

The myth of education and empowerment assignment

[Education](#)



I'd like to begin by introducing myself, so you can get to know me, and my writing background better. I am in the science field at UMKC hoping to pursue a career in medicine. I am from Portland, OR, where I attended a school that stressed the liberal arts. Although the science field has always been my favorite academic area, reading has also always been a paralleled interest of mine. It is currently Saturday morning on October 12th, and I finally have a completely free weekend from work and all other distractions.

I am planning to read through *Teacher Man* this weekend, and provide an overall summaries and an in depth look at the meaning behind the words. Chapter 1 The book begins by providing an introduction to Frank McCourt's life. We learn that Mr. McCourt had an unhappy childhood and education in Ireland. McCourt shared stories throughout the chapter ranging from his childhood to having sex with a girl named June who was in the teaching program at New York University. Towards the end of the chapter he told a long drawn out story regarding the process of becoming a licensed teacher.

Like with any book, chapter one set the tone for the rest of the book. The chapters thus far are short, the stories are funny, many parts are drawn out, and I lack to see the significance in some of McCourt's rants. Various stories stood out, including the sandwich incident. Mr. McCourt attempted to show the class who was boss by eating a student's sandwich that had been thrown at a classmate, which then landed on the floor. This incident caused Mr. McCourt to be questioned by the principle as to what his intentions, and goals were. Later in the chapter, the stalling questions the class presented to Mr.

McCourt in an attempt to avoid work reminded me of some specifically similar instances that occurred in my classes as a high school student. The students asked him anything that would get him off topic, ranging from what he studied in Ireland to why he was a teacher. This is an interesting question, which I am not sure if I would be able to answer if I was in the profession. One student asked him if they dated in Ireland, and Mr. McCord gave a sarcastic answer, which got in trouble again with the principle. In this chapter we begin to see that Mr. McCourt treats his students as adults.

At one point he asks them to calm down, but he never plays the type of teacher that belittles his students. After going through the education system for over a decade, I realize the importance of treating students like adults. This is one aspect that I would be able to condemn Mr. McCourt for doing well. One teaching aspect I believe Mr. McCourt did poorly with was addressing the student's questions. Many of the questions were not appropriate for a classroom setting. The students were simply trying to get him off topic and they were succeeding in doing just that.

As a professional McCord need's to take command of the class. The students also succeeded in getting their teacher in trouble. Students always challenge teachers to try and show who has more power, and in this case I believe the students won the battle, (after Mr. McCourt was called into the principals office). The book failed to address what exactly the principle wanted Mr. McCourt to do differently. This brings me to the point that the book thus far has failed to provide any objectives, or goals. Whether discussing the

meeting with the principle, or the classroom environment, there appear to be no goals.

Mr. McCourt appears to be scared in the office, but I don't believe he changed anything upon leaving. This chapter provided a couple situations that put "flash backs" in my head. I can remember when we had my freshman biology teacher go on thirty-minute rants about his solar powered watch just so we wouldn't have to cover the scheduled lecture material. At this point I am not a huge fan of the book, because I am unable to see the significance to many of the stories. The book is not discussing teaching in depth, but rather providing a background for Mr. McCourt's life.

As for relating the current topic to the Myth of Education and Empowerment I believe I need to get further into the book to fully see how this topic fits. So far the text seems to show the contradiction between attempting to empower and educate a crowd that doesn't have an interest in learning. The only question that came to mind during this chapter is how would I teach differently. I believe I would have more of a dictator approach in the classroom, but would this style be any more effective in trying to teach? I am not sure. My tone at this point is open-minded and I am ready to see what chapter two has to offer.

Chapter 2-10 It's about 10AM on Saturday. After reading chapter one and then stopping and responding, I feel that the stop has really interrupted the flow of the novel. Therefore I'm planning on reading through chapter 10 right now, taking a break and then reflecting upon chapters 2-10. Chapter two appeared to almost be a completely different novel then chapter one. In

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chapter one humor was at the forefront of McCourt's writing. In chapter 2, Frank McCourt presents a sense of sadness. He continues to tell stories, but now they reflect imagery such as how schoolmates always picked on him and caused him to get into fights.

McCourt often came home with bloody shirts. He discusses about when he was really young and was forced to learn about Catholicism. During this period of his life he was often reprimanded for being a "very bad boy". During this part, I had flashbacks from my childhood. I was reminded about my elementary school days, when I went to a private religious school. I was often similar to McCourt, beginning reprimanded and viewed as the naughty child. I don't believe McCourt or myself were a 'bad' child, we were simply curious. McCourt also emphasizes the struggles he and his family were faced with.

