Self-Knowledge and Education : A Formative Experience With Preparatory Students

Education

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ABSTRACT

The educational practice suggests that in spite of the inclusion of self-knowledge contents in the curriculum, the difference between such questions as what am I and who am I is not fully understood. There is a clear distinction between one and the other approach, the first question is refers to consequences, the second just to the essential cause. Even more worrying is the fact that instructors underestimate its significance. This paper is aimed at evaluating the formative influence of self-knowledge in preparatory students. The study was conducted by means of a formative workshop including exploratory techniques such as surveying, completing phrases, and interviewing. The findings indicate that self-knowledge is a very demanded topic students are yet ignoring. Once they get acquainted with it, they start seeing the surrounding reality in a different way.

Introduction:

As it is widely known in the miscalled society of knowledge, self-knowledge is not perceived as a necessity, an axis or a key topic not even for most of the educators. This is usually accompanied by a fear of finding out one's true self, and results from underestimating its significance and formative potentials, and the way of living. Experience indicates that every time this topic is included in the formative process, people, even teenagers, take conscience of its individual and universal value.

Understanding that the knowledge of oneself is a key element in learning is an invitation to give priority to one's individual welfare by cultivating personal potentials. It is not very common that teachers and educational official manage to identify self-knowledge as an axis for personal maturity and the corresponding formative process. This explains its absence in official curricula and what is worse in the thinking and teaching practice of professor staffs.

People are usually motivated toward the domain of many things: a profession, an occupation, a peer; however they seldom stop to think about how much they knew about themselves, a question that might be their very first objective. (Álvarez and de la Herrán, 2009). Such knowledge not only comes off of the interaction with the social environment during the ontogenetic development but can also be fostered through educational activity. (Flavell, 1979; Forrest, Mackinnon and Waller, 1985; Gagne and Dyck, 1983).

Self-knowing is a right of the class. It might not generate profits to social organizations, normally more interested in ductile persons than in individuals having an awareness of themselves and the environment. As exactly expressed by de la Herrán (2004) from the didactic viewpoint, self-knowledge is an essential traverse topic to any other learning area to be memorized, investigated or communicated.

Objectives:

- To enlarge students comprehension of self-knowledge.
- To evaluate immediate and long turn changes produced by one individual knowledge of himself.

Method adopted for the present study

Under the project "Women in Science", sponsored by the National Council of Science and Technology of Mexico and the Autonomous University of New León in 2015, three-session workshops (3 hours each) were carried out on the topic of self-knowledge and personal development. 53 female teenagers of local preparatory schools were enrolled. Brief explanations of related concepts were given and short videos were played to promote discussion and stimulating participant to tell their own stories, thinking and reflecting on their own personality.

Finally, a pre-validated survey was given to evaluate the immediate influence of the workshops upon the participants. Other techniques such as completing phrases were used to explore motivation, feelings and connected experiences.

Three months later the participants were interviewed for more evidence on the workshops influence. As Steinar (2011) indicates the interview is a powerful method for inquiring about the human situation. The sampling follows the criteria of Bodgan and Taylor (1987).

Findings and interpretation
Survey results (given after workshops)

The participants were asked about their appraisal of the topic of self-knowledge. Figure 1 illustrates the majority said workshops were very important. No one gives less important or non-important as an answer.

Figure 1

Participants' appraisal of self-knowledge (data taken from the survey given)
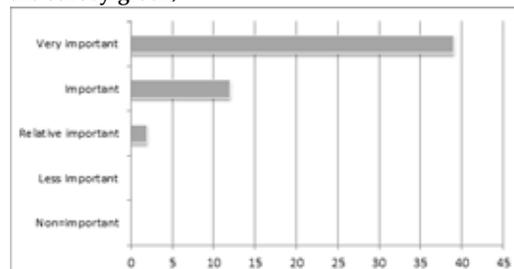
One of the questions given inquires on what comes to their minds first after having studied the topic of self-knowledge. The results are shown in table 1 under the heading *unconscious emerging items*, a term provided by the participants who argued they have never think about these items before. The frequency of replies is shown in this table. Most of the participants referred they have never think about "going out their zone of comfort" (34, 61%), followed by those who selected "knowing herself" (11,53%), or those selecting the future (11,53%). A relatively high frequency of participant selected who am I? (5,76%) as their reply.

