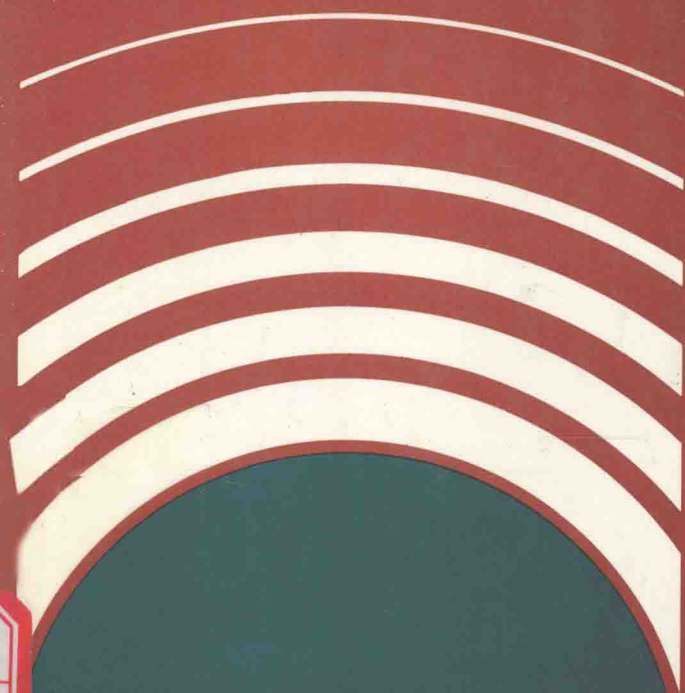
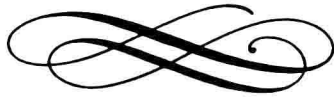


Stanford C. Ericksen

THE ESSENCE OF GOOD TEACHING



The Essence of Good Teaching



*Helping Students
Learn and Remember
What They Learn*

THE ESSENCE OF GOOD TEACHING

Helping Students Learn and Remember What They Learn

by Stanford C. Ericksen

Copyright © 1984 by: Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers
433 California Street
San Francisco, California 94104
&
Jossey-Bass Limited
28 Banner Street
London EC1Y 8QE

Copyright under International, Pan American, and Universal Copyright Conventions. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form—except for brief quotation (not to exceed 1,000 words) in a review or professional work—without permission in writing from the publishers.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Ericksen, Stanford C. (Stanford Clark) (date)

The essence of good teaching.

(The Jossey-Bass higher education series)

Bibliography: p. 167

Includes index.

1. College teaching. 2. Lecture method in teaching. 3. Education technology. 4. Motivation in education. 5. College students—Rating of.

I. Title. II. Series.

LB2331.E75 1984 378'.125 84-47983
ISBN 0-87589-615-4

Manufactured in the United States of America

The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council on Library Resources.

JACKET DESIGN BY WILLI BAUM

FIRST EDITION

Code 8436

*The Jossey-Bass
Higher Education Series*



Consulting Editor
Teaching and Learning

Kenneth E. Eble
University of Utah

*To Jane,
who confirmed the dignity and value
of the individual and who insisted
that this book be written.*

Preface



Teaching is the primary mission of a college, and whatever else might be said or done by way of educational reform, how well we—the teachers—do our job is absolutely basic. The demands on instruction change as society modifies and expands what it expects from higher education, as new resources for teaching become available, and as the criteria for evaluating the quality of instruction are sharpened. There is no consensus model of the ideal teacher, and the instructional diversity we see on every campus is a clear reminder that the individual teacher is the cook in charge of the kitchen. Each, however, will benefit from knowing more about the principles of pedagogical nutrition, that is, from understanding the underlying *constancies* required for good teaching. My purpose in writing this book, therefore, is to give the teacher a conceptual base for making decisions about how to do a better job in managing the classroom hour. More specifically, I hold that the payoff for good teaching is in terms of what students learn and carry away, and most of us strive to achieve this objective.

Good teachers skillfully cope with the *specific* demands of instruction, but they also possess a *fund of knowledge* about what they are doing. Successful professional practitioners generally score well on these two counts—they exercise specific skills for meeting particular problems, and they also understand why things work the way they do. Successful teaching is no different, and so my emphasis is on the conceptual underpinnings of good instruction.

My treatment of college teaching reflects lessons learned from being a long-time professor but especially from my twenty years at the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching at the University of Michigan. The roots of my position should be set forth: In 1962 a faculty committee recommended that a Center on Teaching be established, and its prospectus made clear that the success of this new unit would require that it offer something more than tinkering with “innovative” teaching. As the director, my first official action was to change the name to the Center for *Research on Learning and Teaching*. I had confidence that my discipline specialty—research on human learning and thinking—had reached a level of maturity that would allow useful extensions into the college classroom. From the beginning, therefore, my own perceptions of instruction have been selectively tilted toward how these findings on learning, memory, thinking (problem solving), motivation, and attitude change can be transformed to support college teaching.