McCourt seemed to of favored his mother, explaining how rough she had it, having to raise the children. Many of McCourt's descriptions drew vivid pictures in my mind. He described his mother as having to fight for everything the family received. It is clear he feels his mother is the most important member of the family, but at the same time he does not appear to view her as a role model. The chapter ended with Mr. McCourt back in the classroom answering questions from the students about why Shakespeare's writing's are difficult to follow. Mr. McCourt is unable to answer many of the questions.

McCourt being stuck and unable to answer the student's questions greatly tied into the Myth of Education and Empowerment. There is not always an

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answer to every question, and sometimes, like in this case, teachers must allow their students to struggle and find their own answers to their questions. Throughout this section Frank McCourt does a great job of describing the many roadblocks and barriers that are put in people's paths. He described the challenges he faced in becoming a teacher, but the challenges McCourt faced can relate to becoming successful in any profession.

McCourt discusses June, a girl who easily led him on, who he had a crush on and who broke his heart. This experience provided him with emotional stress and made it hard for him to remain focused in his goal of becoming a teacher. In college we have many distractions, which is why it is important to have goals and priorities. Without goals, many of us would never make it to the end, getting distracted and forgetting about the overall reason why we are in college. McCourt also discusses stories about the negative interviewers who made him feel worthless because of his responses to their questions.

However, once again McCourt knew what he had to do, and despite being scared and brought down, he chose to fight through the negativity to become a teacher. When he gets the certification, McCourt tells how hard it is to find a job because of the discrimination against his Irish Brogue. This made me think about how sad that it is that this discrimination still continues to today. I began wondering, what jobs in America are still publically discriminated against. I did a little research and found that TSA, (transportation Security Administration), has had many lawsuits brought against them for not hiring people of Middle Eastern descent.

However, despite the various lawsuits, they have always been able to get away with these unjust practices. Until reading this section, I didn't realize that the same type of discrimination occurred with teachers or still prominently occurred in the 21st century. The book continues and one of Frank's students asks him why he doesn't do "real work" instead of being a teacher. Frank starts off answering this question with retelling his past work experiences on the docks in Hoboken. He goes back through many of the same stories, telling how it was not easy becoming a teacher, and how finding a job was even more challenging.

I believe it is important for teachers to tell their students their backgrounds. This creates opening up, which leads to a friendship and a positive learning environment. At the same time, a teacher also has to know how much they can tell. Similar to many carriers, the teacher must remember they are a professional, and therefore they must act like one. If they reveal too much, the student might not respect them for various reasons. This led me to another question for this section. What is considered acceptable in a profession, what's considered going too far, and can you tell different amounts of information to different people?

There is no doubt appropriate and inappropriate information to tell a client. I believe the amount told does revolve around the relationship between the two people and the reason for the occurrence between the two people. For example, a doctor may be friends with his client, however, he must remember that he is present to help the patient get better, not to talk about what bar his client is going to later. With any professional setting, one must

remember that there is a time and a place for everything. This section continues with Frank revealing his frustrations in dealing with parents of vocational students.

Frank leads into this subject by telling us of the statistical numbers of lessons, schools, and students that he has encountered in his years as a teacher. Frank shares his frustration when describing his first two Back to School Night experiences. The style of writing becomes dark and it is obvious that Frank has a frustrated stance in regard to parents. Frank has a big problem with vocational students, and during back to school night he receive no support from the parents of these students. With little support and dedication it is nearly impossible to educate individuals through empowerment. Why do high school students skip school?

It's because they are bored or have no interest in certain subjects. I personally wish our school system was more like the European system in that high school would be more equivalent to undergraduate level work of college, and college would be more like graduate school work. I believe undergrad is a big waste of time for many. Most high school students know what they want to become, but are typically hindered by needing to receive a degree before they can pursue there field of choice. In this part of the book we see another situation in which teachers are challenged during the Myth of Education and Empowerment.

Parents want their children to be educated, but will typically support their child and not the teachers who are ultimately left with the challenge of educating the child. Frank realizes that he can overcome this challenge and

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make his students understand things like grammar by teaching them when they are unaware that are being taught. Through telling stories and creating games McCourt is able to make these kids learn, when they don't even realize there're learning. This section made me wonder how do the subjects we learn in school impact our futures? Do they at all?

Would our lives be different without specific classes? I believe all the classes we take do not have an impact on our lives. Many classes we take because we have to, we once again need them to obtain a degree. Many classes we won't even remember taking twenty years from now. However, by forcing us to take various classes, we gain an outline, a basic understanding, of some of the principal areas of life. For example, my Dad is in business, however he still talks about that astronomy class he had to take to graduate and he still is able to point out various astronomy arrangements.

