

## Process vs. Product

By Tina Gist

*Note: We are going to cover a lot of information as as I speak, feel free to select the one thing that is most impactful for you personally.*

### I. Introduction

Good afternoon! My name is Tina Gist and I am so honored and grateful for the opportunity to speak on a concept that has proven extremely powerful in so many facets of my life. Before I jump in, let me share a bit of my background. I spent 7 years in the traditional classroom setting the Poway Unified School District just prior to adopting my first son who is now 13. Following the adoption, I had 4 biological children 2 boys and 2 girls. As a classroom teacher, I never had it in my realm of possibility that I would do any version of home study or independent study. However, when the time came, the best educational option in my area was a charter school with a 2 day whole classroom component. To me, this seemed like the jackpot...the best of both worlds!

For 8 years, my children were enrolled in this local charter/independent study program and they were thriving. I felt blessed that I was able to be a credentialed teacher teaching them at home while partnering with their classroom teachers in collaboration for the best individualized learning environment I felt I could offer them. Toward the last couple years at this charter school, I began to explore a bit more of the classical approach to learning and teaching and I was exposed to other philosophies and methods that I believed would benefit my own children. Little did I know I had sprinkles of classical education throughout my childhood education as well as my college training in teacher education. Now I am able to identify those and utilize the benefit for my children. A little over a year ago, I was asked to be a teacher of record for a classical charter school. At that time, I was in the process of applying to begin a program at the University of San Diego to obtain my administrative credential....in hopes that one day I could participate in the development of a more classical charter independent study school. Today, I am thrilled to say the "product" of my hope for this type of classical charter school/independent study learning option is now available in a program very close to my home! I had very little to do with it "officially", but I, along with several others with the same vision, put feelers out there and found there are hundreds of other people out there who were in a process of their own, searching for a similar educational option. 4 of my 5 children attend Heritage Flex Academy where they attend a full-classroom setting 2 days a week and have the option for enrichment classes on a

3rd day of the week. The remaining days are independent study days. To wrap up my professional journey, I was accepted into the USD program, but then the university decided not to offer the particular program I wanted this year so, I am on “hold” for realizing that goal, yet, this journey is not over and the whole process is proving richer than than I ever would have imagined! Well, enough about my story. Now, I would like to share my passion for process vs. product as it applies to your professional life, your personal life and your students’ lives.

## II. Creating Deeply Rooted Meaningful Morsels in Experience in Education

Let’s begin. What is our goal when we set out to teach our students?

\_\_\_\_\_ [Wait for answers] Anyone? .....Thoughts?.....

When we present information we expect there to be some sort of logging or storage of that information or possibly even a tangible masterpiece at the conclusion of the unit of study, right?

Well, those are absolutely good, right, noble, and beautiful goals. However, are there any other results that could be just as significant and meaningful as the final, bright, shiny product?

Over the year, I have come to believe that sometimes, if not most of the time, in our professional lives, personal lives, and in our students’ lives, the process by which we journey is sometimes, if not much of the time, just as important as the product.

When we begin a new unit of study or set out toward a specific goal toward a final product in our lives, where does our initial focus lie?

\_\_\_\_\_ [Wait for answers: i.e. lesson objective, a unit objective, etc.]

Great! Now let’s stop and ponder, “Am I gleaning the most educational and meaningful morsels I possibly could along this journey?”

\_\_\_\_\_ [Respond in own mind.]

If you are unsure or simply can honestly say, “No.” Please don’t be discouraged. THERE IS HOPE!

I believe too often we minimize the value of the journey. The process by which we convey material or content to our students is significant. From there, each individual student is responsible for his/her own learning and what depth of education s/he will allow him/herself. Finally, there is some sort of result...possibly a formal assessment of the information imparted, a presentation based on the content of the unit, a final project constructed to represent the knowledge gained, and soon!

Let us pause for a moment and take a walk down memory lane, if you will indulge me. Feel free to close your eyes if that helps you focus and reflect more easily and you are comfortable doing that.

