



**THE SEVEN LAWS
OF TEACHING**





THE SEVEN LAWS OF TEACHING

by

JOHN MILTON GREGORY



*Reprinted from the first edition text (1886), unabridged,
by Canon Press*

with a new foreword,

**THE SEVEN DISCIPLINES
OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEACHERS,**

by

DOUGLAS WILSON

and study questions and evaluation tools

by

DR. LARRY STEPHENSON

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“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it.” ~ Bible.

*“Why is it that we, the elder, are spared to the world, except to train up and instruct the young? It is impossible that the gay little folks should guide and teach themselves, and accordingly God has committed to us who are old and experienced the knowledge which is needful for them, and he will require of us a strict account of what we have done with it.”
~ Martin Luther.*

“Faith in God is the source of peace in life; peace in life is the source of inward order; inward order is the source of the unerring application of our powers, and this again is the source of the growth of those powers, and of their training in wisdom; wisdom is the spring of all human blessings.” ~ Pestalozzi.

“If you follow nature, the education you give will succeed without giving you trouble and perplexity; especially if you do not insist upon acquirements precocious or over-extensive.” ~ Plato.

“It should not be claimed that there is no art or science of training up to virtue. Remember how absurd it would be to believe that even the most trifling employment has its rules and methods, and at the same time, that the highest of all departments of human effort—virtue—can be mastered without instruction and practice!” ~ Cicero.



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FOREWORD



The Seven Disciplines of Highly Effective Teachers

In writing the Foreword to a classic like *The Seven Laws of Teaching*, it is tempting simply to say that “this work needs no introduction,” stretch that sentiment out to a few paragraphs, and call it good. This book *does* speak for itself, and nobody wants to be caught bringing coals to Newcastle. But putting words on a page simply to have done so would be an insult to a book like this.

What I thought to do instead is make some observations about highly effective teachers. This will obviously tie in with John Milton Gregory’s book, but at the same time it will not be a pedestrian attempt to anticipate him in the details—plainly, he should be studied and imitated on his own terms.

What I want to do here is highlight what I would consider to be seven characteristics of highly effective teachers, and I will give a tip of the hat to Gregory under my third point.

1. *A highly effective teacher will love God, love life, love the students, and love the subject he teaches.* Jesus taught us that when the process of education is complete, the student will have become like his master (Luke 6:40). Ineffective teaching occurs when no student wants that unfortunate result to happen to him. He does not want to become like *that* teacher, and

so avoids his courses, avoids personal interaction, and so on. When the scribes have settled into this pattern, they then must attract students by the power of the transcript, by an adroit use of credit hours, and by other means of institutional coercion.

But an effective teacher doesn't need to do this because an effective teacher is the kind of person the students want to become like. The driving force behind this impulse is always love. Love for God, love for life, love for the student, and love for the subject. If a teacher loves God, he will love the created order that was given by God. If he loves the created order, he will love all of it. He will not be fascinated by one narrow slice of life—such as the task of getting ungraded papers from this side of the desk to the other side of the desk, but now with red marks on them. He will have a life outside the classroom, a life he loves, and he will bring that love into the classroom, and he will love life there as well. When he does this he loves the students, for they are an assigned part of his life, lined up in rows.

Now say that his assigned subject is algebra. A teacher who loves the God of math, and who noticed with glee in the parking lot that the shadow of the flag pole could be used as an exercise for calculating the height of the pole, and who blows into the classroom excited to see the students *again* today, and who is about to overflow in their presence in an eruption of algebraic joy . . . what will such a teacher be? That is right—highly effective. Students who hate math will be rethinking their prejudices after the second week.

This is what true teaching is. Love the subject in the presence of students whom you also love, and do it because you love how God is so kind to us.

2. *A highly effective teacher will be knowledgeable.* Because love is not to be understood as emotional treacle, that love must *know* something. So developing our first point somewhat, an effective teacher will know something about God,

know something about life, know something about the students, and know something about the subject.

The first characteristic of an effective teacher is that he love. But we live in a time—inherited from that scoundrel Rousseau—where the definitions of love have been sabotaged. Rousseau pronounced himself the most loving man *ever*, and yet he abandoned five of his own children on the doorsteps of an orphanage. Dubbing yourself “loving” is about as effective as knighting yourself (“I pronounce myself ‘Sir Me’ . . .”), and makes about the same amount of sense.

