The Meaning of Education to Me

In present-day society, education has become the number one prerequisite for a successful career and a steady income. More and more people are attaining college degrees, all with hopes of pursuing their passions and talents on a professional level. It isn’t difficult to recognize that “education” as a concept has recently experienced a major transition to being synonymous with the words “degree” or “diploma.” While this change isn’t necessarily negative, it does, personally, bring to question the meaning of education and why I myself am partaking in the college education process for the second time in my life. After some thought, I concluded that the meaning of education is not and cannot be as simple as the aforementioned definition that applies to today’s society; it transcends the basic idea of job prospect and feeds into the idea of becoming a well-rounded global citizen who is passionate about the process of learning in general, and not solely the pursuit of a specialized education.

In perceiving this meaning of education, I asked myself why I’m so committed to college even after years of study back in my native country of Poland. At first glance, it was obvious that I desired a respected profession with a steady income and benefits - the foundation of a secure life. I hold a Master’s Degree in Phys. Ed., which means that I would surely be able to find some teaching job that would provide roughly the same compensation and wouldn’t require attending college again. But here I am. Thus, I knew there had to be more to the meaning of education. I thought about the subjects I am currently and have been studying: nursing, which includes anatomy, physiology, neuroscience, biology, and others. To some, these may seem like hurdles to jump over on the way to obtaining that valuable piece of paper, the degree, that represents a smooth transition into the workforce. I realized that I don’t feel the same way. Those subjects
fascinate me individually, each one offering a treasure chest of information that I am eager to collect and absorb. In other words, the meaning of education can be found in my drive to learn as much as I can about each of these subjects, even if I prefer some to others, and not in coasting through countless classes just to receive a degree - for me, the latter is not the true meaning of education.

I had always wanted to work in the medical field, but various circumstances and choices lead me to teaching. One would think that I'd be regretful of not having pursued medicine from the get go in Poland, but I wouldn't have it any other way. Being older than the average college student, I've had time to come to appreciate everything I have learned up to this point. While I may not apply all the knowledge on a daily basis, I am at least in its possession and can identify myself as a more aware and "educated" person. Just that seemingly marginal observation changes the entire meaning of education for me, and furthers my desire to learn anything and everything. It breaks the link between "education" and "college degree" and widens the scope of what education really is - an ongoing journey that opens our eyes to new subjects, cultures, and ideas, thus making us better people in the process.

All things considered, while most of my current education takes place within the confines of the nursing program at Bergen Community College, it will not cease even once I graduate. I will always want to learn more, see more, understand more, and the acquisition of a degree will not be the finish line that marks the end of education - once again, that is NOT the meaning of education at its foundation. I will look for other sources of knowledge in books, on the internet, and in other people. Therefore, I think it's a mistake to downsize the meaning of education to a degree, to some annoying process we have to go through to be able to work where we want. While that is definitely a part of the meaning of education, learning is a mindset, not a one-time
event. Education does open up opportunities for us professionally and financially, but more importantly, it enhances the human experience by exposing us to everything the world has to offer. That, in a nutshell, is what education means to me, and how I will interpret it for the rest of my life.