When you think about your favourite vacation or most cherished childhood memories, often they are connected to the process, NOT the product. One of my favorite childhood memories was my grandpa walking me to school one day while I was living in just outside Madrid, Spain, in a little village called, Aravaca. I was 5 years old and my grandparents had flown over from Colorado to spend time visiting my family in Madrid. One day, I asked my mom if Grandpa could take me to school. She agreed so Grandpa and I set out on our journey....which should and would have totalled just a few blocks, I believe. My grandpa was a rugged man - quite handsome and was a cross between Ronald Reagan and the Marlboro Man. (AND, as a side note, he was born in 1911, the same year Ronald Reagan was born.) He had been a farmer his whole life which also afforded dangerous tasks such as herding cattle so ever since he was 16 years old, he only had vision in one eye as a result of his whip coming back and hitting him in the eye. Anyway, this tough, senior citizen cowboy and a little girl, in a blackwatch plaid uniform, set out on the streets of the village of Aravaca, Spain to go to school. Well, Grandpa and I had such fun! Every time we reached an intersection, Grandpa would ask, "Tina, which way do you think we should go now?" With my best guess, I would respond and we would head off in that direction. After many times of repeating this routine, chatting with Grandpa about all we saw here and there, taking in the smells of exhaust from buses and cars, I finally asked Grandpa if he knew how to get to my school. With a nervous smile, he replied, "No, Honey. I thought you knew how to get there." I felt a rush of butterflies in my stomach and had a brief moment of panic, but then I made up my mind that I was going to have to somehow just get us home. It seemed like that was a safer option than just wandering the streets of the city...as exciting as that was when I thought we were headed toward school What I did know was my address so I asked Grandpa if he thought we should see if a bus could take us home. Grandpa did not speak any Spanish and I heard my mother call mine "playground Spanish" as I only knew what I learned from interaction with peers at school. After my best attempt to choose correct buses, we finally made it to a corner I

recognized and not far from there was my home! Whew! What an exciting day! Needless to say, I never did make it to school that day and the next morning when I awoke, I asked my mom if Grandpa could take me to school again that day!

So, what is the point of my sharing that precious childhood memory of mine? Well the goal of the day or the “product” was supposed to be Grandpa taking me to school for a change, instead of my mother. However, instead of that product or result actually coming to fruition, I had a day full of the bustling sights, sounds, and smells of the village of Aravaca, with my Grandfather. Now he is long gone, but the memories from that journey through the village with him are forever a part of who I am today. Even now when I smell exhaust from buses, I remember my time on the streets of Aravaca with Grandpa.

This is the process that I believe carries a huge amount of significance in shaping who we are as humans. If we rush through every process to merely achieve our goal and move on to the next thing on our “To Do” list, we rob ourselves and our students of deeply rooting morsels of knowledge and experience along the process on the journey.

If you are taking notes, here is how I like to think about the process:

1. First, the “Why?”
2. Second, the “How?”
3. Third, the “Where?”

[Repeat 1, 2, 3]

Initially, this may strike you as a backwards order of planning, but if you will indulge the process, your student will most likely be delighted to experience a treasure in tweaking the order of typical of thinking, a bit.

“Why?”

- Why am I doing this?
- Why am I asking my student to do this?
- Why is this or would this be meaningful to me?
- Why is this or would this be meaningful to my student?

[Give time for note-taking and sharing.]

“How?”

- How will I approach this content?
- How will I guide my student in approaching this content/concept?
- How will I measure achievement?
- How will I assign value to the process components of the exercise?

“Where?”

- Where do I want to be at the end of it all?
- Where do I want my students to be at the end of it all?
- Where will this take me on the journey toward excellence?
- Where will my students have opportunities to self-assess where they are on the journey toward excellence?

### III. Outcomes/Benefits

There are 3 concrete, precious outcomes, I believe to be had in slowing down and emphasizing the process portion of learning:

- First, the depth of knowledge,
- Second, the depth of strategy,
- Third, the depth of experience.

[Repeat.]

The first outcome of slowing down the process toward the journey toward the product may seem fairly obvious to you and that is the depth of knowledge. It stands to reason that the more time afforded and allocated to absorbing content that is presented, the deeper the roots of knowledge will be imbedded in one’s mind and being or in our student’s mind and being. Have you ever underestimated how long a household “do it yourself” project will take? [Allow time for reflection/response.] That is precisely where I am going with this. Allow AMPLE TIME not merely ADEQUATE TIME for absorption of the content. It may be.... And often is...tempting to rush this step as a means to better efficiency in covering all material/concepts necessary or desired to be imparted to yourself or your student. If we can refrain from such short-sightedness as we grasp the long-term benefits, the results will be astounding!

The second outcome of slowing down the process [on the the journey toward the product] is the depth of strategy. What do I mean by this? Well if I rush through a

process most likely, I or my student will jump in and get started utilizing the very first strategy [or means] to reaching and achieving the product/or final goal. In doing so, you or your student risk missing out on other options that may prove to be more advantageous or enlightening. Research suggests that providing yourself or your student more time for strategizing, actually deepens and strengthens the muscles in the brain.

