



Poor Teaching—A Reason but Not an Excuse for Ineffective Learning¹

Ted Ward

Teaching is not a performance. Teaching is a process that must be assessed in terms of what it causes learners to become. Teachers are accountable for what happens in *learners*, not just for what the teacher knows and has delivered.

Teaching badly is easier than teaching well. It should not be surprising that bad teaching is so common. When teaching is poor, learners attend only to those data and procedures which they think will be formally tested. Students become simplifiers. They seek out every available shortcut. The larger possibilities of deeper understanding are neglected in favor of the quest for the grade.

A student who has conformed to the mold of poor teaching tends to study in bursts of frantic memorization. Measured, steady, and persistent dealing with ideas never becomes a habit. Learning experiences are seen merely as punches on the academic card: get enough punches and get out of it. Such a person walks away from an assignment, a test, or a paper with a sigh of relief. “That’s over! I’m glad I’ll never have to do that again.”

In some parts of the world the problem can be traced to a cultural habit of excessive memorization—it is more important to repeat the words than to be able to reason. Such teaching and learning, wherever it may appear, is called *rote learning*, the memorizing of words to be recalled in specific sequence in response to specific questions.

When students who have been handicapped by either of these phenomena (lazy teaching or rote learning) come to graduate education, they are likely to discover a gap in their skills. Especially in interactional seminars or in the development of more complex papers, they encounter, perhaps for the first time, academic accountability for reasoning and creative thought.

Poor teaching will always be with us. Nevertheless, there is no good excuse for a student defaulting into bad learning. Especially for those who have been granted the opportunities of doctoral study, the higher competencies of analysis, synthesis, and critical evaluation should be developed into sustainable habits of effective learning.

¹ Ted Ward. Poor Teaching—A Reason but Not an Excuse for Ineffective Learning. *Doctor/And: Newsletter of the PhD EDS and PhD ICS programs*, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Issue 3, December 1993