

TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES OF LINGUISTICS AT DEPARTMENTS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

Many ESL teachers experience student resistance when they introduce an instructional activity in the classroom. As students take in and process information in different ways: by seeing and hearing, reflecting and acting, reasoning logically and intuitively, analyzing and visualizing. Therefore, teaching methods also should vary accordingly. To what extent a student can learn is determined by the compatibility of the student's learning styles and the teacher's teaching styles. It is important for teachers to know their learners' preferred learning styles because this knowledge will help teachers to plan their lessons to match or adapt their teaching and to provide the most appropriate and meaningful activities or tasks to suit a particular learner group at different stages.

Keywords: *learning strategies, related techniques, teaching strategies.*

INTRODUCTION

Learning styles have profound effects on material processing, exercises designing, teachers' instruction options, performance assessments. Educators must place emphasis on intuition, feeling, sensing, and imagination, in addition to the traditional skills of analysis, reason, and sequential problem solving. Teachers should design their instruction methods to connect with all learning styles, using various combinations of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation. Instructors can introduce a wide variety of experiential elements into the classroom, such as sound, music, visuals, movement, experience, and even talking (Rosenshine, 1987: 34-36)

Some students want more opportunities to participating in free conversations, expressing their wish towards a more communicatively oriented approach. On the other hand, there are those who would prefer more emphasis on grammar teaching. We believe that the teacher, in making decisions

regarding the type of activities to conduct in a language classroom, should take into account such learner diversities. Learning styles play a vital role in students' learning process. Universities today show an increasing disparity between faculty and students, between teacher and learning. What suffers as a consequence is the learning process itself and the natural differences in learning patterns exhibited by new students are often interpreted by faculty as deficiencies. What may be happening, then, is a fundamental "mismatch" between the preferred styles of faculty and those of students. It is always important for teachers to teach this to their students. Teachers spare no efforts to refine their own teaching methods, keep on informing the students of various learning approaches, for example, how to build up word power, how to improve reading ability, etc. (Zhiwei, 1999:45-46). However, they forget one thing, the most important one, which one suits them most. Students won't take the approach recommended by the teacher, and apply that to their learning practice. As a result, teachers are supposed to figure out their students'

learning styles—internally preferred learning styles, then the teaching styles can be compatible with the learning styles.

DIFFERENT DEFINITIONS OF LEARNING AND TEACHING STYLES

In order to apply learning styles theory to English learning and teaching, we must know what learning style is. Keefe (2006: 54) defines learning style as a consistent way of functioning that reflects the underlying causes of learning behavior. While (Shichun, 1992: 23) defines learning styles as the ways in which each learner begins to concentrate on processes and retain new difficult information. Keefe (2006: 66) describes learning style as both a student characteristic and an instructional strategy. As a student characteristic, learning style is an indicator of how a student learns and likes to learn.

Learning has taken place when we observe a change of learner behavior resulting from what has been experienced. Similarly, we can recognize the learning style of an individual student only by observing his overt behavior. Learning styles are internally basic characteristics of individuals for the intake or understanding of new information. Each learner has distinct and consistent preferred ways of perception, organization and retention. These learning styles are characteristic, cognitive, affective, and physiological behaviors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with and respond to the learning environment (Ibid.:77-87). Students learn differently from each other.

Reiff (1992: 123-128) claims that styles influence how students learn, how teachers teach, and how they interact. Each person is born with certain preferences toward particular styles, but these preferences are influenced by culture, experience and development.

Teaching styles are those pedagogical methods that teachers adopt to guide their students and influence them, beside the use of certain kinds of rhetorics (Reid, 2002: 83).

Teachers can adopt various general pedagogic methods and then very specific didactical recipes, for

example, how to explain a triangle or how to teach composition (Ibid.: 84). Again, teaching style would then be defined by the teacher's adoption of a set of didactical recipes.

THE CLASSIFICATION OF LEARNING STYLES

A learning style is a multidimensional principle (Everstone, 1993: 145). Its elements can be classified into five stimulus categories: environmental elements (sound, light, temperatures, design), emotional elements (motivation, persistence, responsibility), physical elements (perception, intake, time, mobility), sociological elements (self, partner, team, mentor, varied), and psychological elements (global/analytical, impulsive/reflective) (Reiff, 1992:45). The psychologist Howard Gardner has discovered 7 core abilities to process information. (Zhiwei, 1999:n45-46) These learning styles are of interest to ESL instructors who will have classes of learners at various levels using different learning styles. A brief summary is presented here:

Linguistic: Linguistic learners enjoy words and have a good auditory memory. Personal stories dictated and written down are good ways to involve them in the language acquisition process.

