

Week 4 Instructor Notes

Notes from the Field

I have observed over the years that we spend a lot of time talking about learning styles. We discuss modality strengths and the importance of teaching to those strengths in the classroom. Then, it seems to me, that once we get to the classroom those discussions are all but forgotten and we tend to teach predominantly the way we all learned! Feel free to correct me, but this has been **my** observation.

When I worked with student teachers, I would ask them which ones of their students were auditory learners? Which ones were visual and what about the tactile/kinesthetic? I know. We all respond with the question: "Are we not a little of all three?" Perhaps. I won't argue that point. The point is that I do want to know not only how my students learn but how I will address their learning styles in the classroom. We are required to teach them all.

My last four years as a sixth grade teacher, I taught in a room where I could sit up on the window sill, and look out over all the class. This may seem a bit strange to you, but I am short, and this was a great way for me to span the group as we learned together. I well remember at times I would be teaching, and I would get these frowns and kind of questioning looks on some of their faces. That was my prompt to get down, go to the board, and teach the visual students!

I made sure that all my sixth graders knew their learning modality strengths before they left my class. In fact, one of the first things we did in the fall was to drag out the old Swassing/Barbe Tool (that's all we had in the days when I began teaching—I am sure there is up-to-date computer software for that these days), blow off the dust off that box, and my students spent some time determining where they were on the continuum. Before they left me for junior high, I wanted them to understand how to make the transition between how their teachers taught and how they learned.

My point? When you become an administrator, remind your teachers that learning styles are not just terms memorize for tests. They need to be alive and well in every classroom if we are to meet the needs of every student.

Content Notes

If we think back to teachers we had where we felt we learned a lot, what were the characteristics of those teachers? Often, those teachers had high expectations, managed the classroom extremely well, and did not accept excuses.

Learning style or preference is "usually defined as cognitive, affective, and physiological traits that learners exhibit as they interact in the classroom environment" (Orlich, et al. p. 165). Students understand problems in different ways, and they tend to try to solve problems in different ways. Some researchers think of learning styles as being borderline between mental abilities and personality (p. 165). We have all heard of Howard Gardner and his Multiple Intelligences. Gardner believes that rather than being "gifted," we all have different gifts. Gardner has also said that we teach the verbal/linguistic and logical/mathematical intelligences to the exclusion of all the others. He may have a very good point!