

COURSE # 9 UNDERSTANDING HOW CHILDREN LEARN: LEARNING STYLES (Presenter's Notes)

Announce a Bible quiz that includes figuring out a coded message, and you immediately have Eric's attention. But you've lost Jennifer, who shrinks down into her chair. However, if you ask for volunteers to act out the Bible story in pantomime, Jennifer can hardly contain herself!

Children differ in the way they learn. Understanding how children learn can help religious education teachers engage children in learning for spiritual growth. This is especially true for Sabbath School teachers who can impact children for eternity.

Learning Styles

Learning style is a person's preferred way to learn and deal with life and to process information. Your learning style can affect the way you solve problems, how you relate to other people, and the way you teach. Whether learning or teaching, you'll feel most comfortable using your preferred learning style. One of the benefits of knowing and using the various learning styles is that we are more able to reach ALL of God's children.

According to Barbara Manspeaker, Director of Children's Ministries of Potomac Conference, there is no such thing as a right or wrong learning style. It is really which style comes naturally to you.

4 Learning Styles

The GraceLink curriculum is based on McCarthy's 4MAT system of learning styles. The 4MAT system talks about four different types of learners: The **imaginative learner or innovative learner**, the **analytic learner**; the **commonsense learner**; and the **dynamic learner**.

1) Imaginative/Innovative Learners

This type of learner enjoys creative and innovative approaches to learning. These children look for meaning in their learning and so they often ask the question, "Why do I need to learn this?" You will need to provide reasons they should learn new material. The innovative learner thrives on relationships, enjoys working with others, and needs to be personally involved. Discussion, listening, and sharing ideas are important for them.

As the innovative learners spend lots of time in creative activities, role-plays, observations and imagination, these learners usually file away information instead of acting on it. They are also reluctant to make decisions and can be paralyzed by alternatives. Hence, they sometimes fail to recognize problems and opportunities.

In teaching innovative learners in your Sabbath School, respect their feelings, affirm them, and take them into your confidence. Let them know what they are supposed to do and assume they are going to follow through. Provide arts and crafts, creative writing and role plays.

2) Analytic Learners

The *analytic learner* is the second learning style in the 4 MAT system. These logical, abstract thinkers want to work with facts, ideas, and details. These are the kids who want to learn what the experts say. They like to study and investigate a topic. This group wants to organize what they learn and be able to prove their beliefs on the basis of Bible study. They would ask the question: “What do I need to learn?”

They like programmed instruction, well-organized lectures/stories, competition, and objective tests.

While analytic learners are good abstract thinkers, they can go to extreme too. They can be so involved in abstracting thinking that they don't really make good practical applications. It's all in the head and nothing applied to life.

In addition, analytic learners may read lots of books and spending hours studying up on a topic, but eventually never getting around doing it. Hence, lots of time is wasted.

In teaching these learners, the teacher needs to explain the reasons for their assignments and rules and give them an opportunity to explain their reasons for behavior that you might question. Back up your explanation with facts and quotes and rules. So in Sabbath School, provide them with research activities with Bible maps, concordances, etc. They are excited with puzzles and coded scriptural messages.

3) Commonsense Learners

The third type of learner in the 4MAT system is the *commonsense learner*. These children want to get to the point. They want to know what difference this information is going to make in their lives, how it will work for them, and how they can use it. Hence, the question they ask is: “How do I use the information?”

Commonsense learners need hands-on experience when learning something new and really want to use what they learn to apply to new situations. They like problem-solving, logic problems, independent study experiments, and drama/writing/planning problems to solve. But they dislike memorizing, reading assignments, group work.

Commonsense learners lack focus and so make hasty decisions or solve the wrong problems because they have scattered thought about the problems and have not tested the ideas or solutions.

Commonsense learners want to get right to the point, so don't give them a long history of the problem or assignment. They want to start everything on time and they appreciate knowing that they have your support. Allow them some latitude, some choice in

completing your assignment. Give them opportunity to participate in experiments and solving problems that apply the lesson to everyday life.

4) Dynamic Learners

The *dynamic learner*, the fourth learning style identified in the 4MAT system, learns through self-discovery. They want to see, hear, touch and feel. They want to produce results so they start right in to do a job to get it done. They often ask the question: “What if?”

Dynamic learners often use a trial-and-error approach in learning. They want action. Noting suits them better than to bring plans to reality. Hence, they take leadership, are good at explaining policies, and make great salespeople. They like case studies, producing creative products, dramatics and real life simulations.

Dynamic learners are the risk takers who may have to redo the job because they didn’t plan sufficiently before starting. They begin lots of projects but don’t seem to complete them on time. They make trivial improvements and get involved in meaningless activities. For them, planning is impractical and not always goal-oriented.

In teaching dynamic learners in Sabbath School, provide them lots of hands-on activities like making greeting cards, real life simulations, producing a drama, planning real-life events, and listing and organizing material. They are looking for a “what if” opportunity; What if I do it differently? What if I do something else? So be firm and speak with confidence and be businesslike. It is good to spell out the bottom line—what is the minimum requirement? Then offer contests/rewards as incentive to challenge them to do more.

Learning Styles—So What?

It is important to respect each child’s learning style and tailor your teaching to these styles so that children will be more interested in the studying the Bible and learning about Jesus and his plan of salvation. Learners will be happy if at least one activity per class presentation appeals to their learning style.

Finally, learning styles are not meant to predict behavior, attitudes or results. But they do tell us those learners

- 1) Learn in different ways
- 2) Have varying needs
- 3) Appreciate a choice of activities and approaches
- 4) Need practice using all styles of learning activities