Love is not a sentiment. Love acts. Love studies. Love gets into it. Love asks for details. Love works through difficulties, and answers tough questions. An effective teacher is not someone who skims over the surface of things. He wants to know more about all of this. He wants to know theology because he loves God. He wants to know life, because the school he teaches in is located in the middle of that life. He wants to know his students’ middle names, and where they want to go to college, because he regards them as people—and not as carbon-based-receptacles for his upcoming data dump. And he knows his subject because every time he teaches this lesson, *he* learns something new.

3. *A highly effective teacher will understand the profound differences between methods for teaching and principles of teaching.* What I am calling “principles” here, John Milton Gregory calls “laws.” *Methods* change. They come and go. In the ancient world, students would use wax tablets to take notes, and now they use another kind of tablet, one with microchips inside. Methods have to do with things like overhead projectors, chalk boards, white boards, notebook handouts, web sites, film strips, videos, and someone with an ancient Babylonian wagon to deliver the wet clay for the cuneiform tablets. But *principles* never change. This is why someone like Gregory could write a

[Excerpt from the foreword ends here.]



INTRODUCTION



Let us, like the Master, place a little child in our midst. Let us carefully observe this child that we may learn from it what education is; for education, in its broadest meaning, embraces all the steps and processes by which an infant is gradually transformed into a full grown and intelligent man. Let us take account of the child as it is. It has a complete human body, with eyes, hands, and feet—all the organs of sense, of action and of locomotion—and yet it lies helpless in its cradle. It laughs, cries, feels, and seems to perceive, remember, and will. It has all the faculties of the human being, but is without power to use them save in a merely animal way.

In what does this infant differ from a man? Simply in being a child. Its body and limbs are small, weak, and without voluntary use. Its feet cannot walk. Its hands have no skill. Its lips cannot speak. Its eyes see without perceiving; its ears hear without understanding. The universe into which it has come lies around it wholly unseen and unknown.

As we more carefully study all this, two chief facts become clear: First, this child is but a germ—it has not its destined growth. Second, it is ignorant—without acquired ideas.

On these two facts rest the two notions of education. (1) The development of powers. (2) The acquisition of knowledge. The first is an unfolding of the faculties of body and mind to full growth and strength; the second is the furnishing of the mind

with the knowledge of things—of the facts and truths known to the human intelligence.

Each of these two facts—the child’s immaturity and its ignorance—might serve as a basis for a science of education. The first would include a study of the faculties and powers of the human being, their order of development and their laws of growth and action. The second would involve a study of the various branches of knowledge and arts with their relations to the faculties by which they are discovered, developed, and perfected. Each of these sciences would necessarily draw into sight and involve the other; just as a study of powers involves a knowledge of their products, and as a study of effects includes a survey of causes.

Corresponding to these two forms of educational science, we find two branches of the art of education. The one is the art of *training*; the other the art of *teaching*. Training is the systematic development and cultivation of the powers of mind and body. Teaching is the systematic inculcation of knowledge.

As the child is immature in all its powers, it is the first business of education, as an art, to cultivate those powers, by giving to each power regular exercise in its own proper sphere, till, through exercise and growth, they come to their full strength and skill. This training may be physical, mental, or moral, according to the powers trained, or the field of their application.

As the child is ignorant, it is equally the business of education to communicate knowledge. This is properly the work of teaching. But as it is not expected that the child shall acquire at school all the knowledge he will need, nor that he will cease to learn when school instruction ceases. The first object of teaching is to communicate such knowledge as may be useful in gaining other knowledge, to stimulate in the pupil the love of learning, and to form in him the habits of independent study.

These two, the cultivation of the powers and the communication of knowledge, together make up the teacher’s work. All

[Excerpt from the Introduction ends here.]



CHAPTER I



The Laws of Teaching

Teaching has its natural laws as fixed as the laws of circling planets or of growing organisms. Teaching is a process in which definite forces are employed to produce definite effects, and these effects follow their causes as regularly and certainly as the day follows the sun. What the teacher does, he does through natural agencies working out their natural effects. Causation is as certain, if not always as clear, in the movements of mind as in the motions of matter. The mind has its laws of thought, feeling, and volition, and these laws are none the less fixed that they are spiritual rather than material.

