

Learning Styles and Training

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Your trainees will be more successful if you match your training style to their learning styles.

What is a learning style?

Ellis (1985, 2001) described a learning style as the more or less consistent way in which a person perceives, conceptualizes, organizes and recalls information.

Where do learning styles come from?

Your trainees' learning styles will be influenced by their genetic make-up, their previous learning experiences, their culture and the society they live in.

Why should teachers know about learning styles?

Sue Davidoff and Owen van den Berg (1990) suggest four steps: *plan, teach / act, observe* and *reflect*. Here are some guidelines for each step.

Trainees learn better and more quickly if the training methods used match their preferred learning styles. As learning improves, so does self esteem. This has a further positive effect on learning.

Trainees who have become bored with learning may become interested once again.

The trainee-trainer relationship can improve because the trainee is more successful and is more interested in learning.

What types of learning styles are there?

There are many ways of looking at learning styles. Here are some of the classification systems that researchers have developed.

The four modalities

Bandler and Grinder (1979), specialists in Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), believe that trainees may prefer a visual (seeing), auditory (hearing), kinaesthetic (moving) or tactile (touching) way of learning.

Those who prefer a visual learning style

- look at the trainers' face intently.
- like looking at wall displays, books etc.
- often recognize words by sight.
- use lists to organize their thoughts.
- recall information by remembering how it was set out on a page.

Those who prefer an auditory learning style

- like the trainer to provide verbal instructions.
- like dialogues, discussions and plays.
- solve problems by talking about them.
- use rhythm and sound as memory aids.

Those who prefer a kinaesthetic learning style

- learn best when they are involved or active.
- find it difficult to sit still for long periods.
- use movement as a memory aid

Those who prefer a tactile way of learning

- use writing and drawing as memory aids.
- learn well in hands-on activities like projects and demonstrations.

Field-independent vs. Field-dependent

Field-independent trainees

- can easily separate important from a complex or confusing background.
- tend to rely on themselves and their own thought-system when solving problems.
- are not so skilled in interpersonal relationships.

Field-dependent trainees

- find it more difficult to see the parts in a complex whole.
- rely on others' ideas when solving problems and are good at interpersonal relationships.

Left-brain dominated vs. right-brain dominated

Trainees who are left-brain dominated

- are intellectual
- process information in a linear way
- tend to be objective
- prefer established, certain information
- rely on language in thinking and remembering

Those who are right-brain dominated

- are intuitive
- process information in a holistic way
- tend to be subjective
- prefer elusive, uncertain information
- rely on drawing and manipulating to help them think and learn

McCarthy's four learning styles

McCarthy (1980) described trainees as *innovative learners*, *analytic learners*, *common sense learners* or *dynamic learners*.

Innovative learners

- look for personal meaning while learning
- draw on their values while learning
- enjoy social interaction
- are cooperative
- want to make the world a better place

Analytic learners

- want to develop intellectually while learning
- draw on facts while learning

- are patient and reflective
- want to know "important things" and to add to the world's knowledge

Common sense learners

- want to find solutions
- value things if they are useful
- are kinaesthetic
- are practical and straightforward
- want to make things happen

Dynamic learners

- look for hidden possibilities
- judge things by gut reactions
- synthesize information from different sources
- are enthusiastic and adventurous

Matching training technique with different learning styles

The Four Modalities:

Visual

- Use many visuals in the classroom. For example, wall displays posters, realia, flash cards, graphic organizers etc.

Auditory

- Use audio tapes and videos, storytelling, songs, jazz chants, memorization and drills
- Allow learners to work in pairs and small groups regularly.

Kinaesthetic

- Use physical activities, competitions, board games, role plays etc.
- Intersperse activities which require trainees to sit quietly with activities that allow them to move around and be active

Tactile

- Use board and card games, demonstrations, projects, role plays etc.
- Use while-listening and reading activities. For example, ask trainees to fill in a table while listening to a talk, or to label a diagram while reading

Field-independent vs. field-dependent

Field-independent

- Let trainees work on some activities on their own

Field-dependent

- Let trainees work on some activities in pairs and small groups

Left-brain vs. right-brain dominated

Left-brain dominated

- Give verbal instructions and explanations

- Set some closed tasks to which trainees can discover the "right" answer

Right-brained dominated

- Write instructions as well as giving them verbally
- Demonstrate what you would like trainees to do
- Give trainees clear guidelines, a structure, for tasks
- Set some open-ended tasks for which there is no "right" answer
- Use realia and other things that trainees can manipulate while learning
- Sometimes allow trainees to respond by drawing

McCarthy's four learning styles

Innovative learners

- Use cooperative learning activities and activities in which trainees must make value judgments
- Ask trainees to discuss their opinions and beliefs

Analytic learners

- Teach trainees the facts

Common sense learners

- Use problem-solving activities

Dynamic learners

- Ask trainees about their feelings
- Use a variety of challenging activities

If you vary the activities that you use in your lessons, you are sure to cater for learners with different learning styles at least some of the time.

References

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