



# Learning Lifeline

A LETTER ABOUT LEARNING FROM ESTHER WILKISON

For years, I have warned audiences about one of the greatest dangers I know of in the world of learning.

To address this danger, I have to ask—do you know any students who...

- can't find the answer unless the wording of the question matches the wording in the textbook or notes?
- panic if not given a study sheet that tells exactly what will be on the upcoming test?
- hate writing assignments because they require thinking, organizing thoughts, and communicating in complete original sentences—preferably with standard spelling, grammar, and punctuation?

If you answered yes to one or more, chances are good that you know what I call a *Surface Learner*. Also, Surface Learners tend to have good short-term memorization skills, confuse skimming with reading, and think cramming is a superpower.

Many Surface Learners earn good grades, which provide a sense of confidence that can leave them blindsided and floundering when they discover that real life does not come at them in multiple-choice questions. They often struggle with relationships and jobs that require them to listen to find what is important, develop deep understanding, and show initiative to apply what they learn. Surface Learners are not born—they are made by learning systems designed to produce a passive learner who has mastered the art of sitting still for whole days while absorbing data for the purpose of earning high marks.

Bright kids who love learning and don't sit still well are often crushed by surface-learning systems. Such kids are often highly curious and love learning that is not abstract and arbitrary, but that is based on creating real things and solving real problems.

Many schools and homeschools have no desire to intentionally perpetrate surface learning—yet, most are affected by administrators, teachers, parents, or learners who think education is supposed to look like cramming heads full of facts. Many fear that any change from the status quo would heap more work on teachers already crushed under an impossible load. Many believe they cannot affect change since they are not in charge. Many fear enrollment will decrease unless they attain school-wide high test scores which they assume can only be maintained by rejecting students who might score poorly while continuing to cram ever-larger doses of random data at their students. I assure you—there IS a better way.

The better way is our third and final Key Strategy for Bridging Learning Gaps:

## Teach for Deep Learning

If you google the term *Deep Learning* you will find information about Artificial Intelligence. In order to understand what I mean by Deep Learning, stay tuned for the next few issues of the *Learning Lifeline*. We will dive deep into methods that have the potential to forever change you and those you influence.



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**Feedback Please:** There are additional dangers for Surface Learners beyond what I mentioned here. I'd love to know what you've witnessed when it comes to how Surface Learners struggle in areas like higher learning, relationships with God/others, and transitioning into life beyond school.