

Learn the learning styles

A thorough understanding of natural learning styles and behaviors is a priceless benefit that enables Sabbath School teachers to demonstrate their concern for student individuality and integrity.

Change is modern life's most predictable aspect. The printed word is giving way to microfilm, computer memory banks, sound bites, and photoelectronic printouts. Telecommunications have ushered in a new era as dramatically as did Gutenberg's movable type five centuries ago. We live in an era of visual literacy that demands that anyone associated with education of any kind should reconsider the learning process.

Teachers can develop diverse adaptive methods to meet the various needs of children, teens, and adults. Understanding learning styles helps teachers realize and compensate for their own strengths and weaknesses. In diversity we find not differences that separate, but balance and wholeness—a reflection of the body of Christ.

In her book *About Learning*,* Dr. Bernice McCarthy says that we each have our own most comfortable way of learning, depending on two factors—how we *perceive* and how we *process*. If we perceive life primarily through concrete experience (sensing and feeling) we have a different learning style from those who learn primarily through abstract conceptualization (thinking). If we learn more by the process of doing (active experimentation), we differ from those who tend to learn by watching (reflective observation).

Perceiving and processing describe the whole range of the learning experience and form the basis for a natural learning cycle. Though it is true that all learners

engage in all learning types, most seem to favor one type as their more comfortable way of learning.

Dr. McCarthy explains the characteristics of people who prefer different places on the learning cycle as follows:

● **Imaginative learners** have an innate understanding of the atmosphere, mood, and feelings that surround them. They learn best by listening, sharing ideas, and being personally involved. They enjoy participation in small-group discussions, mimes, and role plays. They seek to understand “why” the learning is important.

● **Analytic learners** enjoy discovering abstract bits of information to put together into theories and ways for solving problems. They seek facts, want to know what the experts think, are thorough and industrious, and will reexamine the facts if situations perplex them. They need to learn something new in the lesson. The “what” in learning is what is important to them.

● **Commonsense learners** need to know how things work. Theirs is a bodily, kinesthetic, three-dimensional way of knowing. They learn best through direct, hands-on experiences. They are skills-oriented and like to experiment, tinker, and test theories in ways that seem sensible. They edit reality, cutting right to the heart of things. They need to see that what they are learning makes sense today.

● **Dynamic learners** are enthusiastic about new ideas and enjoy expanding on

what they have learned. They are adaptable, excel in situations called for flexibility, relish frequent change, and are willing to take risks. They look for creative ways to use what they have learned.

These four learning-style descriptions provide a way to understand the learning process. Effective Sabbath School teachers will follow this natural cycle:

1. Begin with the question “Why do I need this?” Just as the question “Why?” is fundamental to imaginative learners, the question “Why?” is really where learning begins for *all* learners, regardless of learning style.

2. This real-life connection now leads to the question “What does the Bible say about my need?”

3. Next, answer the question “How does this Bible teaching actually work?”

4. And finally, answer the question

“How will I use what I have learned?”

You will have taken your students around the cycle in learning styles.

Ellen White promoted balance in teaching. She wrote, “We cannot all have the same minds nor cherish the same ideas; but one is to be a benefit and blessing to the other, that where one lacks, another may supply what is requisite” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 128).

Sabbath School teachers are challenged and privileged to honor Sabbath School members in the unique ways God made them, instead of trying to recreate them the way we wish He had made them.

*Excel, Inc., 1996.

—W. Eugene Brewer