To discover the laws of any process, whether mental or material, makes it possible to bring that process under the control of him who knows the law and can command the conditions. He who has learned the laws of the electric currents may send messages through the ocean, and he who has mastered the chemistry of the sunbeam may make it paint him portraits and landscapes. So he that masters the laws of teaching may send knowledge into the depths of the soul, and may impress upon the mind the images of immortal truth. He who would gain harvests must obey nature's laws for the growing corn, and he who would teach a child successfully must follow the laws of teaching, which are also laws of the mental nature. Nowhere, in the

world of mind or in the world of matter, can man produce any effects except as he employs the means on which those effects depend. He is powerless to command nature's forces except as, by design or by chance, he obeys nature's laws.

What Is Teaching?

Teaching, in its simplest sense, is the communication of knowledge. This knowledge may be a fact, a truth, a doctrine of religion, a precept of morals, a story of life, or the processes of an art. It may be taught by the use of words, by signs, by objects, by actions, or examples; and the teaching may have for its object instruction or impression—the training of mind, the increase of intelligence, the implantation of principles, or the formation of character; but whatever the substance, the mode, or the aim of the teaching, the act itself, fundamentally considered, is always substantially the same: it is a communication of knowledge. It is the painting in another's mind the mental picture in one's own—the shaping of a pupil's thought and understanding to the comprehension of some truth which the teacher knows and wishes to communicate. Further on we shall see that the word communication is used here, not in the sense of the transmission of a mental something from one person to another, but rather in the sense of helping another to reproduce the same knowledge, and thus to make it common to the two.

The Seven Factors

To discover the law of any phenomenon, we must subject that phenomenon to a scientific analysis and study its separate parts. If any complete act of teaching be so analyzed, it will be found to contain seven distinct elements or factors: two actors—a teacher and a learner; two mental factors—a common language or medium of communication, and a lesson or truth

to be communicated; and three functional acts or processes—that of the teacher, that of the learner, and a final or finishing process to test and fix the result.

These are essential parts of every full and complete act of teaching. Whether the lesson be a single fact told in three minutes or a lecture occupying as many hours, the seven factors are all there, if the work is entire. None of them can be omitted, and no other need be added. No full account of the philosophy of teaching can be given which does not include them all, and if there is any true science of teaching, it must lie in the laws and relations of these seven elements and facts. No true or successful art of teaching can be found or contrived which is not based upon these factors and their laws.

To discover their laws, let these seven factors be passed again in careful review and enumeration, as follows: (1) a teacher; (2) a learner; (3) a common language or medium of communication; (4) a lesson or truth; (5) the teacher's work; (6) the learner's work; (7) the review work, which ascertains, perfects, and fastens the work done. Is it not obvious that each of these seven must have its own distinct characteristic, which makes it what it is? Each stands distinguished from the others, and from all others, by this essential characteristic, and each enters and plays its part in the scene by virtue of its own character and function. Each is a distinct entity or fact of nature. And as every fact of nature is the product and proof of some law of nature, so each element here described has its own great law of function or action, and these taken together constitute the Seven Laws of Teaching.

It may seem trivial to so insist upon all this. Some will say: "Of course there can be no teaching without a teacher and a pupil, without a language and a lesson, and without the teacher teaches and the learner learns; or, finally, without a proper review, if any assurance is to be gained that the work has been successful and the result is to be made permanent. All this is

too obvious to need assertion.” So also is it obvious that when seeds, soil, heat, light, and moisture come together in proper measure, plants are produced and grow to the harvest; but the simplicity of these common facts does not prevent their hiding among them some of the profoundest and most mysterious laws of nature. So, too, a simple act of teaching hides within it some of the most potent and significant laws of mental life and action.

The Laws Stated

These laws are not obscure and hard to reach. They are so simple and natural that they suggest themselves almost spontaneously to anyone who carefully notes the facts. They lie embedded in the simplest description that can be given of the seven elements named, as in the following:

1. A *teacher* must be one who KNOWS the lesson or truth to be taught.
2. A *learner* is one who ATTENDS with interest to the lesson given.
3. The *language* used as a MEDIUM between teacher and learner must be COMMON to both.
4. The *lesson* to be learned must be explicable in the terms of truth already known by the learner—the UNKNOWN must be explained by the KNOWN.
5. *Teaching* is AROUSING and using the *pupil's mind* to form in it a desired conception or thought.
6. *Learning* is THINKING into one's own UNDERSTANDING a new idea or truth.
7. The *test and proof* of teaching done—the finishing and fastening process—must be a RE-VIEWING, RE-THINKING, RE-KNOWING, and RE-PRODUCING of the knowledge taught.

