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COMMUNICATE, REACH AND TEACH: A NEW MODEL FOR INCLUSIVE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

The ultimate goal of teaching, from the author's point of view, is reaching all students and promoting learning to every one of them. This is done through accommodating various learning styles and creating an adequate setting that is conducive to learning. The present article presents and describes an applied, practical model for reaching and teaching all students despite their diverse learning styles.

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INTRODUCTION

It is observed that although communication seems to be the easiest thing to do; yet it is regarded as the most challenging to master. The reason is because we all have different styles. We differ in the style we perceive and process information. This fact leads to a variation in our learning styles. Students are endowed with multiple learning styles: some learn best in lecture atmospheres, some are motivated by discussions while others absorb best when they read and reflect on what they have read. The classroom setting may stimulate or hinder the learning process, depending on the dominant learning style of each student. If the teacher fails to align with the learning styles of the students; not only is it frustrating for everyone, but the communication process breaks down and learning fails. In addition, instructors could become excessively critical of their students and could even begin questioning their competence as teachers.

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Unfortunately, most educational systems have ignored individual differences that exist between learners, such as the learning ability, the background knowledge, the learning goals and the learning style (Ford and Chen, 2001). Educational systems generally provide standardized teaching material and teaching methods to all learners which tend to benefit to those whose learning style and background knowledge fits well with the teaching material. If the teaching style employed, closely matches the student preferred style of acquiring knowledge, then learning becomes easier and more natural, results improve and learning time is reduced (Rose, 1998). On the other hand, the opposite occurs if the employed teaching style mismatches that of the student. With such background, the author of the present article; who has been teaching and training in-service teachers as well as undergraduate pre-service teachers for more than 15 years; used her qualified understanding and worthwhile experience to present a comprehensive, practical model to follow which will lead to effective communication with and reaching every student. This will ultimately lead to accelerate the learning process and eventually reach an effective teaching experience.

Purpose of the Study

The present paper aims at proposing a practical model for reaching, teaching and accelerating learning. The model explains, and guides the teaching process. It considers the NLP theory and paves the road for university professors as well as teachers to deliver the content of their subjects in a way that properly meets the needs of all the learning styles present among their students.

The 'Reaching and Teaching Model'

"Reaching before teaching" is my convention throughout this paper. The author puts forth a model, see Figure 1, that considers the NLP theory and attempts to synthesize the characteristics defined in this theory into an approach that can be easily translated into teaching strategies for classroom settings. As university professor and certified trainer, the author of this manuscript uses this NLP model extensively and successfully in teaching and training settings. She has experienced great impact on the outcome of her teaching and training activities.

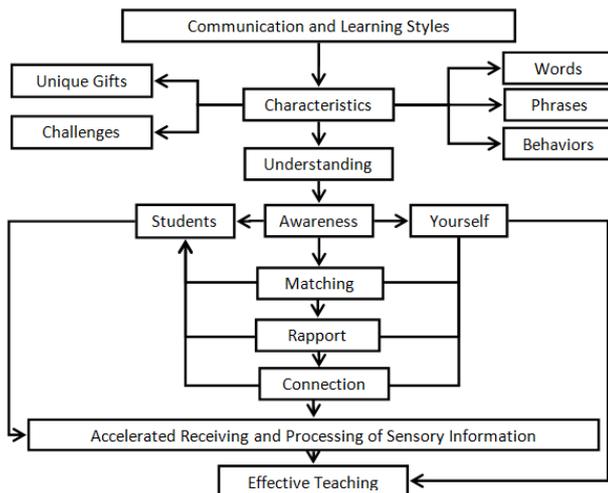


Figure 1. Model for Reaching and Teaching All Learning Styles

Communication and Learning Styles

Communication has been defined as a process of interaction of ideas between the communicator and the receiver to arrive at a common understanding for mutual benefit (Berlo, 1960), and also as a process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another (Keyton, 2011). The elements of the communication process are: the sender, encoding the message, transmitting the message through a medium, receiving the message, decoding the message, feedback, and noise (Lunenburg, 2010). The elements in the communication process determine the quality of the communication process and a problem in any one of these elements can significantly reduce communication effectiveness. In class the teacher, who is regarded as the sender most of the time, uses a combination of techniques, words, gestures, symbols, and pictures to transmit the content (message) to the students (receiver).

Based on the fact that teachers must not only be content experts, but also have to share this content in many different ways that allow everyone to understand it. Thus, an effective teacher must not only decide what to communicate, but also what medium to use in transmitting the context as well as how the receiver (students) will interpret the message. Since communication is aimed at ensuring students' learning then their learning preferences and styles should inform classroom communication. This is one of the reasons for which the subject of learning styles has gained popularity in the field of education and many authors have written on the subject (Dunn and Dunn 1978 and 1993, Schmeck 1988, Vail 1992, Sims and Sims 1995, Riding and Rayner 1998, Tomlinson 1999, Given 2000, Silver *et al.*, 2000, and Tileston 2000). Learning styles have been defined by many scholars as cognitive and interactional (interactive) patterns which affect the way in which students perceive, remember, and think" (Scarcella, 1990). Ibrahim (2016) also defines it as "the way(s) people use to represent and process sensory information in their brain, and the way(s) they present their understanding of the learning experience to others; therefore it is an intrapersonal and interpersonal communication style." Banner and Rayner (1997) added that "an individual's learning style includes two fundamental dimensions that structure thinking and the processing of new information". The first dimension is the verbal imagery structure, which gears the process of thinking. The second dimension of learning style reflects in the manner with which learners process information, either analytically or holistically. Therefore, there are many learning style models that can result in learners reacting in significantly different ways.

