The Teacher and Thinking, Learning and Teaching Styles

Objectives

1. Identify and briefly explain the seven multiple intelligences based on Gardner's learning theory.

2. Identify and briefly explain the VARK learning styles.

3. Outline the connection between thinking, learning, and teaching styles.

4. Facilitate a variety of learning styles in the classroom.

5. Compare and contrast pedagogy, synergogy, andragogy, and enthopedagogy.

6. Demonstrate a balance in teaching strategies that provide mastery of content and integration of knowledge.

7. Characterize adult learners.

8. Indentify and state the purpose of Christian education.

9. Differentiate between high-context and low-context learners.

10. Uncover and examine how a teacher should be organized, caring, practical and creative.

Introduction

Finding a friend reflective, one often asks, "What are you thinking?" When it comes to learning, the question is rather, "How are you thinking?" Everybody thinks. Not all think in the same way.

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Learning Styles

Howard Gardner's learning theory of multiple intelligences assists Christian educators like Barbara Bruce (author of *Start Here: Teaching & Learning with Adults*) in developing teaching and learning strategies that minister accordingly.

Verbal/Linguistic	**Word Smart**	Learning through the written or spoken word. Like reading and writing.
Logical/Mathematical	**Number Smart**	Appreciate lessons with orderly, logical and practical facts and information.
Visual/Spatial	**Picture Smart**	Can learn best what he can see.
Musical	**Music Smart**	Appreciate background music and using music to explain teaching.
Body/Kinesthetic	**Body Smart**	Like to manipulate and move objects around.
Interpersonal	**People Smart**	Appreciate the social aspects of learning. Like to learn with someone else.
Intrapersonal	**Self Smart**	Appreciate having solitary time to process (Bruce 2000, 19-55).

VARK learning styles are divided as:

Visual	Learner interested in what he sees, swayed by how something looks, color and design. Likes instructors that use the blackboard and power point projectors. Such learners frequently say, "I see what you are saying."
Aural (Oral)	"Hear" an understanding of the subject. Prefers to have things explained to him. The written word is not as valuable as what he hears. Oral learners

	often say, "I hear what you are saying."
Read/Write	Learner likes to read words and lists. Talk is okay. A handout is considered better.
Kinesthetic	Learner prefers hands-on approach, the opportunity for trial and error.
Multimodal	Combination of any of the above; multiple preferences. (Vark: A Guide to Learning Styles 2001-2007).

> Thus to describe a culturally preferred learning style is not to prescribe a good teaching style. How culture affects thinking is crucial, but does not determine how one ought to teach. Good teaching methods will tie together the strengths of each thinking style. (Plueddemann 1991, 7)

Teaching strategies should take into account the preferred thinking style of the students. Learning styles can be both accommodated and developed. A thinking style preference leads to a learning style preference. Learning takes best when the whole brain is engaged in the process. In every classroom one finds a full spectrum of learning styles (De Boer 2003, 1-5).

It is not enough to know what to teach; one's subject matter. A teacher must also know those he teaches. Howard Hendricks offers perceptive advice in a chapter entitled "The Law of Education":

> The way people learn determines how you teach….it involves stimulating and directing the learner's self-activities…and tell the learner nothing—and do nothing for him—that he can learn or do for himself….Goal number one: Teach people how to think….A second goal: teach people how to learn…. (Hendricks 1987, 37, 41, 43)

Learning styles denote preferred ways of learning. Teachers teach the way they learned. Overall, learners do not learn in the same manner as their teachers. It is best to design instruction to accommodate a variety of learning styles. Instructors tend to teach according to their learning style or how they were taught. Teaching styles are usually the outcome of a person's learning style. Teaching styles can be learned. Someone has said, "We teach what we know. We reproduce what we are." Similarly, one is inclined to teach using strategies he prefers in his own learning and thinking. Teachers in adult education should endeavor to be learner-centered rather than teacher-centered.