Table 1
Unconscious emerging items **coming from the participants' after studying about self-knowing (first reply percentage out of the total)**

Unconscious emerging items	Number of replies	Frequency
Facing risks	2	3.84
Going out their zone of comfort	18	34.61
Knowing herself	6	11.53
Feeling insecure	1	1.92
Facing the Future	6	11.53
Who am I	3	5.76
Being tolerant	1	1.92
Being a better person	2	3.84
Being a non-conformist	1	1.92
Self-accepting	2	3.84
Accomplish	1	1.92
Being independent	1	1.92
Being secure	2	3.84
Being persistent	1	1.92
Grow up	2	3.84
Diversity	1	1.92
Other	2	3.84

This information shows the influence of studying the topic of self-knowledge upon the participants and illustrates the need for orientating a dimension neglected at schools.

When asked about three negative features they would like to transforms positively, the participants provide a large spectrum of answers (see table 2). Out of the 150 suggested features, *insecurity* (8, 66%), *negativeness* (8,0%) and *bad temper* (6,6%) were the most frequent.

Table 2
Negative features participants would like to transform.

Feature to be transformed	Number of replies	Frequency
Ways of thinking	6	4.00
Overcoming obstacles	2	1.33
Intolerance	5	3.33
Negativeness	12	8.00
Lack of imagination	1	0.66
Having a complex	1	0.66
Having a low self-esteem	4	2.66
Insecurity	13	8.66
Being introvert	5	3.33
Laziness	2	1.33
Selfishness	1	0.66
Shyness	4	2.66
Being unpunctual	1	0.66
Lack of order	1	0.66
Students' qualifications	5	3.33
Fear the unknown	8	5.33
Being reactive to criticism	1	0.66
Inability to prevent consequences	2	1.33
Being excessively proud	1	0.66
Criticize	1	0.66
Fear of failure	7	4.66
Way of being	5	3.33
Bad temper	9	6.00
Unawareness	3	2.00
Inability to make decisions	5	3.33
Lack of moral virtues	1	0.66
Having no limits	1	0.66
Inability to concentrate	2	1.33
Having a healthy body	1	0.66
Lack of persistence	3	2.00
Ways of expressing	1	0.66
Discipline	1	0.66
Lacking patience	2	1.33
Way of acting	2	1.33
Depending on someone else	3	2.00
Being jealous	1	0.66
Dreaming	1	0.66
Discovery in abilities	1	0.66
Having initiatives	1	0.66
Knowing new things	2	1.33
Way of talking	1	0.66
Self-awareness	1	0.66
My own plan	1	0.66
Goals	2	1.33
Going out of my zone of comfort	2	1.33
Being a narrow-minded person	2	1.33
Being a conformist	2	1.33
Lacking maturity	2	1.33
Being negligent	1	0.66
Being egocentric	1	0.66
Hesitation	1	0.66
Learning languages	1	0.66
Fear of unhappiness	1	0.66
Others	4	2.66

After the workshops, participants were asked how much they have changed after studying about self-knowledge. 47 students gave positive answers; the other 6 report no change.

Some of the arguments given are the following:
- "My life changes after I have seen the videos".
- "Aside from studying, I feel the need of knowing myself and going out of my zone of comfort."
- "I have overcome the fear to coming events, now I know things happen due to definite causes, and no matter the course of events there is nothing to fear."
- "I never imagined self-knowledge was so many things, I just believed it was limited to *who am I*, and *what I think*."
- "Now everything looks different, one has to do what

one please, going farther and keep on studying."
- "Now I know how to think and the future I want."