These interpretations are the basis for this book. Chapter One sets the theme: The lasting measure of good teaching is what the individual student learns and carries away. The one piece of artwork in this chapter shows the outcome when teachers make full use of the intellectual and motivational resources students bring to the classroom. Chapter Two examines course content and shows how decisions on what to include reflect the teacher’s understanding of the long-lasting relevance of selected units of knowledge. Most courses are composed of a combination of facts, skills, concepts, methods, and values, to which must be added the inevitable personal development of the individual student.

The next four chapters consider the instructional means

for tapping and releasing the resources for learning and remembering. The lecture is the usual mode for presenting information, and Chapter Three reviews this familiar form of teaching, as well as the teacher's role in making effective use of various technological aids—audiovisual devices, computers, and the printed word. Special attention is given to the importance of probing value implications, since this function will outlive a technology that places the organized world of knowledge literally at the fingertips of students. Motivation (Chapter Four) to learn is part of every teacher's responsibility and is best accomplished by the spontaneous display of interests, positive attitudes, and enduring values, which are signs to students about what is worth learning and retaining in their own store of knowledge. I hold that the reinforcing effects of satisfying curiosity are educationally more powerful than extrinsic rewards of test scores, high grades, or even honors. Meaning—comprehension or understanding (Chapter Five)—is the strongest single factor leading to long-term retention. Rehearsal, that is, active participation and review, is basic and thus the major focus of this chapter. Forgetting, however, is inevitable, and guides are given as to how the teacher can help reduce the influence of factors leading to forgetting; for example, discussion groups serve as an excellent means to gain retention through better understanding. The shift from memorizing specifics to comprehending concepts (Chapter Six) is an important step forward in college-level instruction. Understanding ideas is the target of teaching, because ideas with deep meaning endure over time and extend into different settings. Various instructional arrangements directly related to concept learning are briefly summarized, but in any given instance, each student shapes the fluid meaning of an idea against a distinctive and idiosyncratic personal store of knowledge.

Learning how to learn and to solve problems—thinking independently—is the most important single end product of education. Chapter Seven demonstrates that a teacher meets this special challenge best by staying within the boundaries of a particular discipline. Chapter Eight recognizes that it is hard for students to think straight if their emotions are in turmoil. Nearly all stu-

dents will, sooner or later, feel the need to seek advice and counsel from a teacher whose judgment they trust. The empathetic teacher, as counselor or mentor, is especially helpful to those in need of remedial support in matters of study and learning.

Evaluative judgments (Chapters Nine and Ten) are intrinsic to the academic enterprise and cannot be farmed out. The results of evaluation make a difference in the career progress of both students and teachers and therefore require considerable technical assistance to assure that procedures are valid. Quizzes have an important diagnostic and instructional function, and student ratings of a teacher offer significant data as a basis for self-improvement; in short, evaluations influence what and how well students learn and how well teachers do their job.

Chapter Eleven is teacher-oriented and identifies the support teachers receive (or should receive) from their institutions for improving the quality of instruction. For one thing, the distinctive strength of the individual teacher must be sustained—and by means other than exhortation or neglect. Providing information based on sound research and effective practices at other institutions is a primary contribution to be made by a center on teaching. Chapter Twelve concludes the book with a perspective about the diet for the self-sustaining professor. Self-esteem is basic and is nurtured from sources beyond salary increases and promotion.

I have drawn freely from the *Memo to the Faculty* series, which I wrote or edited at the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching at the University of Michigan. These seventy-one newsletter-type analyses covered and re-covered many topics directly related to college teaching, and this book is essentially an integration and extension of the various themes first stated in the *Memos*. I have tried to use language appropriate for the faculty as a whole, and this means, among other things, that I have had to be rather sparse in my use of illustrative examples taken from any one department.

The epigraphs for each chapter are a mixture of statements from classic writers and contemporary college teachers; they are offered as stimulating observations related to the substance within the chapters.

Having been a college teacher for more than forty years, I find it difficult to credit the source of ideas expressed in the pages that follow. I acknowledge my debt to my associates at the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching and my colleagues on the Panel on Research and Development of Instructional Resources within the Committee on Institutional Cooperation of the Big Ten universities. My peers in the Department of Psychology at Ann Arbor have consistently supported and encouraged my efforts to filter out the instructional implications from the findings of our discipline.

