

**Educational Inquiry: Responsibility**

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What does being a teacher mean? This is a hard question, one I believe I will be continually re-evaluating. This introductory course has confronted me with difficult questions that I neglected to ask myself when I applied to this program, more specifically the classes two guiding questions; what matters in the world, and what matters in education? A lot of things matter in this world, and as teachers, we have an important role in making sure what matters is brought to the table. What matters in the world certainly matters in education, and what is deemed important in education impacts the future of the world we live in. As teachers, we are afflicted with the responsibility of navigating what matters in education, while simultaneously trying to equip our students with an understanding of life. The theme that this essay will focus on is the responsibility of being a teacher, more specifically the commitment to life-long learning, and the duty of working alongside parents and the curriculum to best serve students. Michael Fullan (1993) defines inquiry as “internalizing norms, habits, and techniques for continuous learning.” (p. 2). Utilizing these ideas, this educational inquiry will attempt to declare and defend my thinking about being a teacher, guided by the readings given in this course (Fullan, 1993, p. 2).

William Ayers’ (2019) novel discusses the expectations that teachers have of students, namely the expectation that they will be diverse readers, he proclaims that “you can’t expect the kids to be bold and constant readers if you yourself are a passive or indifferent one. Get busy! Read more, read better!” (p. 44). The analogy that Ayers makes, causes me to consider that we as teachers must be accountable to our students and the expectations we have of them (Ayers, 2019, p. 44). If I expect my students to do something, I need to be questioning myself and the work that

I have been putting in to interact with those ideals. If you want your students to be constantly engaging, Ayers' alludes to the ideals of lifelong learning (Ayers, 2019, p. 44).

Carl Grant and Ken Zeichner (1995) in their paper *On Becoming a Reflective Teacher*, say that "teachers lose sight of the fact that their everyday reality is only one of many possible alternatives. They tend to forget the purposes and ends toward which they are working." (p. 104-105). I think that this quote contextualizes the complexity of teachers' comprehension of what they need to be doing. Grant and Zeichner's (1995) article discusses how teachers must be reflective of what they are doing and why they are doing it (p. 105). Their discussion of losing sight, for me, highlights how teachers must not lose track of why they are teaching, and that they must be self-reflective about their commitment to their students, rather than just going through the motions (Grant and Zeichner, 1995, p. 105).

Michael Fullen (1993), who defined inquiry for this paper, says that teachers must have a personal vision, which he claims "comes from within... gives meaning to work, and... exists independently of the organization or group we happen to be in." (p. 2). I think that Fullen's take on personal vision helps me narrow down the commitment I want to make as a teacher, it is my responsibility as a teacher to be reflective of how my vision drives the meaning of my teaching (Fullen, 1993, p. 2). Your mission as a teacher can't just be selfish, you can't be there to flex your own knowledge, but you are there for the students. In an interview with scholar Henry Giroux (1992), he discusses his hopes of radically changing education and states "I believe that schools should function to provide students with the knowledge, character, and moral vision that build civic courage." (p. 7). Although this is only a small quote from his interview, his philosophy and ideas on how schools should function, as well as his emphasis on moral vision,

are reflective of the personal vision I want to have. (Fullen, 1993, p. 2; Giroux, 1992, p. 7). The personal vision that I want to live by incorporates not only my own goals but will attempt to provide students with the type of knowledge that Giroux talks about (Fullen, 1993, p. 2; Giroux, 1992, p. 7). As a teacher, my responsibilities of being accountable, reflective, and having a personal vision, will be futile if I do not manage to work with the curriculum and social setting I am surrounded by.

In William Ayers' (2019) novel he defines curriculum as "a dialogical process in which everyone participates actively as equals—a turbulent, raucous, unpredictable, noisy, and participatory affair, expression, and knowledge emerging from the continual interaction of reflection and activity." (p. 95). Ayers' (2019) discussion of curriculum being a participatory affair, is what I believe to be a utopian definition of how we can build an idealistic curriculum. (p. 95). While I wish that the curriculum could be formed in a truly participatory fashion, from reading Stephen Crump's (2005) study of Australia and New Zealand's "crowded curriculum" it put some perspective on how things are not always ideal (p. 31).

Crump's (2005) discussion of curriculum, states that the profession of teaching has become crowded and that many of the reforms put in place took teachers "out of their classrooms and away from a focus on students' (p. 31). The study states that "attacking the crowded curriculum is the key to attacking the problem of teaching as a crowded profession" and that "parental involvement in education is becoming more widely recognized, to the point where educational bodies include parents in their descriptions of best practice" (Crump, 2005, p. 38-41). My take-aways from this study are that to be a responsible teacher you not only have to sometimes criticize the pre-existing conditions, but you have to be versatile and work

collaboratively towards your goals. The study's reference to the collaboration between teachers and parents draws parallels to Ayers' (2019) idealistic approach in his novel when he says, "parents are your students' first teachers, and as such they're your colleagues and co-teachers" (p. 144). This important relationship between parent and teacher is a responsibility that teachers must keep in mind, it is a tool that may be difficult to utilize, but it is one that must be used in a more collaborative way.

In Thomas Guskey and Dennis Sparks' (2004) paper *Linking Professional Development to Improvements in Student Learning*, they discuss the "multi-dimensional relationship between professional development activities for educators and improvements in student learning (p. 12). In their study, they link the development of teachers to positive impacts on students' academic performance (Guskey and Sparks, 2004, p. 16). The conclusion of their study states that "teachers, administrators, and parents all have critical roles to play in the improvement of student learning, and their ability to fulfill their responsibilities more effectively will be determined largely by the quality of professional development" (Guskey and Sparks, 2004, p. 18). This study does a good job of putting the ideals that this class has promoted to the test: teachers have a grave responsibility towards their students, must perform, and work towards improving themselves. Professional development can be introduced by school boards, but ultimately I believe that much of the professional development teachers need is done on their own time.

The responsibility of being a teacher isn't a burden, it is part of doing the job with all your might. I believe being collaborative, challenging the status quo, and committing to a lifetime of learning are all key to ensuring I am a responsible teacher. This course and the material we focused on allowed me to question what matters in the world and in education, and I

believe the themes of responsibility and accountability will stick with me for the rest of my teaching career.

### References

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