This matter does not help him in the work field, however it had provided him with an understanding, enjoyment and a hobby for the past twenty years.

This section continues and Frank tells us a spur of the moment lesson having to do with excuse notes, when a child brings Frank a note that the student clearly wrote himself, Frank turns this into a real life lesson for his class. I enjoyed this story because a lot of my friends have often asked if I would write a paper for them, or if I could sign them into class. I like that Frank did not yell at the student, but turned it into an opportunity to teach the class.

This also presented Frank, the teacher with an opportunity to learn. Frank learned how to deal with this new type of situation. This is an important point that many people do not realize: learning is a two-way streak. Just because

someone is labeled as the teacher, or the professional, does not mean that they cannot also be actively learning. I believe the Mr. McCourt provided one of the best types of learning opportunities for his students through allowing them to learn during a real life scenario. In the next section, Frank tells us three stories that involve the “ teacher-student” relationship. He begins the chapter with a shocker.

McCourt was forced to contact the mother of a disruptive student, Augie, to inform her of her son’s behavior. The next day, the boy’s gargantuan father busts into the classroom, and beats his child against the wall. The Father concluded by warning the students about being disruptive to the teacher. McCord described this scene quite graphically. This seen caused me to think about how much times have changed and caused me to feel slightly uncomfortable. Our parents always say you don’t know what being beat is. Many have opinions, and wonder if modern day, or if pastime parenting is more effective in raising a child.

I can’t provide an accurate answer because I have not studied the background behind each parenting method. McCourt’s next story involved the issue of race. Sal, an Italian boy, is jumped by an Irish kid one day in Prospect Park after school. He is struck in the head with a two-by-four. This experience embarrassed Sal in front of his girlfriend, Louise (an Irish girl). Sal goes on a racial outburst and storms out of the class. He requests a transfer to another teacher, a non-Irish teacher. The incident reminded me of many that I saw during high school, however there was one primary difference.

In my school, the teacher always attempted to calm and had some control over the situation. However, in McCourt's case, he didn't attempt to do anything. This presented one other major story called a "royal pain in the ass," which described a troublemaker-type student. McCord was the school's newest teacher and was stuck with an unpleasant kid. The school administration hoped that McCord, as an Irishman would be able to find some connection with this boy who was an Irish student. If that fails, the administration planned to do nothing but sit back and hope that the kid dropped out and joined the army.

This student identifies with nothing and is described as the "impossible case." He interrupts the class with irrelevant commentary. His mother can't do a thing with him. However, McCourt sees him as a bright boy with a lively imagination. I believe McCourt realizes that he needs to target the boy's energy. McCourt figures out how to empower and educate the child through assigning him busywork. McCourt gives Kevin housekeeping responsibilities such as washing the board, cleaning the erasers, etc. The kid is even happy cleaning old paint jars, taking dozens home with him at the end of the year.

Eventually the trouble making student does get assigned to another school, drifts out, and gets drafted to go to Vietnam. This whole section provided a great scene, which proved that people communicated and see different things in each other. In the next section Mr. McCourt is forced to teach in a "melting-pot" school. At this school, many of the students were raised speaking different languages and learning different cultural practices. As a result, much of what Mr. McCourt tries to teach is too language-dense for the

students to understand or too much in opposition of what the students stand for.

In an effort to connect with them, he indulges their off-the-wall, point-blank questions; he takes them to see movies and plays; and he tells them stories about how he used to teach English to tough, Puerto Rican cooks.

Throughout this whole section of the book the reader learns more about Mr. McCourt's teaching experiences. McCourt describes the various ways that he has been able to empower students. An important message that I took away from this section is that there is no "one method fits all" for when it comes to teaching. I believe this model can further apply to "no one method fits all for learning. I also believe that it was important that McCourt was able to provide us personal details about his students. Being able to know your customers, students or patients is extremely important in being able to successfully understand them, and in order to educate to their specific needs. This made me wonder about how does it feel to know that the success of students largely depends on how much extra time and attention a person is willing to devote to them? Is it fair to ask you to do extra work for students or for clients? I believed this is where the quality aspect comes into place.

The higher quality a person is reflects upon a person who puts in the extra time and devotes their free time towards helping their students or at the job. The pace has picked up and I am enjoying bouncing between various issues. I have been able to find the meaning behind nearly all the stories. Many of the meaning can relate to other fields. I have enjoyed McCourt. His style is

different. McCourt often leaves the reader thinking and relating, but not trying to guess what comes next. Well that's it for today. I am going to finish the remainder of the book tomorrow morning and then finish up my reflections.

