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Abstract

Education based on the Jesuit value of *cura personalis*, "care for the whole person," requires approaches quite different from the "sit and get" formulas from academia's past (and sometimes the present). If learners are to master course content and develop ways to use course content to "do their lives better" and thus be in a better position to serve themselves, their families, and their communities better, learners must be actively engaged in the learning process. Learning styles theory and practice offer insights on how facilitators can structure learning sessions so that students participate in learning new things in active ways. This time-tested approach to designing instruction that helps learners better experience another Jesuit value, the *magis*—the "more" of learning, involves moving through a teaching/learning cycle that, at one time or another, meets the predominant learning styles in the class or course and actively engages students in the learning process. This approach also helps facilitators meet the challenge of designing course sessions that are lively and interactive and helps learners experience greater "unity of heart and mind", another Jesuit value.

"Telling is not teaching, and listening is not learning!"[1]

Introduction: Learning Styles

Learning styles theories provide a backdrop for designing instruction for the "whole person." Students[2] learn best in different ways, so it makes sense to design holistic instruction that meets varying learning styles. Using the Teaching/Learning Cycle[3] to do this allows students to spend part of instructional time learning in ways most comfortable for them. At the same time, designing instruction this ways allows students to stretch beyond their comfort zones and acquire new learning-to-learn skills. There are any number of learning style theories and theorists, but the Teaching/Learning Cycle I have adopted is based on the model developed by Bernice McCarthy.

Bernice McCarthy's "4MAT System"[4] based in part on David Kolb's extensive learning-styles research[5] classifies learners into four major styles. I have adapted these as follows: Style #1—Feelers; Style #2—Watchers; Style #3—Doers; and Style #4—Discoverers.

Learning Style #1—Feelers

Feelers ask the question, "Why?" Why should I learn this? Why is this important to learn? Why should I learn it from you? Why will this help me? Why should I do this? These are the "WIIFM." learners. In order to learn effectively, Feelers must answer the question, "What's in it for me?" Until this question is answered thoroughly, Feelers will continue to wonder why, and will fail to engage in the learning process.

Feelers believe, "Unless I know you care about me, I don't care about what you know." They are generally interested in experiencing greater "unity of mind and heart", a key Jesuit value.[6] It is crucial for Feelers to make connections in the classroom—connections with the facilitator, connections with other students, and connections

with the course material itself. They may typically be the students who approach the facilitator before or after class to ask questions or to get feedback about whether their work is correct. Feelers need and want the facilitator's approval and validation.

Learning Style #2—Watchers

Watchers, on the other hand, are the students for whom traditional schools were designed. Style #2 learners process information by "reflective observation."[7] Watchers learn best by listening to and watching the experts. They enjoy lectures or teacher-led discussions. They like to organize new learning into logical, sequential steps. Watchers are interested in learning things the "correct" way, and they may tend to think that there is a single correct answer to just about any question. They ask the question, "What?" What do you want me to learn? What will be on the test? What information is most important? What grade will I get? What expertise can I learn from you?

Learning Style #3—Doers

Doers, Style #3 in the classroom, have little patience for listening to knowledge, no matter how learned the speaker. In our classrooms, Doers, who process information by "abstract conceptualization,"[8] perpetually ask the questions "How?" "How does this work? How should I learn this? How can I use this? How do I make this practical? How can I apply this outside of class?" Doers are interested in using new learning in practical, precise ways. They may truly represent "contemplatives in action."[9] They learn best by doing, doing things themselves. They tend to be independent learners who need to feel that they are in charge of their own learning. They grow impatient with long lectures and have little use for theory unless they can see, almost immediately, how this theory translates into practice.

Learning Style #4—Discoverers

Discoverers are Style #4 Learners, who ask the question, "What if?" What will happen to these two ingredients if I mix them together? What will happen if I draw a picture instead of writing the paragraph the facilitator asked for? What are the limits of this or that? Discoverers glean disparate information from a variety of sources and synthesize it into new learning that they can call their own. Discoverers are excited about the possibilities for new learning. They think "outside the box" and learn best by trial-and-error.

Like Doers, Discoverers will become impatient with lengthy introductions or explanations. Discoverers just want to jump right into the learning experience. They are eager to create something, get feedback on what they have created, and use that feedback to improve their product or learning. Discovery and problem-based learning will work well with Discoverers, as the mystery of exploring uncharted or new territory appeals to them a great deal.

