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The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month
by Kathy Pickett



Christian education: Engaging different learning styles

For me, sitting through a 45-minute lecture without an opportunity to respond in a learning environment is torture. Even worse is the expectation that I will sit still and pay attention without taking notes or doodling. I know for some learners a lecture meets their preferred learning style. However, in today's over-stimulated world even those who are verbal learners may become uninterested without additional learning tools and methods available.

Christian educators are tasked with encouraging and nurturing learners toward a greater understanding, knowledge and experience of God. Therefore, we must plan and implement a variety of ways to engage a diversity of learning styles.

There are many ways to approach this task, and Barbara Bruce, writing in several books, including *Start Here: Teaching and Learning with Adults* (Discipleship Resources, 2000), focuses on Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences to help Christian educators develop teaching and learning techniques with a broad level of appeal. They are, briefly:

Verbal/linguistic learners enjoy words in prose and poetic forms, stories, word games and puzzles, and definitions.

Logical/mathematical learners like lessons to be orderly and practical with facts, information, details, and logical relationship between ideas. They appreciate timelines, forced-choice activities, problem-solving games and case studies.

Visual/spatial learners can do what they can see. Patterns, shapes and colors are part of their thinking. They like to draw, use graphics, videos, pictures, maps and other visualizing activities such as guided imagery.

Musical learners employ sounds, rhythms, tones and melodies to help recall other informa-

tion and to convey meaning. They appreciate background music during a lesson, use lyrics to explain or illustrate a biblical text, memorize a passage or other information using a familiar song tune, and relate to experiences of God evoked through music.

Bodily/kinesthetic learners like to manipulate objects and to move around, even if it is just to stretch. They are not always good sitters, preferring activities such as role playing, dancing, relays and sculpting.

Interpersonal learners appreciate the social aspect of learning. They may be more aware of the personal and social dimensions of a Bible story or theological construct or dilemma. It's not just a puzzle or a problem to be solved, but something that has an effect on a real person.

Intrapersonal learners appreciate having solitary time to process what they take in. They prefer "reading the directions" without a lot of group interference or process or instruction. Self-knowledge is a key tool to making decisions.

Resources

- Bruce, Barbara. *Our Spiritual Brain: Integrating Brain Research and Faith Development*. Abingdon Press, 2002.
- Hynson, et al. *The Ministry of Christian Education and Formation: A Practical Guide for Your Congregation*. Discipleship Resources: 2003.
- www.businessballs.com/freepdfmaterials/free_multiple_intelligences_test_young_people.pdf
- www.gbod.org/education/wetntk_teaching.html#ways
- www.helwys.com/learningmatters/lm_pages/adult_archives/adltarchv_saywhat.html
- www.nationalministries.org/discipleship/docs/DCE_Teaching_Does_Not_Equal_Talking.pdf
- www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/
- www.upperroom.org/bookstore/

How to engage learning styles

- Recognize yourself as a nurturer of learning rather than the authority.
- Seek to understand the personal learning styles represented in your group as well as your own.
- Practice a partnership style of teaching and learning, knowing you will learn something from the experience as well.
- Take time to step outside and experience God's learning environment. (What sights and colors do you see? What smells do you sense? What songs do you hear?) In your teaching plans include opportunities to understand, know and experience God in these ways.
- Have the group take a learning-style profile assessment and discuss together how best to meet the group's diverse needs.
- Together with your group create goals and rules for group learning-style success.
- Provide markers, pens and paper for note-taking.
- Hang visually interesting and relevant maps, posters and pictures in the room.
- Plan response time in your learning session; 20 minutes without group interaction is too long.
- Divide large groups into small discussion groups.
- Vary teaching methods; make use of technology, movies, PowerPoint, the Internet, etc.
- Offer opportunities for self-expression through the arts, poetry, drama, dance and music.
- Use the "think and do" method of learning; plan a missional activity relevant to your lesson and do what you have learned.
- Create a centering space using candles, relevant objects and fabric.
- Ask individuals in the group to plan and lead experiential activities.

Engaging learners through their personal learning styles may seem overwhelming and chaotic at first. You may experience a few people doodling; others might stand at the back of the room while another sits quietly taking it all in. What you will also experience is a learning environment filled with renewed energy and learners better engaged in the process of understanding, knowing and experiencing God. **BT**

THE RESOURCE PAGE is provided by the Congregational Life office of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in partnership with *Baptists Today* and for those dedicated lay leaders working in the educational ministries of local churches. This month's page was written by Kathy Pickett, pastor of congregational life at Holmeswood Baptist Church in Kansas City, Mo. Resource Page Archives are available at <http://www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/Baptists-Today-resource-page>.