

# Advice for Future Teachers



Send him mail.



*“Insight for the Young and Unrestrained” is an original weekly column appearing every Thursday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Gregory V. Diehl. Gregory is a writer, musician, educator, and coach for young people at EnabledYouth.com. Archived columns can be found here. IYU-only RSS feed available here.*

“Intellect” is intangible, and therefore not something which can be directly observed. Its workings must be inferred by its measurable physical effects. We can get a sense of ways in which intelligence obviously does not work. We can build numerous positive correlations which show obvious patterns and general trends. But as soon as we attempt to zero in on it and describe it as succinctly as we might describe the parts and processes of an internal combustion engine, it eludes us again with real live demonstrations of human behavior which don’t quite fit the theory. But in exactly the same manner which the position of a planet might be deduced by the observation of its gravitational influence on surrounding bodies, every teacher can make educated guesses about the inner workings of a student’s mind by careful observation of a student’s physical actions and words.

In education, information is presented to learners through the use of visible and audible symbols (such as written and spoken words, or physical gestures) with associated meanings. But these demonstrations only take on significance when the student has a mind capable of recognizing the meanings of the symbols presented, and this can only be done through sufficient logical capacity and readily accessible memory. A mind which categorizes every individual idea or activity as completely new and unrelated to the memories of previous experiences cannot learn new tasks or skills. Logic and memory are the glue which bind random data into a cohesive structure, and make learning possible. Therefore, every teacher ought to focus on strengthen and expanding the logical capacity of every student they encounter.

In instructing language, this means learning the relevant patterns of sentence structure and the conjugations of verbs. These grammatical principles are applied intuitively to every new vocabulary word through the use of logic, whether or not the student has ever actually heard or seen that new word in use. If not for logical categorization of information, every new word and iteration would have to be learned by rote as merely an arbitrary and

unrelated list of facts or labels. Patterns such as this can be represented through the use of logical syllogisms, such as if A is a subset of B, and B is a subset of C, then A must therefore be a subset of C. True education and sharpening of intelligence happens through the enhancement of the understanding of such principles, whereas list-based learning involves no use of logical capacity, and only relies on the occupation of space in memory banks. This distinction may seem small, but it makes all the difference in the world.

I've seen countless examples of would-be students who insist that they would love to learn music, math, or any number of esoteric skills, but feel that they lack natural ability or talent in those fields. They may wish to travel the world, but have never identified themselves as strong "language learners," regardless of their proficiency in other domains, and so on. While clearly some people are born with a stronger disposition for learning some subjects than others, I believe anything can be learned by anyone, so long as a qualified instructor can find a suitable way to compare a new type of knowledge and understanding with some other form of information already maintained by the student, and so long as the student maintains strong enough reasoning capacity.

If intelligence and all its applications can be summarized as products of the ability to reason correctly, the knowledge acquired from the use of reason, and the precision use of the body's various motor functions deriving from this knowledge, it follows that an optimized model of education will break down the informational constructs comprising any skill set into something already relatable and familiar to a student. By turning the unfamiliar into something familiar via metaphor and comparison, students can more easily adopt the required information into an established logical structure, rather than create a new one from the ground up. This task requires that a teacher or explainer of information first identify what sort of information and patterns their student is already familiar with, and compare them effectively with the subject being taught. This is not a task for the lazy or dispassionate teacher.

Focus on principle when dealing with learners of any age. "Smart" is an arbitrary general designation unless it accurately reflects a person's ability to take in superior information and disregard outdated ideas. Intelligence is more a measure of psychological fluidity and consistent categorization than anything else. A teacher facilitates this process through the controlled release of the appropriate pieces of information in a sequence tailored to the temperament of his student, with continually feedback from direct interaction. A caretaker of children makes it his first priority to promote the capacity for reason and rapid adaptation, knowing that everything else more visible on surface display is a downstream derivative of these traits. The capacity to reason is the only thing which allows for an integrated understanding of life, and which weaves together seemingly unrelated fields of knowledge.