Teaching Styles

The following table highlights different avenues of teaching. Each has the same goal in mind; developing the student's maximum potential, and selects a different path to achieving this, that is best suited for a particular audience.

Pedagogy	Standard classroom model that presents knowledge in an orderly manner. Pedagogy is subject-centered and content-driven. It comes from the Greek word *paid* where we get "pediatrics." *Agogus* refers to "leader of." So, pedagogy is the art of teaching children (Knowles et al. 2005, 36, 61).	Teacher is expert and is teacher-oriented.	Student opens head. Teacher drops in teaching.
Andragogy	Adults teaching other adults. Andragogy is life-centered. Andragogy and synergogy are needs-driven curriculum. Andragogy aims at change in adults. It is the art of helping adults learn.	Teacher is facilitator	Is student participation-oriented. The learner has greater involvement in directing learning.
Synergogy	From two Greek words which imply working together. It derives the best from both worlds above.	Teacher is integrator and interacts.	Student works together with teacher for maximum results (Hill 1997, 1-2).
Ethnopedagogy	Cross-cultural teaching model.	Teacher is able to teach in different cultural settings.	Student is a cross-cultural learner. Students anywhere in the world usually exhibit similar thought patterns (Plueddemann 1997, 1).

Which one is correct? Which makes the best teacher? Bible colleges usually employ pedagogical principles as reflected in typical curriculum development design and instructional delivery. According to David Martz, this helps adult learners gain new content and competencies and serves well at the

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introductory level when and where they lack experience. It provides the foundation for critical thinking and self-directed learning. The next logical step is andragogical (adult teaching) techniques where focus moves from indoctrination (mastery of content) to integration of knowledge. This is where critical thinking emerges center stage. We move beyond indoctrination or "what to believe" to critical thinking "why we believe." A combination of pedagogical and andragogical principles work well at the Bible college level, and are greatly enhanced by instructors sensitive to the cross-cultural environment.

Andagogy

Christian education for adults is best designed to assist learners to grow and mature, and excels best in a community. "Community shapes the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of individuals." It promotes a Christian worldview. This does not mean that everyone has to "think alike, look alike, or agree on all issues…diversity and even disagreement can enrich and strengthen learning as we search together to follow Jesus Christ" (Blair 1997, 13). Adults possess untapped resources of human potential. They have a wealth of knowledge and experience, that when shared, strengthens education development. Knowles indicated that life is also an education. Experience is important. We learn what we do and when we keep doing and thinking together. Adults learn well from each other. Experience is the adult learner's living textbook. Adult learning places much emphasis on tapping into experience of learners, using experiential techniques (Pg. 37, Adult Learner). Teaching should be proactive, influencing students toward discovery learning. People learn best when they perceive they can use content in real life, and adults prefer to be able to apply learning to life situations in the here and now. They need tools. Adults tend to be self-directed and respond best to needs-based learning

One can quickly tell the philosophy of the Bible school or instructor by a quick look at the classrooms. A desk or podium at the front, with desks neatly aligned in rows and columns presume the teacher is the instructor, director, "fish-feeder," and expert. This may create emotional distance and suggest knowledge as:

> An eternal commodity to be digested like lunch. And 'learning' is little more than conforming to teacher's expectations. It is the instructor…who is the center of attention. The unspoken assumption in formal classroom settings…is that the students are ignorant 'open receptacles' eagerly waiting…for the daily feeding. (Shaw 2006, 3-4)

Bible school education is much more than the transmission of content. It is for the transformation of lives. In theological education in Africa, and in much of the developing world, many are inclined to be people or relationship, global, high-context learners (pay close attention to the concrete world) rather than being task or low context-oriented (pay more attention to words, abstract concepts, analyzing, and integrating ideas). However, both types of learners are found anywhere, Africa included, so a culture cannot be stereotyped one way or the other, but in every culture people tend toward one or the other. "Some mistakenly assume that all non-western people are global learners and all westerners are analytical. That is not the case because a learning style is an individual

circumstance not a cultural one" (Lingenfelter and Lingenfelter, 2003, 61). A close analysis of the teaching style of the Master Teacher, Jesus Christ, shows He had the perfect blend. He motivated students to be relational and analytical. Our Bible schools are generally geared for the low-context learner. They emphasize course schedules, content, and sticking close to the syllabus. Incorporating a teaching model that integrates the strengths of both types of learners is preferred and provides balance (Plueddemann 1991, 1-8).

