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“Said it,” “Showed it,” and “Do it” Learning Styles

The teacher repeated the instructions. Juanita seemed to be attentive. Whenever the teacher spoke, Juanita was very receptive and gazed intently at her. However, Juanita often didn't follow instructions. Frustrated, she would become quiet and withdrawn.

The teacher showed the children how to assemble the science kit. Art seemed to be attentive. Art was eager do the science project and his eyes darted over the components with excitement. However, Art had trouble following the instructions. Unsuccessful with putting it together, he would get “creative” and find ways to play with the parts, often distracting or antagonizing the other kids.

Juanita listened and watched as the teacher explained the process while showing her on the worksheet where the different answers went. Juanita could follow the instructions, because the auditory instructions when supplemented by visual cues made more sense to her. Juanita had a stronger visual learning style than auditory learning style.

As the teacher showed the children how to assemble the kit, she instructed everyone including Art to pick up the two pieces that fit together. It took him a couple of tries twisting the pieces this way and that, but he was able to put them together. Watching, listening, and doing it at the same time worked best for him. As a motor-kinesthetic learner, hands on strategies worked best for Art to learn new things.

Learning style theories assert that individuals can have stronger and weaker styles of learning. By identifying the learning style, instruction can be directed to it. The child will learn more efficiently and with more depth. Auditory, visual, and motor-kinesthetic learning are a way to look for strengths and weaknesses in a child's learning style. Teachers should examine their learning/teaching styles for effectiveness, rather than just blame children for academic failures. Children are not normally aware of their learning styles and not able to adapt when necessary. Failure and frustration for adults and children, lowered self-esteem, and acting out behavior may increase.

Children labeled as "hyper" are often motor-kinesthetic learners, using their senses, especially touching and moving about. Adults may value quiet attentiveness in a more visual and/or auditory style. Teachers as a group may be more visually oriented, and auditory oriented secondarily, missing connection to the motor kinesthetic learner. With misconnection and frustration, the child intensifies motor-kinesthetic behavior, becoming a classroom management problem. He/she becomes labeled as "immature" and/or "bad" and/or "hyper."

Some individuals have very distinct strengths in one style and very distinct weaknesses in the other two. Others are more balanced with relative strength in two or even all three learning styles, with a relative weakness in the remaining style or no weakness at all.



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Juanita and Art had teachers who “said it,” “showed it,” and let the kids “do it,” as a matter of consistent teaching style. They also adapted and emphasized a particular style with kids like Juanita and Art once they recognized their learning styles. Children didn’t get smarter or dumber from year to year, but may have had a match or mismatch between their learning styles and a teacher’s learning/teaching styles. Children who are frustrated academically often behaviorally act out. Thus academically and behaviorally, they have “good year” and “bad year” experiences. Juanita and Art can learn the material with such an adaptive teacher approach, but not learn to be adaptive by themselves. Children should be taught how to use and accentuate strengths and to minimize and compensate for weaknesses. Compensation for relative weaknesses in a learning style can come from using techniques that emphasize stronger learning styles, or by using techniques that increase the receptivity of the weaker style. For example, a person who is weaker in the auditory learning may be taught to use visual cues, including note taking eventually. A strong motor-kinesthetic learner should be encouraged verbalize while engaged in hands-on learning. Manipulatives would make mathematics concepts more tangible to the motor-kinesthetic learner.

Teachers help children successfully learn. Teachers can also help children to become successful learners. Adult understanding learning styles serves children becoming successful learners.

Auditory (listening) Strengths:

Spelling, Phonics, Vocabulary, Ten Verbal Excuses, Talks a lot, Reads out loud well.

Auditory (listening) Weaknesses:

Poor Reading, Poor Following Directions, Can't Hear Differences between sounds, Says "gizmo", "whosit", Poor comprehension.

Visual (seeing) Strengths:

Enjoys books w/ pictures, Recalls location of objects, Comments on clothing, Puzzles, Drawings, Notice/comment on visual detail.

Visual (seeing) Weaknesses:

Short attention for paper/pencil tasks, Poor printing, Poor visual memory, Poor spacing when writing, Skip words when reading aloud.

Motor Kinesthetic (movement, touch) Strengths:

Bear hugs, Thump buddies on back, Loves climbing, Touch everything, Makes airplanes & fans from paper, Loves clay, sandbox.

Motor Kinesthetic (movement, touch) Weaknesses:

Illegible handwriting, Dislikes drawing, Awkward, clumsy, Poor speech, Lacks interests other than TV, Exhibit body tension.



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Biography

Ronald Mah, therapist and educator, combines concepts, principles, and philosophy with practical techniques and guidelines for effective and productive results. He uses humor and stories from his many experiences to illustrate important points in a stimulating and highly motivating and engaging style.

A Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist, his experiences include: Asian-American community mental health, Severely Emotionally Disturbed mental health & school partnership programs, vocational programs for at risk youth, welfare to work programs, clinical consulting & cross and multi-cultural training for Head Start, other early childhood education programs, social services organizations, & mental health agencies, supervising a high school mental health clinic, training and supervising therapists, private practice in Castro Valley, author of the Asian Pacific Islander Parent Education Support curriculum.

Professional Education experiences include: 16 years in ECE, including owning and running a child development center for 11 years, Kindergarten, elementary, & secondary teaching credentials and experience, ethnic studies curriculum writer, community college instructor, Masters of Psychology instructor, and former member Board of Directors of the California Kindergarten Association and of the California Association of Marriage & Family Therapists.