The value of taking time for reflection and analysis of strategical options seems to minimize when there is a looming deadline for a final product. That deadline can drive us forcefully through the process arriving at our product, but inadvertently robbing us of the depth of strategy that can be a very valuable piece of the learning process. Shortcuts and plowing through a process may initially seem efficient and wise, but if the rush causes us to short circuit or miss a valuable element in synthesis, we have not gained anything other than putting ourselves on a path to a less than excellent process.

The third and final outcome or benefit of slowing down the process [on the journey toward the product] is a greater depth of experience. There is no better way to solidify something in our memories than to experience it. Take the brave and potentially frivolous step to make this concept or information come to life and get as many of your 5 senses involved. Utilizing these senses will result in implanting lasting, valuable memories forever stored in one's brain. Though this portion of the process can be time consuming, it may ultimately be the most significant outcome/benefit of the process to you or your student. These brain connections are often formative pieces in our whole life experience. If we will allow ourselves the opportunity to absorb the full experience of the journey and utilize as many of our 5 senses during the process, the greater the depth of our experience will be.

#### IV. Examples

Now that may be a bit of overload and brain-shifting for you. You may be thinking, "That's nice, but it sure isn't practical. How will I ever accomplish anything or move through material or my content at the expected and appropriate pacing?" I thought you might wonder about this so I have a few scenarios for you to consider:

Here is one scenario that seems to be a hot topic in many educational circles: **Testing**

So let us say you need test scores to show growth and document the progress of a student. Raise your hand if you have wondered how this could ever remotely apply. [Pause and acknowledge.] I believe most, if not all of us here at this conference can

agree that learning is the ultimate goal. NOW measuring that learning can occur in various forms. However, no matter what “form” you choose to use as your measurement, your student will absolutely have greater retention of content if the process is magnified and the journey is slowed down. You may think, “But what about deadlines? What about standardized growth so we do not lose our funding?” Here’s where a matter of conscience may be a factor. If you are so driven to get those scores up that you are willing to rush and push and possibly even send yourself into a “private panic”, then you may get those results on paper. However, if you open your mind to the possibility that there may be even greater benefit short-terms AND long-term to breaking down the process into the “Why?”, “How?”, and the “Where?” risking the added benefits of “depth of knowledge”, “depth of strategy”, and “depth of experience”, you will afford yourself the opportunity to assess, teach, assess, reteach, and assess. In doing so, you have the ability to correct any misunderstandings of the concepts and verify that TRUE LEARNING has taken place. At this point, you could confidently test and know that you have served this student well...not merely for a test score, but for all of life.

Here is another scenario for implementation of slowing down the process as you journey toward the product: Raise your hand if you have personal goals in your life and share if you are willing. Think about how it would benefit you to slow down the process. [Pause and allow for sharing...if time permits....If no one answers, share about husband and his training for Ironman...or even ½ Ironman.]

Finally, here is a third scenario. For those of you with children or nieces or nephews or friends’ kids, think of a situation where you were tempted to hurry up and finish a project or task for the child, but paused to realize that in doing so, you may actually cheat them out of so many lasting benefits. [Allow people to share. I.e. dishes, laundry, etc.]

[Pass out handouts.]

As you take a moment to consider that goal or one of the goals that popped into your head just now, I want you to take your handout and spend a few moments answering the questions outlined in front of you.

- I. What is my goal?
  - A. Why is this goal important to me?
  - B. How will I approach achieving this goal?

- C. Where do I want to be at the end of it all?
- II. What are the benefits of this goal?
    - A. How could I gain the greatest depth of knowledge in this process?
    - B. How could I obtain the greatest number or optional strategies toward this goal?
    - C. How could I receive the greatest depth of experience by slowing down the process toward this goal?

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, I want the hour we have spent together today to be as meaningful as possible for you both in your personal life and in your professional life. So before implementation with students, I urge you to experiment with this process vs. product concept in your own life. You may already have a scenario readily available. If you grant yourself the luxury of time to reflect on just one process in your life that is still incomplete. Think through possible benefits for your staying in the process just a bit longer in order for you to receive more depth of knowledge, depth of strategy, and more depth of experience.

VI. Question/Answer Time

[Allow time for people to share, ask questions, etc.]

Before we dismiss, feel free to take a moment to write down the one thing that was most impactful for you personally. [If time permits, allow people to share this.]





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  - B. **How** will I approach achieving this goal?
  - C. **Where** do I want to be at the end of it all?
  
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