Please note: For a more detailed and excellent discussion on cross-cultural teaching/learning styles: http://www.abwe.org/pdf/culture_teaching_and_learning.pdf.

Much of the world, 70 percent of all people, totaling in access of four billion, are oral communicators. An interesting article in *Mission Frontier* entitled "Learning: God Reveals Himself through the Way People Learn" illustrates this idea. How true! "They generally conclude that the written Scriptures are best for peoples who are used to reading and writing; and the word in story form is best for oral cultures." This does not imply or suggest that Bible school instructors should toss aside giving reading or writing assignments. However, alternative methods of teaching oral learners should also be implemented (2008, 9).

> Making disciples of oral learners means using communication forms that are familiar within the culture: stories, proverbs, drama, songs, chants and poetry. Literate approaches rely on lists, outlines, word studies, apologetics and theological jargon. These literate methods are largely ineffective among two-thirds of the world's peoples. Of necessity, making disciples of oral learners depends on communicating God's Word with varied cultures in relevant ways. Only then will the gospel be able to reach to "the uttermost parts of the earth." (Executive Summary 2006)

The three major approaches to teaching strategies are teacher-oriented, student participation oriented, and material oriented (Lackey 1996, 6). Merging these three approaches is desirable. As students advance from the introductory or first year of Bible school the approach should move from teacher-oriented to more student participation. Student abilities affect the selection of the teaching style utilized.

A teacher should be:

Organized	Organizes content and delivery.
Caring	Is concerned for students. It has often been said, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."
Practical	Practical in solving real-life problems. Brings genuine experience into the classroom. A Bible

	school teacher with knowledge and field experience is preferable.
Creative	Excites and encourages learners (Cranton 2001).

Our desire is to pass the truth to the next generation, developing others for effective apostolic ministry, equipping them for lifelong learning, to reach their maximum potential, and helping them fulfill God's call, will, and vision for their lives.

> To educate the whole person, to encourage disciplined learning, and the quest for excellence is a sacred trust….The educator's task is to inspire and equip individuals to think and act for themselves in the dignity of persons created in God's image. (Holmes, 1979/1999, 16)

Lesson in Review

1.   How does an oral learner best learn?_____
_____
_____

2.   It is best to teach directed at a culturally preferred learning style. Do you agree with this statement? Explain._____
_____
_____
_____
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3.   How many learning styles are usually found in every classroom?_____
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_____

4.   "Teachers teach the way they learned." Explain._____
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5.   What is pedagogy?_____
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6.   What is andragogy?_____
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7.   Why is synergogy a good avenue or style/way of learning and teaching?_____
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8.   "Students anywhere in the world exhibit similar thought patterns." Explain._____
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9.   What is the difference between indoctrination and critical thinking?_____
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10.   Comment on the benefits of community, experience and needs-based learning to the adult
learner._____
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11.   The classroom is set up with desks and chairs arranged in a "U" shape. What does this tell you
about the manner of teaching?_____
_____

12.   The classroom has a podium or a larger desk at the front, with desks neatly aligned in rows.
What way of teaching does this denote?_____
_____

13.   The classroom is set up with one large table; chairs distributed around it. What way of teaching
does this denote?_____
_____

14.   What is the difference between low-context and high-context learners?_____

_____
_____
_____

15. What teaching style did Jesus use?_____

16. Which style or way of teaching is best for introductory level Bible school classes?_____
_____

17. Which style or way of teaching is best for more advanced Bible school classes?_____
_____

18. Name or list four characteristics of teachers contained in this lesson._____
_____
_____
_____

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