Logical-Mathematical: These students work well with patterns and abstract concepts. They like to experiment and solve problems. Workbook exercises are a good choice as are computer-assisted activities.

Spatial: Spatial learners can perceive the visual world accurately; they think in images and seem to know where everything is. They react well to films, slides, photographs, posters and other visual aids.

Musical: The musical learner needs music in the background to study. They respond well to songs, "jazz chants" and poems.

Kinesthetic: These learners communicate well through body language. They are good at dance and mime and they tend to write before they read.

Interpersonal: They have a group identity and interact well with others. They enjoy games and teaching or leading others in the class.

Intrapersonal: They learn through independent study. They shy away from groups and would rather work alone on "self paced" material.

Clearly, learning styles include not only the cognitive domain, but also the affective and physiological domains. These learning styles serve as a guide to the instructor in preparing materials and help explain why different students react in different ways to the same materials. Instructors need to be aware of the various learning styles in order to facilitate the learning process as much as possible.

Generally speaking, the learning-styles can be divided into three major categories: cognitive learning styles, sensory learning styles, and personality learning styles (Stern, 1983: 27-30). In other words, there are three major categories of learning styles:

Cognitive learning styles:

- Field dependent & field independent.
- Analytic & global.
- Reflective & impulsive.

Sensory learning styles:

- Visual.
- Auditory.
- Kinesthetic and tactile.

Personal learning styles:

- Tolerance of ambiguity.
- Right hemisphere & left hemisphere.

Cognitive learning styles include field-independent/field-dependent learning styles, analytic/global learning styles, reflective/impulsive learning styles and Kolb experiential learning model. Sensory learning styles also fall into the following four sub-styles: auditory learners, visual learners, tactile

learners and kinesthetic learners. Temperament learning styles include Myers-Briggs temperament styles, tolerance of ambiguity styles, right-and left-hemisphere learners.

LEARNING STYLES AND LEARNING STRATEGIES

Learning strategies are external skills that students use, often consciously, to improve their learning (Shichun, 1992: 108). While Learning styles: they are internally base on characteristics often not perceived or used consciously. They help in dealing with understanding and new information (Ibid.: 189) Since language classroom is like a problem-solving environment in which language learners are likely to face new input and difficult tasks given by their instructors, learners' attempts to find the quickest or easiest way to do what is required, that is, using language learning strategies is inescapable. In short, learning strategy is an external skill that learners use, often consciously, to improve their learning.

The term language learning strategy has been defined by many researchers. Rosenshine (1987:19) define learning strategies as "... any sets of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval , and use of information," Everstone (1992: 209) state that learning strategies are "intentional behavior and thoughts used by learners during learning so as to better help them understand, learn, or remember new information. According to Stern (1983: 261), "the concept of learning strategy is dependent on the assumption that learners consciously engage in activities to achieve certain goals and learning strategies can be regarded as broadly conceived intentional directions and learning techniques. All language learners use language learning strategies either consciously or unconsciously when processing new information and performing tasks in the language classroom.

DIFFERENT STEPS IN LEARNING AND TEACHING STYLES

1. Lesson planning in accordance with learning and teaching styles

In all academic classrooms, no matter what the subject matter is, there will be students with multiple learning styles and students with a variety of major, minor and negative learning styles. It is important to vary the activities in your lessons, so that you cater with students with different learning styles (Reid, 2002: 67)

An effective means of accommodating these learning styles is for teachers to change their own styles and strategies and provide a variety of activities that help students connect with the lesson. Accordingly, students discuss what they know about the topic of the lesson, as a whole class. Then, students predict what a reading passage/story will be about from the title or cover picture. So that students share an experience that relates to the topic, with the small whole class or in small groups. For instance, students listen to a song or piece of music that relates to the lesson topic. Then, they discuss what the song/music made them feel indulged. (Keefe, 2006: 56-58)

2. Creating teacher-student style matching

The prospect of altering language instruction to somehow accommodate different learning styles might seem forbidding to teachers. This reaction is understandable, teaching styles are made up of methods and approaches with which teachers feel most comfortable; if they try to change to completely different approaches, they would be forced to work entirely with unfamiliar, awkward, and uncomfortable methods (Shichun, 1992: 45-47). Fortunately, teachers who wish to address a wide variety of learning styles need not make drastic changes in their instructional approach, Regular use of some of the instructional techniques given below should suffice to cover some specified learning style categories (Zhiwei, 1999: 78-80):

1) Groups of four or five learners are given cards, each with a word on it. Each person describes his word in the foreign language to the others in the group without actually using it. When all students have described their words successfully, the students take the first letter of each and see what new word the letters spell out. (Puzzle parts might also depict objects in a room;

in this case, when all the words have been guessed, the group decides which room of the house has been described.)