More important than how linguistically gifted, logical, or diverse a student's mind may be,

no true learning can occur without first the presence of a genuine desire to learn. Likewise, no matter how mentally forsaken a student may appear to be, incredible amounts of growth can almost always be achieved by someone with the will to learn. Therefore, the job description of an effective teacher is never limited to just explaining the logic and facts of the subject of focus; it is to inspire students to want to learn. It's as much an emotional process as it is an intellectual one. It requires the development of bravery and confidence in the face of the unknown and intimidating. Learners need inspiration in the form of a real life human role model.

Many children feel themselves stupid, or incapable of learning certain skills or subjects. Many adults believe that the adoption of large amounts of new data is impossible past childhood. Good teachers take time to learn where these students' strengths lie, and find a creative way to link the development of new knowledge to what they already know and care about. Almost everyone past a certain age has something which they've learned to excel at despite initial obstacles. Reminding them of these things can give them the perspective needed to envision how the new tasks and processes will come to be easy for them as well. But again, this can only happen when the teacher has a personal interest in the emotional lives and interests of his students.

Teaching is definitely not for everyone, but for some people it seems to be the only way to sustain a purposeful life. It's the social role they were born to fill, and they naturally shift toward positions of nurturing and guidance over others. It's about being the right kind of person more than it is about any particular type of talent, and natural teachers usually find themselves in educational and mentorship roles well before ever getting their first job in the field. It can be frustratingly different every day, and present you with situations for which there is no formulaic response or solution. In that way, it's one of the most adventurous professions in the world, and it can easily break the spirit wear on the patience of anyone ill-suited to take up the mantle.

How do you know if teaching is the right path for you? It depends. Do you find the workings of the human mind fascinating? Do you have a natural knack for seeing the process of intellectual and emotional growth in yourself and others? Do you have a way with words and a talent for demonstrating how things work? Can you easily empathize with others and imagine the world from their present point of view? Is your most basic instinctual drive to strengthen rather than prey upon the weak? Does the idea of contributing to the improvement of the human race excite you like nothing else? If you've even read this far, you probably already have a good idea of who you are and where your destiny lies.

When you enter the field, you'll probably notice there are two diametrically opposite philosophies concerning education. The dominant philosophy on the scene, likely throughout the world, is that a teacher is merely a cog in a larger machine, whose only purpose is to throw information and discipline at students. Don't be fooled into thinking this

is the way it always is or will always be. The remnant minority are those who understand and celebrate the unique and personal craft each teacher brings to the table when they take on the role of professional educator. Make it your personal mission to find these types of people, or you will come to hate your job and yourself for compromising your principles and become the anti-embodiment of your true values.

Hone your craft. Teaching is as much an art as it is a science. The way you think, talk, gesticulate, and otherwise choose to express yourself becomes an integral part of the quality of your performance. It becomes your trademark and personal brand appeal. Maybe you're not fortunate enough to be in a market where your services are fully appreciated. Either work the best you can with what you have or head elsewhere. In a world where educators are still massively underappreciated, you are also necessarily, to an extent, an entrepreneur. If you do it right, you never stop learning about learning. Teaching is way too broad of a pastime to be put in a box by reigning custom. You'll go into it armed with an innate disposition and passion for explanation, but real experience with an endless variety of students and circumstances is what will turn you into a master.

Enjoy the ride as you learn to navigate the system and work within the expectations of the culture around you. Education is, in some ways, among the most controversial and controlled career fields in the world, and because of this it needs progressive thinkers to push it in the right direction. The pay and hours can be hugely variable depending on the specific nature of the educational endeavor you choose to pursue, but the personal rewards will be unmatched by any other course of action if you find the right kind of person for teaching. By many, you will be ignored and unappreciated, but by those whose lives you really influence you will be a hero. You won't ever have to wonder again if your life has had any meaningful impact on the world, because you will know that, at least for those whose minds you impacted, the world will be forever different.