

CORPS RESOURCES



ACCOMMODATING DIFFERENT LEARNING STYLES

By Rebecca Walker

THE CORPS AS A LEARNING COMMUNITY

Life is an ongoing process of learning and growing, and the corps as the people of God gathered together, should be a learning community. Obviously, one of the purposes of corps Sunday services is learning, as the sermon is there to instruct people in the Christian tradition. Music in the service can also play a role in teaching people. Indeed, for church leavers often after years have past, the thing people will remember from church will not be the sermons necessarily, but the songs. “Until recently, many Christian communicators assumed that the most effective ways to teach were teacher-centred—through lecture, storytelling, or sermon” [4].

There has been much discussion in the emerging church movement about the usefulness of the traditional monologue sermon as a way of helping people to learn. The propositional content of the three-point sermon has also been challenged, as 65% of the bible is narrative compared to 10% being propositional [1]. In the postmodern era, there has been a move from being a word-based society to a more picture-based society. “In a culture that increasingly thinks in images, what are the implications on our evangelical stress of the text? How might we better understand and relate to such a media-saturated audience?” [2]. The attention span of younger generations is also getting less. So we need some new methods for engaging people in a learning experience.

Current teaching methods outside the church take into account the different learning styles and intelligences of the people involved. It also honours adult learners by allowing them to participate in the learning process in ways that leverage their existing strengths [1]. Adult learners “strive to become independent, self-directing, and competent;

they thrive in learning environments that help them to transform their perspective and feel empowered to effect change in their lives. Adult learners are diverse and require learning programs that accommodate the full spectrum of learning needs, styles, and preferences” [3].

LEARNING STYLES

LeFever identifies four distinct learning styles: *Imaginative, Analytic, Common Sense & Dynamic*.

IMAGINATIVE LEARNERS tend to be quite social. They learn best in the context of interpersonal relationships. They like to discuss ideas and listen to other people’s perspectives. They tend to focus on the big picture more than small details. “They learn by sensing, feeling, watching. They can see all sides of the issues presented” [4].

ANALYTIC LEARNERS like to watch and listen. They expect the teacher or pastor to provide information while they assess the value of the material. Analytic learners do well in the traditional lecture-style learning environment. They aim for perfection. They want all the information before they make a decision [4].

COMMON SENSE LEARNERS need to figure out whether new ideas are rational and workable. They like testing theories in the real world to make sure they work. They are outcomes focussed, wanting to get the job done. They love to find solutions to problems. They are exceedingly practical. They learn best when combining learning with doing. “Until the late sixteenth century, ‘faith’ was a verb in the English language; to the Common Sense Learner it still is” [4].

DYNAMIC LEARNERS tend to be people of the gut feeling. They follow their hunches and sense new directions and possibilities. “These risk takers thrive on situations that call for flexibility and change and find real joy in starting something new, or putting their

personal stamp of originality on an idea” [4].

Each learning style fits into a distinct part of the learning process. The learning process can be described as a series of four steps. Firstly, a context for the learning must be set, from things that the learner already knows. What is being learnt needs to be connected to a real-life situation. Secondly, the new information is presented. Thirdly, the new content should be practiced, to see how it will work in real life. Finally, the learners take what has been learnt and use it beyond the teaching setting [4].

Imaginative learners are good at sharing from their past experience, helping to provide a context for learning (step 1). Analytic learners are looking for the new content (step 2). Common sense learners need to make sure what they have learnt makes sense and works (step 3). Dynamic learners find creative ways to use what has been learned (step 4) [4]. As each of the four types interact during the learning process, they help other people with their step in the learning process. For example, common sense learners help everyone else identify the practical application of Biblical values today [4].

Therefore the learning process can be designed around the four types of learners. “The lesson starts with Imaginative and moves to Analytic, then onto Common Sense, finally finishing with Dynamic. You can see how this logical progression works by looking at the questions each learning style group is best at answering” [1]. This could form the outline for a sermon, or could be applied more broadly within a service, or a collection of different learning activities for a corps community. Each learning style has a key question; **IMAGINATIVE** - *Why do I need to know this?* **ANALYTIC** - *What do I need to know?* **COMMON SENSE** - *How does this work?* **DYNAMIC** - *What can this become?*

For example, if teaching on the resurrection you would address the learning styles thus, firstly addressing the imaginative