Chapter 10-20 McCourt begins chapter eleven by discussing what it means to be the good teacher. He essentially says good teachers have control, power, authority, never allow students to talk out of turn, to swear, or to go to the bathroom for more than five minutes, and overall follow the rules and know how to please the administrators. First off, I was stunned at many of the concepts of what McCourt said made a good teacher. Bathroom for only 5 minutes? Pleasing the administrators? Having complete power? At this point I was stunned because I had felt that McCourt has just said everything that he didn't believe in.

However, from here McCourt fell into a trance about how he's not the good teacher. Then further he says that he's never been good at anything in his whole life, but just walks aimlessly from one job to another. I re-read this section, wondering if McCourt was looking for sympathy, but then realize McCourt's problem was that he had never had any goals. With no goals, he has no ambitions and doesn't know what to do with himself. I believe he was left with a ton of " what if's," none of which were taking him anywhere. This whole part of chapter 11 confirmed my strong believe that everyone needs goals.

It's impossible to reach full potential in life without having something to challenge yourself to reach for. Luckily, my teachers have always had me set

both short and long-term goals. This has been a huge help in both my everyday and long term journeys of life. Later on McCourt manages to land a dream spot at Trinity College in Dublin. One of his fantasies has finally come true, and he strolls around the campus feeling proud. He describes this opportunity as a dream come true. Having “ dreams” led me to wonder if McCourt really did have goals, but he called them ambitions instead of goals.

He’s a doctoral candidate, which is never an easy position to fall into. I believe he must have been doing something right, most likely with priorities and goals in order to achieve this. He is going to get the degree, and earn the money. He’ll get the respect he’s been striving for his whole life, but without any further goals, this is where his dreams and possibilities will end. McCourt fails to focus on his studies. Instead he spends his time like an immature undergraduate: drinking, sleeping around, and researching random tidbits on the Irish in America.

His studies continue and McCourt realizes that the Irish heritage, which he’s so proud of, is actually the one that’s struggling for acceptance in America. He returns to America as a failed doctoral candidate, where his life only continues to worsen. McCourt loses his teaching job and now earns money being a substitute teacher. He is on a downward spiral, leaving the reader to wonder if he’ll be able to pull it together? This section was a lot longer than most of the sections, but I found it more interesting, with a lot of conveyed meaning.

Maybe it was simply because I could relate it to scenarios that I have witnessed my friends go through. McCourt’s conversation with Andrew was

interesting because it sounded as if McCourt was the kid's illegitimate father. I also found it strange that McCourt took note of Boom Boom Brandt's advice on life: " Whenever you think too much of yourself, go home and clean the toilet. That will remind you of how unworthy you really are. " Boom Boom Brandt's quote reminds me of many of my friends, naturally the brightest in the class, but ultimately fails because of no dedication or desire to try.

I believe McCourt included this piece of advice from Brandt to provide himself an excuse for screwing up, and showing himself how unworthy he was. Overall this quote provides an interesting manor in order to keep someone in check. In the book, McCourt thought too much of himself when he headed into Dublin wearing his American uniform. He was punished, (cleaned the toilet), when he could only attract the attention of Mary, (a heavily obese Irish woman). McCourt also thought too much of himself when he was accepted to Trinity College.

He eventually wound up failing to get his degree and had to return to America empty-handed, however this was because of no dedication. Maybe McCourt feels he should have cleaned the toilet a little more often, but I still firmly believe McCourt needed more goals. The time McCourt spent with the psychiatrist revealed a lot about his insecurities. McCourt's almost forty years old explains to the psychiatrist that he's still concerned with impressing people. It becomes apparent that McCourt spends more time trying to win the shrink's approval than trying to get to the root of his own problems.

I believe this unveils that McCourt is lonely and he needs more friends. In the next section, McCourt gets a new opportunity at life. He's offered a position at one of the most prestigious high schools in New York. Daughter Maggie is born not long after he begins this job. Life begins looking up for McCourt. At Stuyvesant High School, McCourt makes friends with his supervisor. They have drinks together, and McCourt is trusted to teach whatever grade and whatever topics he wants. Never before has McCourt been given this much freedom or responsibility in the classroom. Unfortunately, at age forty-nine, McCourt experiences another major setback.

His wife divorces him, and he is forced to live in less than ideal conditions. Along the way, however, he connects with an artist who looks at the world differently. It was really nice to see this change of McCourt personality of being happy. The book was beginning to get slightly depressing with all downs and no ups. People always say that having kids changes your perspective on life, this is evident with McCourt. The reader can tell McCourt is trying to change his life. He obviously loves his daughter more than anything. At his new job, McCourt has the opportunity to make choices, as to what to teach, and how to teach it.