2) Class members are placed in pairs or in larger groups. Each student has a blank piece of paper. He listens to his partner or the group leader who has a picture to describe (the teacher can provide the picture or students can choose their own). As his partner describes the picture, the student tries to draw a rough duplicate according to the description he hears.

3. Providing activities with different grouping and Teaching Techniques in Learning Style

In a class made up of students with various learning styles and strategies, it is always helpful for the teacher to divide the students into groups by learning styles and give them activities based on their learning styles (Reid, 2002: 92-93). This should appeal to them because they will enjoy them and be successful. For example, the group made up of the extroverted may need to express some ideas orally in the presence of one or many class members. On the other hand, the group made up the introverted may need some encouragement to share aloud and may want the safety of jotting down a few notes first and perhaps sharing with one other person before being invited or expected to participate in a group discussion.

Stern (1983: 156-158) states that no matter how students are to be grouped, teachers should make a conscious effort to include various learning styles in daily lesson plan. A teacher must design her lesson plan around her students. After you know the students learning styles, you should set goals for your teaching strategies. This requires you to differentiate instruction through use of the learning styles. Ideally you want to incorporate all of the learning styles so that each student may learn in a way that suits them best for the day. Studies show that matching teaching styles to learning styles can significantly enhance academic achievements, student attitude and student behavior at the college level. One simple way to do this is to code the lesson plans so that a quick look at the completed plan shows if different learning styles have been included. Putting "A" or "V" beside activities that denote whether they are primarily appealing to the analytic learner or the visual learner will serve as a

reminder that there is a need for mixture of both kind of activities. Meanwhile, simply designating various parts of the lesson plan with letters (I for individual, P for pair, SC for small group, LG for large group) and other symbols reminds the teacher to pay attention to learning styles. If the coding system is used on a regular basis, it becomes very natural to think in terms of providing the setting and the activities by which all learners can find some portion of the class that particularly appeals to them.

This is not to say that the best thing one can do for one's students is to use their preferred modes of instructions exclusively. In fact, Everstone (1993: 167-173) adds that there are generally agreed techniques employed in teaching practice:

- 1) Provide a balance of concrete information (data, facts, experiments and results) and abstract concepts (principles, theories).
- 2) Balance material that emphasizes practical problem-solving methods with material that emphasizes fundamental understanding.
- 3) Use pictures, graphs and simple sketches liberally, during and after the presentation of verbal material. Show films or provide demonstrations, if possible. iv. Don't fill every minute of class time lecturing and writing on the blackboard. Set aside intervals—however brief—for students to learn what have been told on their own. Raise questions and problems to be worked on by students in a small group.
- 5) Talk to students about learning styles, both in advising and in class. Students are reassured to find their academic difficulties may not all be due to personal inadequacies. Explaining to students how they learn most efficiently may be an important step in helping them reshape their learning experiences so that they can be successful.
- 6) Try to design some activities which involve students, senses as many as possible, using all the senses to help improve English learning. For example, relatively long passage dictations, and games, which require students to write down what they are told by their classmates, who already have learnt that by heart.
- 7) Encourage students to learn English online, such as, post writing assignments through e-mail, read materials given online (the students in the

experimental class use the new horizon college English book, a web-assisted textbook).

8) Motivate learning. As much as possible, teach new material in the context of situation to which students can relate in terms of their personal experiences, rather than simply as more material to memorize.

Teachers confronted with this list of techniques might feel that is impossible to do all that in the English Class and still cover the syllabus and requirements. The idea, however, is not to adopt all the techniques at once but rather to pick several that look feasible and try them on an occasional basis; and try one or two more later in class. In this way a teaching style that is both effective for students and comfortable for teachers will evolve naturally, with a potentially dramatic effect on the quality of learning (Reid, 2002: 356).

CONCLUSION

Mismatching may be appropriate so that students' experiences help them to learn in new ways and to bring into play ways of thinking and aspects of the self not previously developed. Any mismatching, however, should be done with sensitivity and consideration for students, because the experience of discontinuity can be very threatening, particularly when students are weak in these areas. Knowledge of learning style can thus help faculty design experiences appropriate for students in terms of matching or mismatching and enable them to do so thoughtfully and systematically. Learning a foreign language without guidance is similar to sailing without a good map. When teachers are aware of the importance of learning styles, they can provide a good map to their students. It's time for teachers to seek a reasonable way to teach English so that students can swim in open seas. Teachers should employ a variety of assessment techniques, focusing on acquiring the essential language skills. Generally speaking, the learning-style research can be divided into three major categories: cognitive learning styles, sensory learning styles, and personality learning.

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