



Key Learning Problems in Academic Doctoral Study¹

Ted Ward

1. Accumulated habits of learning from all previous formal education. (Come now, don't I already know how to learn?) Learning styles are not innate; learning styles are learned preferences.
2. Presumptions of the adequacy of one's present approaches to learning. (I'm a winner-survivor so far, so I'll just persist and increase the effort.)
3. Over-dependence on one or two learning strategies. (Hey, I can memorize anything. Just tell me what I need to know!)
4. Willingness to succumb to the pressures to narrowness and over-specialization. (So what if I ultimately know more and more about less and less—that's the name of the game isn't it?) You will ultimately know everything about nothing. Keep alive ancillary interests and multiple perspectives.
5. Presumptions of personal excellence, especially in the subjective valuing of the worth and truth of ideas. (I can usually separate out the worthy from the unworthy ideas.) Shallow wisdom, premature greatness, egoistic and immature.
6. Unfamiliarity with the history and connectedness of ideas and their philosophical roots. (I really don't think it matters much where the idea comes from; what really matters is whether or not it is *true*.) The true-False dichotomy. The satisfactions of categorical judgments.
7. Undervaluing of the social nature of learning processes. (I really don't need to talk and write nearly so much as I need to read and think.) Oral languages as key to thinking. Learning is essentially a social process.
8. Overvaluing of the competitive motivations to learn. (I see learning as a race. I want to win.) Damaging/ handicapping. Isolates learner. Non-sustainable habits.

¹Ted Ward. Key Learning Problems in Academic Doctoral Study. Academic Doctoral Retreat, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, September 20, 1995.

9. Intolerance of contrast and dissent. (All truth converges; therefore I expect to find higher level studies bringing us all to a common set of beliefs and opinions.) Recognition of how little we know is a valid outcome.

10. Unchallenged acceptance of a mental faculty understanding of human learning. (Since the mind is essentially like a physical muscle, doctoral study is just a matter of jumping higher and higher hurdles and running longer and longer races.)

Ted Ward's List of Sustainable Habits

1. Learn to listen
2. Seek verbal interaction
3. Build network maps of ideas and sources
4. Log your own ideas as fervently as any other note-taking
5. Write to aid the digestion process—the digestion of knowledge and understanding.
6. Compare what you thought with what you find.
7. Fight off the rush to judgment.