What is the Most Used Learning Style in the Elementary School Classroom; The Impacts of Teaching Different Learning Styles in the Classroom?

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Abstract

As most teachers know, students learn the material taught to them most effectively by using multiple strategies presented in class. The many strategies are displayed by the four main learning styles in education that include visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic. Hence, teachers must address this diversity to enable their students to succeed in learning in the classroom. Students also come from different backgrounds at home, such as the English language learner, the foster child, the intelligent student, and a special needs student. Therefore, knowing the most commonly used learning style in the elementary school classroom allows teachers to utilize the most appropriate strategy to push their students forward to learn the next California Common Core Content Standard to be covered. This is exemplified, especially, for a teacher that needs to move on quickly with a concept in class. If a teacher can reach the golden rule in teaching of 80 percent (Olivant, 2017) of the population of students in their classroom to understand a concept by using one learning style, then this can be an efficient way for a teacher to move onto to the next material that needs to be covered. The remaining 20 percent of students that do not fall under this learning style can be pulled aside later in the day for additional assistance. The reasoning for this approach is that there is a large quantity of California Common Core Content Standards that elementary school teachers need to meet, and there is only so much time in the school day/school year to cover all standards. As a result, there were methods used in this research project that include recruiting participants using a snowball sample, beginning with teachers at Crowell Elementary School that I met, while undertaking observations for my Liberal Studies classes. All participants were teachers currently teaching in kindergarten through sixth grade classes. Interviews conducted were conducted in their classrooms. Thus, after completing the above procedure, I learned that most teachers try to incorporate all four learning styles of visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and reading/writing in their teaching. However, according to the data collected, visual is the prevalent learning style utilized in the elementary school classroom after conducting five snowball sample interviews from teachers at Crowell Elementary School and Earl Elementary School. Further, most students needed to see visual aids in the classroom in order for them to best understand the material. As follows, teachers who may be struggling in the classroom to reach all of their students learning curves can utilize this learning style of visual and combining with others in order to have the great majority of their class understand the abstract concepts at hand to then move on to the next lesson.

Keywords: Learning Styles, English Language Learner, California Common Core Content Standards, Kinesthetic

Introduction

There are many learning styles being used in the elementary school classroom each day. Most teachers utilize a variety of learning styles to teach their students throughout the school day. This would be tedious for the students and their learning if teachers failed to use different styles. Recently, teachers have tried to use more creativity in the classroom to make learning more comprehensible as well as entertaining. Without creativity, teachers cannot consider the myriad of ways to teach their students the material to keep them both engaged and entertained throughout their lessons.

There tends to be about 20-35 students in a class, and every student has a different learning style or comes from a different background. Some may be better at listening to a teacher to understand the material. Some may be better at visualizing something in front of them to learn, like me. Some may need to move their body to learn. Some may need to write down the concept to understand the abstract material being presented. Each student is different and is entitled to learn by the best means possible to understand the material being taught. Thus, it is beneficial to know your students thoroughly in order to teach them in the manner that is best for their learning.

Background

Learning styles have different ways a teacher may use to teach material to their students. All students

think differently and come from diverse backgrounds of learning. The learning styles include kinesthetic of using the body, visual of seeing, auditory of hearing, and reading/writing on paper. In the field of Liberal Studies (Olivant, 2017), visual activities include writing directions on a board, using resources that require reading and seeing, having students take notes on concepts, and using videos. Reading/writing includes having students draw pictures/make models or write things out on paper. Auditory includes using lectures to listen to, using music related to the themes, and using oral reports. Kinesthetic is having students use computers or calculators, providing movement in class, and playing by role imitation.

Figure 1. Four Learning Styles

(Photograph from Metropolitan)

According to a journal article by Cassidy and Eachus, the authors both evaluate the efficacy of teaching and learning in higher education by investigating the relationships between assessment of their learning styles, academic beliefs, self-report student agency, and academic achievement. The authors after conducting research of the first- and second-year undergraduates used the Research methods proficiency (RPM) to measure the students before and after completing modules in research studies. "From this it may be reasonably concluded that high academic self-efficacy, internal academic LOC and high academic self-confidence are likely to be associated with the adoption of deep or strategic learning approaches; while low academic self-efficacy, external academic LOC beliefs and low academic self-confidence will be associated with surface or apathetic learning approaches" (Cassidy, 2000). Therefore,

proving that students who have good approaches to studying and focusing in class tend to have higher achievement in school because they are using the best teaching strategy/learning style for them to learn from their teacher. If the teacher can keep utilizing the best strategies from students that have higher academics, they just need to know the best strategy/learning styles to implement for other lower academic students. This proves knowing the most used learning styles/teaching strategy in the class is important because this can be implemented to teach to the student's interest in order to keep them both engaged in the material and understanding it in their best form. Overall, the data above proves the better teaching strategies (learning styles) used that best fit with the student, the higher academic achievement is correlated.