These have been exciting and rewarding years, and I treasure the memories of my work with students and my fellowship with teachers. For the past twenty-two years, my professional specialty has been to transform basic research and theory in psychology into support of college teachers. At times, professors can indeed be difficult, but I doubt if anyone has more respect and affection for college teachers than do I. For many years they have been the source for raising (and lowering) my self-esteem. They are a marvelous group of intelligent people who examine the meaning of accumulated knowledge and implement a set of enduring values for the benefit of the next generation of citizens. In the service of a democratic society, the contribution that teachers make stands alone at the top of the line.

Ann Arbor, Michigan
August 1984

Stanford C. Ericksen

The Author



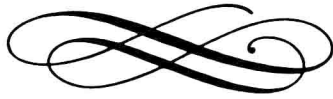
Stanford C. Ericksen is professor emeritus of psychology at the University of Michigan. In 1962 he was the founding director of that institution's Center for Research on Learning and Teaching. He joined the Michigan faculty after fourteen years of being head of the Department of Psychology at Vanderbilt University. His A.B. degree (1933) and M.A. degree (1934) were from the University of Utah and his Ph.D. degree (1938) from the University of Chicago; all three degrees were in psychology.

Ericksen's career-long research interest is in human learning and thinking and, for the past quarter century, in using these findings to support college teaching. His twenty-year *Memo to the Faculty* series reflects this purpose, as do such other publications as *Development and Experiment in College Teaching* (an annual, 1964-1981, compilation of instructional activities in the Big Ten universities), *Instruction: Some Contemporary Viewpoints* (with others, 1967), *Effective College Teaching* (with others, 1970), *Motivation for Learning: A Guide*

for the Teacher of the Young Adult (1974), and *Support for Teaching at Major Universities* (1979).

Ericksen was director of National Project III (Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education) and wrote or edited its sequence of eight reports: *Criteria—For the Evaluation, Support, and Recognition of College Teachers* (1975–1978).

The Essence of Good Teaching



*Helping Students
Learn and Remember
What They Learn*

Contents



Preface	ix
The Author	xvii
1. The Lasting Measure of Good Teaching	1
2. Decisions About Course Content	13
3. Options for Presenting Information	27
4. Generating Enthusiasm to Learn	41
5. Remembering Follows Understanding	53
6. Guiding Students to Comprehend Concepts	69
7. Teaching Students to Think Independently	83

8. Teacher as Counselor and Mentor	97
9. Assessing the Achievement of Each Student	111
10. Evaluating the Quality of Instruction	127
11. Institutional Support for Better Teaching	141
12. Sustaining Good Teaching over Time	153
References	167
Index	175

CHAPTER ONE

The Lasting Measure of Good Teaching



Then let us not leave the meaning of education ambiguous or ill-defined. . . . For we are not speaking of education in this narrower sense, but of that other education in virtue from youth upwards, which makes a man eagerly pursue the ideal perfection of citizenship, and teaches him how rightly to rule and to obey. . . . that other sort of training, which aims at the acquisition of wealth or bodily strength, or mere cleverness, apart from intelligence and justice, is mean and illiberal, and it is not worthy to be called education at all.

—Plato, *The Laws*

By precept and example, good teachers give voice to knowledge and beliefs linking the past to the present and to the future. This prophetic touch requires knowing the subject matter and having the courage to express judgments about values. Thus, teachers, as do scholars and researchers, exercise the academic traditions of open inquiry and exploration of the diversity of

values. An analysis of good teaching, therefore, involves considerably more than detailing the instructional techniques of telling things to students.

Many yardsticks are needed to measure competence because people observe different aspects of teaching in different settings and for different purposes. Further, all manner of instructional variations are called for by the nature of the subject matter, the characteristics of students, institutional expectations, and the teacher's own habits and predispositions. This chapter reviews some of the different ways teaching is judged, but gives emphasis to the kind of instruction designed to have a long-term impact on students. A leading educational researcher (Bloom, 1982, pp. 12-13) reflected a similar emphasis as he projected the future of his specialty: "My wish is for us to reduce our efforts devoted to predicting and classifying humans and for us to make more central in our research the variables, processes, and concepts that can make a vast difference in the teaching and learning of students. While much has already been done, these ideas are still at a very primitive stage."

The Many Measures of Teaching

Nearly everyone holds opinions about what is or is not "good" teaching and, given this reality, criterion standards that ensure fair play—to the institution, the teacher, and the students—are difficult to come by. In any instance, measurement requires a reference standard for defining a scale of judgments about "good," "better," or "best." Group results of student ratings of teachers, for example, are usually reported against statistical norms, but assessments by peers and administrators are interpreted against qualitative reference points that may or may not be useful as guides for improving specific skills of teaching.

Remote Measures of Teaching. Institutional language about teaching is usually couched in global terms. Janet Lawrence (1982) made this clear in her content analysis of the citations and the supporting documents offered by administrators, faculty, and students about nominees for one of the more prestigious teaching awards at a large university. She concluded, "If