He had freedom for the first time in a long time, and appeared to be making acceptable choices. He teaches literature, and is successful at achieving the hardest concept for teachers to achieve: he is able to get his kids individually think. He's no longer a classroom entertainer telling stories, but he is finally educating through empowering his students. McCourt runs into various routine "teacher related" responsibilities. Janice, one of McCourt's students,

expresses sexual abuse troubles in one of her papers. McCourt says he considers letting the guidance counselor know what he's read, but ultimately decides against it.

I was shocked, and slightly outraged by this decision. Child abuse is a huge problem, and this simple action of not alerting anyone could ultimately lead to the death of this child. I firmly believe in any field one must know when to get others involved. This was clearly an issue outside of McCourt's specialty. McCourt's believes students never want to see their teachers as being anything but teachers. They don't want to think about their teachers being involved in relationships or doing things that do not directly relate to teaching. He believes students think that learning is the only priority teachers have.

I cannot quite understand what makes McCourt believe this, and nor do I believe teachers are only present for the responsibility of teaching. I know teachers, like any professional have other activities in their lives. When teachers, or any professionals, share with their students, or clients, about other activities, it allows for a personal bond to occur. In some cases, I believe this is appropriate in order to allow for a deeper relationship. In the final section, McCourt's once again experiences Parent-Teacher meetings. During the meetings he got a sense of what it must be like for his students at home outside of his class.

He came to appreciate that each student comes from a different home life and that this is sometimes what is reflected in that student's personality and from this he learned how to better teach each individual. I enjoyed reading

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this section and was easily able to relate it to the medical field. Physicians often make recommendations based upon a patient's home life. This is crucial in setting for various factors, ranging from religious practices to socioeconomic factors. McCourt appears to show jealousy. He deeply loves all his students, but is jealous of their fortunate lives. He makes it clear that he didn't come from the same background.

I believe this challenges him with trying to connect with their problems. Phyllis however is able to remind McCourt that everyone has problems when she shares her story about having to choose between witnessing the moon landing and witnessing her father's death. This is an important message in this final portion of the book. It represents that no one's life is perfect. Everyone has problems. How each one of us addresses these problems results in how we live our lives. McCourt informs his students that everyone is a writer. I really enjoy when he says, " People write in their heads all the time. I like this analogy of thinking is a process that never ends. I believe is quite important to share experiences with others. This sparks interest and allows for active teaching. McCourt tells his students to write about their plans, their wishes, and their dreams. He says it's all in there; it's just not on paper. He turns this thought into an assignment where the students are asked to listen to their grandparents' stories and to write them down. He finally seems to have found a teaching style that works for himself and he is getting his students to continuously think which is key in educating through empowerment.

McCourt lands himself in trouble again when he talks about the lives of writers from the Beat Generation. Parents do not approve and this controversially issue, landing him in trouble with a parent. A student asks McCourt how they will be graded for the course. He provides students with their dream answer, telling the students to grade themselves. He explains they know how hard they worked during the semester, and they know what they did or did not learn. The important question to McCourt is if the class freed their minds in any way. I find this idea quite strange. He leaves the idea of freeing their minds quite open-ended.

I believe it is a good thing to be able to think out of the box, like McCourt is attempting to get his students to do, but I believe McCourt is failing to show his students the limits and expectations of society. At the end of the book, McCourt gave the young substitute teacher some advice: " I know I'm exaggerating but being a teacher is like being a boxer going into the ring or a bullfighter into the arena. You can be knocked out or gored and that's the end of your teaching career. But if you hang on you learn the tricks. It's hard but you have to make yourself comfortable in the classroom. You have to be selfish.

The airlines tell you if oxygen fails you are to put on your mask first, even if your instinct is to save the child. " This was the most inspiring dialect McCourt shared in the novel. The quote can apply to nearly any field. Life is a fight and in order to make it through one must experience the positives and negatives. The story of Guy Lind reminds the readers one last time to count our blessings and to be thankful for all that we have. The story makes us

remember that it's the little things that make the big differences and ends with a student telling McCourt to write a book. Overall I enjoyed the book.

At the beginning there were a few slow spots, but the bouncing between stories causes the audience to remain engaged. The book interests me because of the ability to relate many of my experiences to what McCourt had faced. Some of his lessons McCourt shared I agreed with, and other instances provided me an opportunity to provide my belief on a subject. Overall McCourt was able to educate through empowering. After re-reading everything I reflected on, I believe all the experiences and thoughts came from within me and allowed me to re-live a lot of my childhood. Overall I enjoyed seeing McCord's view on the education field.