According to John Yerxa, an education officer, who states that simply being aware that there can be different ways to approach teaching and learning can make a difference. This difference can be the small portion between a student understanding the concept when delivered in the student's best interest or being far from understanding the concept at hand. Furthermore, learning styles are where "individuals characteristically approach different learning tasks." (Cassidy, 2004) All student's minds think differently when given an assignment. This is then presented below in Gardener's multiple intelligences where Gardener portrays the different ways a person may think when given a task.

Learning styles are also diverse from Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory (Gardner, 1983), which are the many different ways our brains intellectually think. The main point on Gardener's Multiple Intelligences theory is students are not in one specific intelligence category of learning. Students are able to embrace all the multiple intelligences, just one intelligence may be more favorable for a student over the others. Each of these intelligences apply to the many different learning styles of visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and writing/reading. According to my worksheet that I used to observe in the classroom for my liberal studies classes. The different multiple intelligences include the following below.

First, linguistic intelligence is where one facilitates well with their words and language. Second, logical-mathematical intelligence is where one is able to use abstract thinking of numbers and reasoning to solve problems. Third, spatial intelligence is when one thinks best by drawing or seeing pictures. Fourth, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence is when one thinks and learns best when using their body to move around. Fifth, musical intelligence tends to involve people thinking best when listening to the sounds of music. Sixth,

interpersonal intelligence is when someone is both smart and understands others feelings well. Seventh, intrapersonal intelligence is when you are self-smart and can reflect well. Finally, naturalist intelligence is when one can think best and learn when among the nature of the world (Armstrong, 1994). All students come in different packages of intelligences from multiple backgrounds, thus causing them to learn in many different ways.

The multiple intelligences help in diversifying the types of learning styles above by explaining the different ways a student may think. Therefore, the teacher can ascertain what is the best type of activity or activities they may integrate into the classroom by knowing how their students think for themselves to learn the material. An example would be a teacher teaching the student a mathematics problem, but the student is having trouble with multiplication. The teacher can tap into the student's intelligence of logical-mathematical and kinesthetic to teach them through the learning style of kinesthetic by having the student move their body to learn. Thus, I will have them do 2 sets of 3 jumping jacks. This will teach them that 3 x 2 = 6. This teaches the student the material in a way that works better for them to learn. Then, the teacher can reinforce that style more often if it works for that student. Gardener states we must tap into their multiple intelligences to use their best way of thinking to ascertain what learning style to use depending on the student's strengths and weaknesses.

Figure 2. Multiple Intelligences

(Photograph in Hastac)

Further, the teacher should get to know their students and personalities as well. Knowing your

student better allows the teacher to be more open to inputting creativity into their lesson plan on the multiple teaching strategies they must encompass (Olivant, 2009). The teacher must know their student's interests and abilities so they can build around to spark creativity in their lesson plan. This is exemplified where the student is an athlete and having trouble in counting 1-100 in a mathematics problem. It is better to have the student kinesthetically jump in the air to practice their counting, instead of tediously say it out loud. This is creative by the teacher, keeps students engaged in the lesson by jumping, and encompasses the learning style the teacher should use for that student more often.

In a study below, an English teacher describes her experiences in the classroom where she accommodated multiple intelligences. Simeone discovered her students had a higher grasp of knowledge of the material taught when they could express what they learned in different strategies that best worked with them. An instance in the text describes the teacher having her class play a game of "Chalkboard Pictionary" as she calls it in her English classroom. This is also one of her favorite kinesthetic language arts activities too she stated. The students would be doing a review on African proverbs and get into two teams. Each student on a team would go head-to-head up to the chalkboard drawing what they thought was the best picture to demonstrate their learning of the African or American proverb presented to them. Translating these proverbs and symbols into pictures takes concrete thinking.

The teacher lastly stated after playing the game that "I am always struck by the talent of some of my students who often are the least talented with paper, pen, and word but are outstanding with picture conceptualizations. This realization has led me to offer more picture alternatives" (Simeone, 1995). Her study proves that certain students in class may struggle with demonstrating their learning of using just pen and paper. Some students may need to get up and draw what they learn in order to demonstrate their knowledge that was presented to them. Every student learns in a different way and may need to express themselves in different ways as well. These students here used the learning styles of kinesthetic to move their body to draw and multiple intelligences of visual–spatial to draw artistically what they learned. The author seems to imply that not all students are like this, so it is beneficial to use multiple learning styles in the classroom, even in English, to get the material across to the students in the best way. This study proves not all learning needs to be with writing in pencil on paper. There are other avenues for different types of learners.