The Laws Stated as Rules

These definitions and statements are so simple and obvious as to need no argument or proof; but their force as fundamental laws may be more clearly seen if stated as rules for teaching. Addressed to the teacher, they may read as follows:

- I. Know thoroughly and familiarly the lesson you wish to teach; or, in other words, teach from a full mind and a clear understanding.
- II. Gain and keep the attention and interest of the pupils upon the lesson. Refuse to teach without attention.
- III. Use words understood by both teacher and pupil in the same sense—language clear and vivid alike to both.
- IV. Begin with what is already well known to the pupil in the lesson or upon the subject, and proceed to the unknown by single, easy, and natural steps, letting the known explain the unknown.
- V. Use the pupil's own mind, exciting his self-activities. Keep his thoughts as much as possible ahead of your expression, making him a discoverer of truth.
- VI. Require the pupil to reproduce in thought the lesson he is learning—thinking it out in its parts, proofs, connections, and applications till he can express it in his own language.
- VII. Review, *review*, *review*, reproducing correctly the old, deepening its impression with new thought, correcting false views, and completing the true.

Essentials of Successful Teaching

These rules, and the laws which they outline and presuppose, underlie and govern all successful teaching. If taken in their broadest meaning, nothing need be added to them; nothing can be safely taken away. No one who will thoroughly master and use them need fail as a teacher, provided he will also maintain the good order which is necessary to give them free and undisturbed action. Disorder, noise, and confusion may hinder and prevent the results desired, just as the constant disturbance of some chemical elements forbids the formation of the compounds which the laws of chemistry would otherwise produce. Good order is a condition precedent to good teaching.

Like all the great laws of nature, these laws of teaching will seem at first simple facts, so obvious as scarcely to require such formal statement, and so plain that no explanation can make clearer their meaning. But, like all fundamental truths, their simplicity is more apparent than real. Each law varies in applications and effects with varying minds and persons, though remaining constant in itself; and each stands related to other laws and facts, in long and wide successions, till it reaches the outermost limits of the science of teaching. Indeed, in a careful study of the seven laws, to which we shall proceed in coming chapters, the discussion will reach every valuable principle in education, and every practical rule which can be of use in the teacher's work.

They cover all teaching of all subjects and in all grades, since they are the fundamental conditions on which ideas may be made to pass from one mind to another, or on which the unknown can become known. They are as valid and useful for the college professor as for the master of a common school; for the teaching of a Bible truth as for instruction in arithmetic. In proportion as the truth to be communicated is high and difficult to be understood, or as the pupils to be instructed are young and ignorant, ought they to be carefully followed.

Doubtless there are many successful teachers who never heard of these laws, and who do not consciously follow them; just as there are people who walk safely without any theoretical knowledge of gravitation, and talk intelligibly without studying grammar. Like the musician who plays by ear, and without knowledge of notes, these “natural teachers,” as they are called, have learned the laws of teaching from practice, and obey them from habit. It is none the less true that their success comes from obeying law, and not in spite of laws. They catch by intuition the secret of success, and do by a sort of instinct what others do by rule and reflection. A careful study of their methods would show how closely they follow these principles; and if there is any exception it is in the cases in which their wonderful practical mastery of some of the rules—usually the first three—allows them to give slighter heed to the others. To those who do not belong to this class of “natural teachers,” the knowledge of these laws is of vital necessity.

Skill and Enthusiasm

Let no one fear that a study of the laws of teaching will tend to substitute a cold, mechanical sort of work for the warm-hearted, enthusiastic teaching so often admired and praised. True skill kindles and keeps alive enthusiasm by giving it success where it would otherwise be discouraged by defeat. The true worker’s love for his work grows with his ability to do it well. Even enthusiasm will accomplish more when guided by intelligence and armed with skill, while the many who lack the rare gift of an enthusiastic nature must work by rule and skill or fail altogether.

Unreflecting superintendents and school boards often prefer enthusiastic teachers to those who are simply well educated or experienced. They count, not untruly, that enthusiasm will accomplish more with poor learning and little skill than the best trained and most erudite teacher who has no heart in

his work, and who goes through his task without zeal for progress and without care for results. But why choose either the ignorant enthusiast or the educated sluggard? Enthusiasm is not confined to the unskilled and the ignorant, nor are all calm, cool men idlers. Conscience and the strong sense of right and duty often exist where the glow of enthusiasm is unknown or has passed away. And there is an enthusiasm born of skill—a joy in doing what one can do well—that is far more effective, where art is involved, than the enthusiasm born of vivid feeling. The steady advance of veterans is far more powerful than the mad rush of raw recruits. The world's best work, in the schools as in the shops, is done by the calm, steady, persistent efforts of skilled workmen who know how to keep their tools sharp, and to make every effort reach its mark. No teacher perhaps ever excelled Pestalozzi in enthusiasm, and few have ever personally done poorer work.