Results for the completing phrases exploratory technique
Students were given phrases to complete to go deeper into their appraisal of self-knowledge. Feelings, projects, expectations and frustrations were interpreted and classified as positive, negative or neutral. Table 3 shows the global results of completing phrases.

The most frequent positive phrases were "the largest strength of the world" (77,5%); "the most important" (69, 2%); "the primary need" (67, 3%).

The most frequent negative phrases were "the greatest defeat" (66, 0%); "the most disgusting person" (63, 8%) and "the greatest defect" (62, 54%).

Neutral phrases indicate a lack of knowledge and clear orientation. The confusion arises in phrases such as "the easiest thing to do", "the main disadvantage", and "the most useless merit".

Table 3
Polarity tendency of completed phrases (percentage of the total of replies)

Phrases	Positive	%	Neutral	%	Negative	%	Total
The main disadvantage.	26	50	15	28.8	11	21.1	52
The easiest thing to do.	29	56.8	15	29.4	7	13.7	51
The most useless merit.	16	31.3	14	27.4	21	41.17	51
The greatest error.	16	31.3	10	19.6	25	49.01	51
The greatest defect.	12	23.5	7	13.7	32	62.74	51
The greatest solace.	24	48	18	36	8	16	50
The most disgusting person.	14	29.7	3	6.3	30	63.8	47
The greatest virtue.	31	62	13	26	6	12	50
The greatest defect.	8	16	9	18	33	66	50
The main need.	35	67.3	14	26.9	3	5.7	52
The most disgusting feeling.	4	8	11	22	35	70	50
The most important moment.	36	69.2	13	25	2	3.8	51
The largest strength of the world.	38	77.5	9	18.3	2	4.1	49

The interpretation of completions leads to the following conclusions:

- The significance of the studies arises almost in every phrase.
- The participants show insecurity, fear, and lack of orientation from the family and the school.
- The need of qualification they have not got yet.
- A significant number of phrases were completed with information they get at the workshops.

Appraisal of the long-term impact of the workshops
Out of the students that initially considered the workshops as very important, nine were chosen at random for interviewing. This interview was oriented to:

- Comprehension of self-knowledge concept.
- The inner need of self-knowledge.
- Self-knowledge relation to individuals' growth.
- Self-knowledge as an object of study in school.

The intention was to verify if students' initial replies were the result of fleeting changes or was reflecting actually long lasting changes. Once the contributions of the interview were analyzed, workshop participants were grouped into a fourfold classification according to the impact they received.

Three participants fall in the group labeled as *very significant.* They were capable of giving sound arguments explaining their change of attitude.

Other three fall in the *group receiving significant impact.* They were capable of understanding self-knowledge importance and of giving some arguments.

Two participants fall in the half-significant impact group. They were capable of remembering essential items and its importance.

Another couple falls in a group that receives non-significant impact. They were only capable of vaguely remembering some of the workshop topics

Illustrations of students of each group
One that received a very significant impact:
"I have heard a lot about the zone of comfort, but I only understand its actually meaning after the workshops. I used to be afraid of changes (friends, events, everything). I've changed a 100%, but started to do things that seem impossible to me, like learning a foreign language".

One that received a significant impact:
"I remember the workshops with pleasure; all the talking was very interesting, the workshops were important but, getting rid of thing you dislike is difficult. I know I need to overcome my shyness but I can't."

One that received a half-significant impact:
"This is the first time I hear talking about self-knowledge and maturity, these concepts are related because a mature person knows herself very well. I liked the point and talked about it to other friends telling we should know ourselves, that's not the same that answering the questions who am I and what am I."

One that received a non-significant impact:
"Oh yes, are you talking about the workshop at the faculty? The truth is that we watched videos and had some discussion, but I can't remember what they were about".

Conclusions
The cognitive encounter with the topic of self-knowledge yields high motivation, students explained they would like to learn more about and improve awareness.

Solving task related to the topic of self-knowledge is positive; it left an immediate and a long-term imprint in students' consciousness. At least, it opens unknown doors and

paves the way for a seed to start growing.

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