A study below exemplifies "an experiment that someone did for nursing students on their best learning styles when teaching them in the classroom. Results of this experiment include that the predominant learning styles were: sensing – 82.7%, visual – 78.7%, sequential – 65.8%, and active - 59.9%" (Gonzalez, 2017). This is interesting to me; these are not the usual learning styles I will use. Even though my project is based on learning styles most commonly used, this teaches me that learning styles are applied at all ages and in many ways. Even nursing students do not think the same way as each other proving that all students no matter what you are learning will be different.

Like the students in the nursing school, we are all different. The nursing students must be able to observe and touch their patients with their senses to learn their material the best for them. Hopefully, their teacher will apply this research into their future lesson plans more often. This helps me as well, because I know if a student wants to be a nurse in the future, they need me to see/teach using the learning style of visual more often for them to best understand the material in the classroom.

Description of Research

The purpose of my research is to identify the learning styles used most commonly by teachers in the elementary school classroom. This is important because every student learns in a different way and teachers must address this diversity to enable their students to succeed.

It is beneficial to know the most commonly used learning styles in the elementary school classroom so that not only myself, but also other future teachers may benefit from this information. In standard practice, teachers cannot move onto another lesson until 80 percent of the class understands the current concept they are learning. Thus, knowing the most commonly used learning style will help teachers reach as many students as possible. That is because not all students learn the same way and will understand the lesson every time it is taught. This will then make both the teacher's and the student's jobs easier for them.

I predict the teachers will say they use multiple different learning styles in the classroom. However, more specifically, my hypothesis is the most commonly used learning style in the elementary school classroom is visual learning. This is because most students need to be able to observe a problem being performed in front of them in order for them to understand the problem. For example, when I observed the classrooms, most teachers tended to model most of the problems on their

smartboards for the students to see, touch, read, and copy down.

Methods

I will recruit my participants using a snowball sampling method, beginning with the teachers at Crowell Elementary School that I met while conducting observations for my Liberal Studies classes. All participants will be teachers currently teaching in kindergarten through sixth grade classes. All interviews will be conducted in a public facility of the teacher's choosing at a time convenient for the teacher. Possible places include the teacher's classroom, Stanislaus State Honors building, and coffee shops. The letter of support for my research that I received from the principal of Crowell Elementary School also allows me to conduct an interview with the teachers on her school campus. I will start each interview by getting an informed consent. I will then start the audio recording and ask the interview questions. Lastly, I will thank them when the interview is over and invite them to my Honors Capstone Conference to hear my results.

Data will be collected through in-person, semi-structured interviews with multiple elementary school classroom teachers from different grade levels. I will ask them basic questions on their teaching background in one set of questions. In another set of questions, I will ask them about the learning style the teachers think they use most often and why they use it. I will listen to what they say and write down brief notes during the interview. I will also record the interview on the Voice Memos app on my iPhone to ensure I do not miss any important information. I will make sure that I have the teacher's permission to record and will only record with the teacher's permission. I will then use the recording along with my notes to identify learning styles and themes emphasized by participants when analyzing my results.

Results

In late November, I was approved by Stanislaus State University Institutional Review Board (UIRB) to start my research by interviewing teachers. I then contacted 4 past teachers I observed before at Crowell Elementary School and an additional one from a current teaching credential class I was taking at Stanislaus State to do the semi-structured interview to gather some results.

The first teacher interviewed was a Hispanic, male, sixth grade teacher at Crowell Elementary School. This teacher stated that out of all 4 learning styles of visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and writing/reading, in general, he utilized auditory and kinesthetic the most in his classroom. For auditory, he believed his students learn the material best when they are able to talk to each

other when moving around the classroom. The learning style he stated he used most often into his classroom is kinesthetic. The teacher stated that after reading many teaching books as research, he learned when his students are more exhausted than he is at the end of the day by both learning and moving around at same time. He then knows his students were both engaged and learning in class which leads to them being more tired than him. In addition, for using the kinesthetic learning style, the teacher does not prefer for his students to sit down for a long period of time because they can get "chatty" or bored from not moving as they learn to get their blood flowing. The teacher stated that he encompassed the kinesthetic learning styles as well by having his students get out of their seats to write on whiteboards to discuss in small groups what are their answers to math problems presented on the smartboard. The teacher added that he would utilize the other learning styles more if they were more exciting to him and at the moment, they did not fit the needs of the students he currently has in his class.

The second teacher interviewed was a white, female, third grade teacher at Crowell Elementary School. The teacher asserted that she tried to use all 4 learning styles in every lesson that she creates. However, she encompassed the learning style of visual the most in her classroom because that is the way she learned when she was in school and this is an easy way to teach if that is how she learned previously. An example of how she utilized visuals in the elementary school classroom was by asking her students to have "1,2,3 all eyes on me, mouths off." If the students looked at her, it was easier for them to understand the material as she presented the directions on the document camera for all to see. At the same time, the students would point to each word on their paper in front of them to follow along. The learning styles this teacher used the least is kinesthetic. In her opinion, it is more difficult for her to incorporate this learning style, especially in her bungalow portable classroom that shakes as students walk in the classroom.