Teachers need to determine their students' learning styles either through observing students' behavior and picking up on several verbal and non-verbal cues that indicate the students' learning styles or to have the students complete one of the widely used learning style self-assessment inventories. Despite the fact that, learning styles are complex and the process of analyzing the overall learning 'profile' of a student may be a demanding task for teachers; yet the mission of coming to know our students as learners is simply too important to leave to chance, and the risk of not undertaking this inquiry is simply not reaching a learner at all.

Benefits of Knowing Students as Learners

By developing an in-depth understanding of each learner and gaining an insight to his/her characteristics; this enables teachers to reap the following benefits: First, create a psychologically safe environment for every learner. Second, determine each student's readiness for learning. Third, identify multiple access points to the curriculum to increase engagement and success. Fourth, develop and demonstrate greater emotional intelligence in the classroom through specifying the unique gifts as well as the challenges of each style. Students' preferred learning modes will impact on information that is accessed through classroom communication as it assist in their levels of comprehension, motivation and meta-cognition. Students' preferred learning modes will also have significant influence on their behavior and learning, and thus should be matched with appropriate learning strategies, (Hawk and Shah, 2007).

Awareness

By achieving the previously mentioned four gains, the teacher is approaching 'the power of awareness'. Awareness of their students. However, despite the fact that awareness is the greatest agent for change; yet being aware of the students' learning styles is insufficient for any desirable change. It is only a part of the puzzle. In order to complete the puzzle and possess the total power of awareness, teachers have to gain self-awareness. Only then, awareness is empowering. Carolyn Mamchur (1996) notes that when teachers know their own style; this will help their students in the long run because "in working from a position of strength, we become more willing to bend and yield to the needs of others". Simply, by discovering our learning style, as teachers, and reflecting on the various ways in which we learn, then determining the methods we prefer most will help us become better teachers. The reason awareness is empowering is that it shows us, teachers, we have a choice and means concerning how we respond to what has become acknowledged. Awareness of style differences is useful in several ways. First, it captures the cognitive and affective differences between the teacher and the learner. Second, it encourages the use of a wider variety of teaching methods. Third, it helps learners understand their own styles and preferences better. Finally, it enables teachers and learners alike to be more accepting of differences among people. In this way, new means of communication are established with the diverse participants that most teachers face.

Matching

Current research show that it is not only teaching to one particular learning style that works, it is the combination of all of the learning styles in a single lesson that makes the learning experience truly worthwhile. Incorporating different teaching methods based on students' learning styles can also be a tough process sometimes, but students appear to learn best when teaching styles and technologies fit their learning styles (Ibrahim, 2016). When they do not fit, students can experience feelings of great insecurity, frustration, anger, anxiety, alienation, overcompensation, and futility (Gregorc and Butler 1984). Sarasin (1999) states that "a relationship between learning styles and teaching styles is a factor in the success of postsecondary students." The mismatch between the learning style of the student in relation to the teaching strategy adopted by the teacher makes students bored and inattentive. Consequently, students perform poorly in tests. The narrower the gap between teacher intention and learner interpretation is, the greater the chances of achieving the desired learning outcome (Kumaravadivelu, 1991).

Rapport and Connection

Building student rapport is the development of a positive relation between the teacher and the students. Rapport is a connection you make with your students based on their positive feelings for you. It isn't always easy for teachers or instructors to establish rapport with students, sometimes there's a big age difference; others times it's having few (if any) shared interests. However, there are good reasons for teachers to work on establishing rapport with students. It is

my belief that the teacher's ability to calibrate his/her teaching strategies to meet the students' learning styles and needs is the number one key to create rapport, and build teacher-students connection. In itself, rapport does not result in learning, but it certainly helps to create conditions conducive to learning. Building rapport has the potential to impact every important area of teaching: classroom management, increased comfort, motivation, independence, satisfaction, trust, and enhanced communication (Granitz, Koernig, and Harich, 2009). Subsequently, it can be a remarkably effective way to improve and accelerate the academic progress in total and, thus, lead to effective teaching.

Conclusion

This model is logically-based on some key principles: (1) learning is an intrapersonal communication process, and people learn in almost the same way they interpersonally communicate; (2) the better you reach your students and build rapport with them, the better they will learn from you; (3) building rapport and connecting to your students require that you know your communication style and flexibly present information in a way that have the broadest appeal across other styles; (4) you can flexibly calibrate your teaching style to match and accommodate your students' learning styles if you are aware of the ways learners from each style communicate and process sensory information; (5) when students are taught in the way they are programmed to receive and process information, they will be actively involved in the classroom activities, and (6) students who are actively engaged, learn better and fast and retain more of what they learned and in effect they cognitively exercise accelerated learning.

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