

# Teach me!

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Every night I am faced with an overload of homework. I'm rarely sure how to complete each assignment, and for some I feel completely lost. In my academic experience, I have encountered many educators who attempt to hide their lack of experience or motivation behind claims that their homework assignments promote "learning by discovery" or "development of critical thinking." When teachers assign impossible homework, projects, and tests with these excuses I feel helpless and defeated.

Every day I hear my classmates complaining that their teacher "doesn't teach" and expects them to know what they have not been taught. To understand my point, you must understand my definition of "learning by discovery." Many people probably haven't heard of this concept with this title. However, regardless of what it might be called, all students have experienced it. Throughout my academic career, this concept has manifested itself in the form of activities that my teachers didn't explain, problems that they didn't give me a method to solve, and tests that required knowledge of terms and concepts that were never even mentioned in the course.

For example, in my chemistry class, we are assigned innumerable labs and activities that are confusing and difficult for me to complete. These activities have the potential to teach me. However, when they are not explained by my teacher I feel that I have learned nothing. I often leave classes feeling like I have gained no new knowledge because nothing was explained to me. After the "discoveries" have been made, the teacher should lead a debrief about the activity and explain its relevance. For the most part, this has not happened in my career.

Without any debrief or explanation, activities that claim to promote “learning by discovery” are virtually without meaning. I have found that I create false theories, methods, and concepts when I do not understand something. This gives some students an unfair advantage; they come into the class with helpful prior knowledge or simply get lucky. Other students, like me, seem to accommodate their “learning” to their expectations. They may disillusion themselves about what occurred in an activity or problem-solving situation so that they can understand it. When they do that, the activity or assignment has had a detrimental effect.

I feel that this is a major downfall of education. Teachers are so focused on this “learning by discovery” method and having students constantly thinking critically and introspectively that they are no longer educators. It could be argued that my standpoint on this issue is attributable to my learning style. Throughout my academic career I have found myself enjoying lectures more than interactive learning. My response to this opposition would be the fact that my learning style is a direct result of the misapplication of the “learning by discovery” method.

It is also highly probable that I prefer the lecture style of teaching because it results in greater personal success. I’m probably not even qualified to have an informed opinion about which learning style is my favorite, due to the fact that I haven’t been exposed to effective “interactive learning” or “learning by discovery.” Others might argue that this could be easily fixed if a student would simply confront their teacher and express their concerns. However, I think that this is a sensitive subject; a teacher would instantly get defensive and close themselves off to any suggestions as soon as the student

approached them about the situation. Personally, I don't want to create resentment between me and my teachers and I don't have time to confront every single one of them.

This problem is too great to be solved with the efforts of only one student. I do believe that this method can be successful. I completely understand the benefits of developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills. For example, I recognize that developing these skills can prepare students for the competitive career world and their adult life as a whole. However, my argument is that the average teacher's grasp on how to do this successfully has been growing weaker.

The way that my teachers are currently utilizing this method is causing an immense amount of stress for me and my classmates. In a school system that focuses heavily on perfect GPAs and perfect grades, the success of students is greatly hindered by the failures of their teachers. I think one of the most important things that educators must consider is how to promote healthy "learning by discovery." Somebody who disagrees with me would argue that teachers who utilize this method are executing their duties perfectly; that it is very important for students to be able to solve problems independently and think critically. I agree; critical thinking and independent problem-solving skills are important. However, as in everything, this method is most effective in moderation.

Teachers have to be able to recognize the necessary balance between letting their students figure things out for themselves and explaining what students have discovered. I imagine that the initial effort of teachers to

utilize this method was righteous and successful. Unfortunately, it seems to me that they have found that this teaching method lightens their load and places the blame for students' failures on the students. This irritates me. I have had to deal with educators who attempt to hide their lack of experience or motivation behind claims that their homework assignments promote "learning by discovery" or "development of critical thinking," and I believe that I will continue to encounter these types of educators.

Too often I have seen my friends and peers' self-esteem drastically reduced as a result of this terrible system. It is a teacher's duty to teach. If that concept is too much for one to handle, their teachers probably failed them as well.