The third teacher interviewed was a white, female, fifth grade teacher at Earl Elementary School. The teacher said she used all 4 learning styles in her classroom. However, the learning style she incorporated the most in her classroom is visual. She believes it reaches all learners. Also, if a student is struggling on learning the class material, then looking at a visual image helps that student make a connection to assist better in understanding the confusing concepts at hand. This teacher also uses her technology in the classroom as visual aids for her class as another angle in learning an abstract concept. This teacher stated she does not use the learning styles of auditory as much because most, young students do not process by hearing

in her opinion. This is due to their speaking/listening skills that need to be improved.

The fourth teacher interviewed was a white, female, special education autism specific classroom teacher with grades third through sixth at Crowell Elementary School. This teacher stated in general she tends to use all the learning styles listed above. Nevertheless, the learning styles the teacher employs the most in her autism specific classroom is visual. This teacher asserted that her students do well when a visual is supported to help make a connection, which is huge for autistic students. An example of this visual representation is a tangible item, such as a cotton ball or a rock, where the students can actually touch the object. Even though visual is the best learning style for the teacher, it is also best paired with another learning style of auditory, specifically when giving instructions in her classroom. She also encompassed the kinesthetic learning style in her classroom additionally because autistic students have a sensory issue where they move their arms when they are more anxious. Therefore, she gave ample opportunity to her autistic students to get out of their seats to move the anxiousness out of their bodies. In addition, the learning style the teacher incorporated the least was writing/reading because not all her students can use this style well to learn. Thus, this learning style can be frustrating for students. Therefore, the teacher will modify or limit this learning style of reading/writing to ensure that her students keep learning and improving. An important point the teacher brought up in this interview is to remain cautious of who needs what for each student. This is because all students are unique and not all 9/10 will know or be able to complete the 4 learning styles.

The fifth teacher interviewed was a Latin, female, first grade teacher at Crowell Elementary School. In general, she stated that she uses all 4 learning styles in her classroom. However, she added visual is used the most in lower grades. The materials this teacher employs in her classroom included pictures, graphs, videos, photos, objects. The teacher also stated that if she could give her students something to look at and focus on, then this would help make something abstract be understandable to learn. The learning styles the teacher incorporated least was reading/writing because some students at this age can surpass their grade level or some are very behind.

Conclusion

After obtaining results from data collected in interviews of the elementary school teachers above, the most commonly, used learning styles appear to be visual. My hypothesis was supported by the data above on visual as the most commonly used learning style in the

elementary school classroom. This is because most students need to be able to see what they are doing in order to focus their attention on or actually touch to help make an abstract concept easier to comprehend.

However, overall, it was interesting to learn after doing this research that most teachers in general try to incorporate all 4 learning styles of visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and reading/writing into all their lessons. This way, the teachers can attempt to reach each student in their classroom. Nonetheless, teachers use visual the most to reach most of their students in their classes. However, they should strike to encompass all the different learning styles to reach all the students in their classroom. Every student is important and is entitled to understand the lesson concepts at hand in whatever way it takes to do so.

Another note after conducting this research is that half of the teachers stated that sometimes they combine the learning styles in their lessons to reach those students who learn more effectively when the styles are combined. Such an example would be the special education class where the teacher likes to pair an auditory with a visual aid because autistic students are more apt to learn when they can touch or see things when being told directions out loud. This goes the same for general education students that are told to put their fingers on a text as they read the material as a class as suggested by the third-grade teacher.

An additional note after conducting this research is that most of the teachers imparted in their interview that they were beginning to use the learning style of kinesthetic in their classes. These teachers stated that they are finding many of their students to be restless while in class. This is somewhat like how some college students struggle to be able to sit still in class for long periods of time. Thus, teachers are slowly finding more ways to have their reckless students learn better by having the students incorporate their body more often in the classroom when learning a new concept.

This research was important to me. Now, I can share my learning styles findings with future teachers and let them know that yes, visual is the most commonly used learning style in the elementary school classroom. Now, teachers knowing the most utilized learning style may use this learning style in the classroom to reach the great majority of students, when the teacher has to move on from topic to topic to cover in class. Teachers are charged with teaching the California Common Core Content Standards during the school year. Most of the time, there appears to be insufficient time in the class day or year to cover every standard. Therefore, future teachers should utilize the learning style or styles that allows students to learn the best and to allow the class

to move quickly to cover the standards. The teachers can always pull aside those students not in the visual learning style radar, for extra assistance after the lesson or infuse two learning styles in one lesson to reach all the students in the class. This should enable the class to learn faster and proceed efficiently so that the class will learn all the required standards.

Acknowledgements

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