

My Response to *The Art of Learning*

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The most important "take away" message from the Art of Learning by Josh Waitzkin for me, and I think for educators in general in this day and age is to stop fearing failure. Josh's message that failure is important for growth, and his deeply personal accounts of his process of growth through failure as critical to success is transformative for those educators steeped in a culture that demands that all children succeed in everything they do every time that they try. Rather than give all children a trophy or award for something they did not earn, we should celebrate genuine progress, but also coach children through the all important growth process which ensues when things do not go their way.

Another important "take away" message is that true learning is incremental and comes from hard work and discipline. Josh is a living example of how discipline and deep inner analysis interact with a gifted mind to create success. His ability to reach for commonalities between martial arts and chess helps all of us understand how gifted minds operate and how some of these successful strategies may be generalized for all of us.

The story Josh tells of the chess master who explained a choice of a complex move on one part of the board by saying, "I had stuff there" is a fascinating example of how the human mind operates. So much of our thought process is below the conscious level, and many people, especially gifted children, may have trouble analyzing exactly how they got to a particular answer, point of view or understanding. This is a particularly important idea for teachers to keep in mind as they work with students with varying levels of conscious understanding of how their own mental processes work.

Finally, Josh's deep understanding and analysis of the process of succeeding in two diverse disciplines that require years of dedication can help educators understand the value of longer project based focused learning. Educators today work in a culture of immediate gratification coupled with an educational system focused on the kinds of test results that often lend themselves to large quantities of drilling as preparation. Longer more focused types of experiences have a deep and lasting value because they develop a kind of discipline and meta-analysis that is fundamental for success in adult life.

As an educator, Josh's book has led me to focus more on longer activities where success is not immediate or assured, but must be worked for over time and earned. The book also inspired us to create a chess program in our school that has drawn hundreds of participants over the last few years.

Thanks to Josh for sharing his experiences in such depth and with such honesty. The Art of Learning is Must Reading for educators today.