INTELLIGENCE	CORE COMPONENTS	WAYS THAT CULTURES VALUE
LINGUISTIC	SENSITIVITY TO THE SOUNDS, STRUCTURE, MEANINGS, AND FUNCTIONS OF WORDS AND LANGUAGE	ORAL HISTORIES, STORYTELLING, LITERATURE
LOGICAL-MATHEMATICAL	SENSITIVITY TO, AND CAPACITY TO DISCERN, LOGICAL OR NUMERICAL PATTERNS; ABILITY TO HANDLE LONG CHAINS OF REASONING	SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERIES, MATHEMATICAL THEORIES, COUNTING AND CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS
SPATIAL	CAPACITY TO PERCEIVE THE VISUAL-SPATIAL WORLD ACCURATELY AND TO PERFORM TRANSFORMATIONS ON ONE'S INITIAL PERCEPTIONS	ARTISTIC WORKS, NAVIGATIONAL SYSTEMS, ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNS, INVENTIONS
BODILY-KINAESTHETIC	ABILITY TO CONTROL ONE'S BODY MOVEMENTS AND TO HANDLE OBJECTS SKILFULLY	CRAFTS, ATHLETIC PERFORMANCES, DRAMATIC WORKS, DANCE FORMS, SCULPTURE
MUSICAL	ABILITY TO PRODUCE AND APPRECIATE RHYTHM, PITCH, AND TIMBRE; APPRECIATION OF THE FORMS OF MUSICAL EXPRESSIVENESS	MUSICAL COMPOSITIONS, PERFORMANCES, RECORDINGS
INTERPERSONAL	CAPACITY TO DISCERN AND RESPOND APPROPRIATELY TO THE MOODS, TEMPERAMENTS, MOTIVATIONS, AND DESIRES OF OTHER PEOPLE	POLITICAL DOCUMENTS, SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS
INTRAPERSONAL	ACCESS TO ONE'S OWN "FEELING" LIFE AND THE ABILITY TO DISCRIMINATE AMONG ONE'S EMOTIONS; KNOWLEDGE OF ONE'S OWN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES	RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS, PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES, RITES OF PASSAGE
NATURALIST	EXPERTISE IN DISTINGUISHING AMONG MEMBERS OF A SPECIES; RECOGNISING THE EXISTENCE OF OTHER NEIGHBOURING SPECIES; AND CHARTING OUT THE RELATIONS, FORMALLY OR INFORMALLY, AMONG SEVERAL SPECIES	FOLK TAXONOMIES, HERBAL LORE, HUNTING RITUALS, ANIMAL SPIRIT MYTHOLOGIES

Table 1: Multiple Intelligences [5]

question of "Why do I need to know this?", Jesus' resurrection is important because it is a foretaste of what God wants to do for the whole of creation. Then to address the analytic question you would explain the historical details of Jesus' resurrection, perhaps emphasizing the bodily nature of his resurrection. Then to address the common sense question, you could look at 1 Corinthians 15, and the implications for our own resurrection and the new creation God is working to bring about. Finally, you would address the dynamic question of what does this mean for our daily lives now? What implications does this have for the value God places on our material bodies? Or indeed on the whole of creation?

MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCE

Multiple Intelligences is another way of understanding the differences in the ways people learn. Table 1 defines eight intelligences.

Multiple intelligences is not a "type theory" that determines a single type to define a person. Rather it "is a theory of cognitive functioning, and it proposes that each person has capacities in all eight intelligences" [5]. The eight intelligences can be developed, given the appropriate encouragement, enrichment and

instruction [5]. The eight intelligences interact with one another. No one functions in just one type. For example, "To cook a meal, one must read the recipe (linguistic), possibly divide the recipe in half (logical-mathematical), develop a menu that satisfies all members of a family (interpersonal), and placate one's own appetite as well (intrapersonal)" [5].

Using the example we discussed earlier of teaching on the resurrection, you could then use the intelligences to structure the activities and teaching methods. The learning styles help define content, the intelligences the methods used to communicate that content. So to teach on the resurrection:

1. **LINGUISTIC** – you may talk about the issue
2. **LOGICAL-MATHEMATICAL** – present the "scientific" evidence of the nature of the resurrection (e.g. that Jesus ate after his resurrection, and that Thomas touched him)
3. **SPATIAL** – get the corps to produce some artwork on the resurrection
4. **BODILY-KINAESTHETIC** – get the corps

members to poke their neighbour in the arm, and tell them, that is how material and bodily Jesus' resurrection was

5. **MUSICAL** – play some music that talks about resurrection, or if there are no words, that sounds initially sombre and then hopeful.
6. **INTERPERSONAL** – get corps members to discuss in groups the implications of the resurrection on family relationships. What does the resurrection mean for broken families?
7. **INTRAPERSONAL** – get corps members to reflect on what the resurrection means for them. For example, what implications does it have for any health challenges that they currently experience?
8. **NATURALIST** – have a corps excursion to a local site where there is environmental damage. Spend time reflecting on what the resurrection, and a theology of new creation, has for environmental issues. Start a corps community garden to promote sustainable living, in light of knowing that God plans to redeem all of creation.

NOTES

- 1 Dinkins L. *My Journey into the World of Narrative*. Momentum. 2008;Jan/Feb:30-34.
- 2 Keller D. *"Comiletics": Beyond the Monologic Model*. Taylor University; 2006.
- 3 Roberto J, Minkiewicz C. *Best Practices in Adult Faith Formation*. Lifelong Faith. 2007;Fall/Winter:1-12.
- 4 LeFever MD. *Learning Styles*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook; 1995.
- 5 Armstrong T. *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development; 2000.