But the most serious objection to systematic teaching, based on the laws of teaching, comes from Sunday school men, pastors and others, who assume that the principal aim of the Sunday school is to impress and convert rather than to instruct; and that skillful teaching, if desirable at all, is much less important than warm appeals to the feelings and earnest exhortations to the conscience. No one denies the value of such appeals and exhortations, nor the duty of teachers, in both day schools and Sunday schools, to make them on all fit opportunities. But what is to be the basis of the Sunday teacher's appeals, if not the truths of Scripture? What religious exhortation will come home with such abiding power as that which enters the mind with some clear Bible truth, some unmistakable "Thus saith the Lord," in its front? What preacher wins more souls than Moody with his open Bible ever in hand? What better rule for teacher or pupil than the Master's "Search the Scriptures"? What finer example than that of

Paul who “reasoned” with both prejudiced Jews and caviling Greeks “out of the Scriptures”? If the choice must be between the warm-hearted teacher who simply gushes appeals, and the coldhearted who stifles all feeling by his icy indifference, give me the former by all odds; but why either? Is there no healthful mean between steam and ice for the water of life? Will the teacher whose own mind glows with the splendid light of divine truths, and who skillfully leads his pupils to a clear vision of the same truths, fail in inspirational power? Is not the divine truth itself—the very Word of God—to be credited with any power to arouse the conscience and convert the soul?

These questions may be left to call forth their own inevitable answers. They will have met their full purpose if they repel this disposition to discredit the need of true teaching-work, in Sunday schools as well as in common schools; and if they convince Sunday school leaders that the great natural laws of teaching are God’s own laws of mind, which must be followed as faithfully in learning his Word as in studying his works.

A Word to Teachers

Leaving to other chapters the full discussion of the meaning and philosophy of these seven laws, we only add here the exhortation to the teacher, and especially to the Sunday school teacher, to give them the most serious attention. Sitting before your class of veiled immortals, how often have you craved the power to look into the depths of those young souls, and to plant there with sure hand some truth of science or some grand and life-giving belief of the gospel? How often have you tried your utmost, by all the methods you could devise, to direct their minds to the deep truths and facts of the Bible lesson, and turned away, almost in despair, to find how powerless you were to command the mental movement and to secure the spiritual result? No key will ever open to you the doors of those chambers in which live

your pupils' souls; no glass will ever enable you to penetrate their mysterious gloom. But in the great laws of your common nature lie the electric lines by which you may send into each little mind the thought fresh from your own, and awaken the young heart to receive and embrace it. He who made us all of kindred nature settled the spiritual laws by which our minds must communicate, and made possible that art of arts which passes thought and truth from soul to soul.

Remark. In the discussion of these laws there will necessarily occur some seeming repetitions. They are like seven hill-tops of different height scattered over a common territory. As we climb each in succession, many points in the landscapes seen from their summits will be found included in different views, but it will be always in a new light and with a fresh horizon. The truth that is common to two or more of these laws will be found a mere repetition. New groupings will show new relations and bring to light for the careful student new aspects and uses. The repetitions themselves will not be useless, as they will serve to emphasize the most important features of the art of teaching, and will impress upon the younger teachers those principles which demand the most frequent attention.

CHAPTER I STUDY QUESTIONS

Answers in Appendix D

1. How old was John Gregory when he started teaching?
2. In 1852 he became _____ of a _____ school in Detroit, Michigan.
3. In 1858 he was elected _____ of Public Instruction.
4. In 1864 he was chosen as the _____ of _____ college.
5. In 1867 he was chosen as the _____ at the University of _____ and was _____ on campus.
6. We can only train by _____, and we teach best when we _____ best.
7. The objective of *The Seven Laws of Teaching* is to set forth, in a certain _____ order the principles of the _____ of _____.
8. Good _____ is a condition precedent to good _____.
9. The world's best work, in the schools as in the shops, is done by the _____, _____, persistent _____, of _____ workmen who know how to keep their tools sharp, and to make every _____ reach its _____.
10. The Factors are: a _____, a _____, a common _____ or medium of communication, a _____ or _____, the _____, the _____, the _____, the _____ work, which ascertains, perfects, and fastens the work done.

[Excerpt from The Seven Laws of Teaching ends here.]