize their working environment with fresh eyes by studying educational traditions they are not accustomed to. And

teachers need to replace a skeptical view towards educational research with a view that is more appreciative of the fruit of scholarship so that they can view the familiar landscape with a different pair of lenses.

Conclusion

An ideal that can inspire teachers to grow professionally is lifelong learning. A proactive approach of continually learning something worthwhile and new about teaching can benefit teachers in many ways. Besides experiencing excitement and satisfaction for learning something new, teachers can become more empathetic towards struggling students and open-minded towards contested areas in education. By embarking on an arduous journey of learning, they can also serve as role models to their students. Moreover, teachers who take their work seriously must continue their education because evidence-based teaching practices are based upon research findings that are by nature provisional and new discoveries and breakthroughs can have important bearings on classroom teaching. Lifelong learning is also an important component of the professional lives of teachers because they will face new challenges and problems when teaching a different generation of students. The will to continue learning can attenuate because of complacency and incuriosity and skepticism. They must forever motivate themselves to continue learning so that they can serve their students. Teachers have no choice but to become thoughtful students of education if they want to have a lasting effect on those who are under their charge.

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