Learning Styles Summary

Learners with each of these styles—Feelers, Watchers, Doers, and Discoverers—can be found in all of our classrooms or online forums. No learning style is more or less positive than any other. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses. As facilitators, our role is to design teaching/learning time in order to focus, at least part of the time, on learners with each learning style. When we do, learners with a particular style have both the opportunity to learn in ways compatible with their styles, as well as in ways that stretch them out of their learning-style comfort zones. Teaching in this way empowers facilitators to teach more of the whole person and to engage students in much deeper learning.

Designing Instruction Using the Teaching/Learning Cycle

Using the teaching/learning cycle to design instructional time can help with the task of meeting the needs of learners with all four styles. As facilitators, we can integrate learning-styles-focused teaching techniques—and engage learners more thoroughly—when we follow a model like the teaching/learning cycle. Using the teaching/learning cycle involves the following tasks:

- ✓ Establish Purpose

- ✓ Facilitate Learning
- ✓ Provide Time for Organization
- ✓ Structure Time for Practice
- ✓ Provide Feedback
- ✓ Give Opportunities for Discovery
- ✓ Get Feedback

In some ways, there are certain parallels between parts of this model and that of noted Jesuit philosopher and theologian, Bernard Lonergan, known as "generalized empirical method," also known as "transcendental method."[10] According to Lonergan, people come to know and to act by moving through a cycle that has four elements:

Experiencing—What's involved?
Understanding—What does it mean?
Judging—Is it really true and good?
Deciding—What is to be done?

Establishing purpose and facilitating learning in the Teaching/Learning Cycle help students *experience* what it is they are going to learn. When they have time to organize new learning and information, this gives them an opportunity to determine what the new learning *really means*. Having time for practice lets them test whether what they're learning is *really true*. And opportunities for discovery give them a chance to *decide what to do*. The first step in the Teaching/Learning Cycle is to establish purpose.

Establish Purpose

If we establish a clear *purpose for learning* at the beginning of each class or online session, Feelers will not have to grapple all session long with "WIIFM." Establishing purpose entails telling students what our objectives are for the learning session and for asking them what their objectives are as well. Our objectives can be posted on the board or on a computer screen or in the introduction of each week in an online course. We can give students a purpose for listening or a guiding question(s) or essential questions that they can try to answer as information is presented and discussed.

Establishing purpose also involves assessing what students already know. This assessment can be accomplished by administering a brief pre-test or by asking students questions like, What experience have you had with _____? Have you used _____ before? What do you know about _____ from your previous experience? Such activities begin the process of engaging students in the learning process.

Facilitate Learning

Once a clear purpose for learning has been established facilitating learning is the next step in the teaching/learning cycle. It is much easier for us to learn something if we have some idea about what it is. Feelers and Watchers profit most if teachers use teacher-centered (lecture, teacher-led discussion, demonstration, PowerPoint presentations, videotapes, audiotapes) methods to introduce new learning. Doers and Discoverers will prefer to access information through learner-centered (role-play, hands-on, simulation, student-led discussion, student lectures, collaborative learning, student demonstration, case-study, problem-based) instructional approaches.

This is the time during a class or session that we introduce what it is that we want students to learn. As you can see from the above, lecture is only one of a number of methods that can be used to introduce new information or practices.

Provide Time for Organization

The next step of the teaching/learning cycle, providing time for organization**,** helps students process new information. Remember that brain research tells us that students cannot both pay attention and learn at the same time. Once they've paid attention during the time when new learning was introduced, they now need time to process and integrate this information. In order to organize what has been presented earlier, students can construct mind maps (pictorial, relational depictions of information) or fill-in teacher or student-prepared mind maps. Students can be asked to prepare outlines of a procedure or process, discuss these with a classmate, and then write a summary of their learning in their own words. Students can construct a Prezi or PowerPoint presentation.

Since learners remember 90 percent of "what they do and say," contrasted with only 10 percent of "what they read"; 20 percent of "what they hear"; or 30 percent of "what they see,"[11] the more students do and say with the new learning, the more apt they are to retain it and make it their own.

Structure Time for Practice

Once students have had a chance to organize what they are learning in ways that make sense to them, they next need a chance to practice using what they have learned. Guided practice, independent practice, small-group work, problem-solving, short quizzes or questions, or other strategies that require students to use what they have organized will help cement their learning. Doers and Discoverers will enjoy properly-designed practice, since they prefer to learn by doing and by trial-and-error.

Provide Feedback

As students practice, or as soon after the practice as possible, learners will need constructive, specific, behavior-focused feedback about their practice**.** Feedback can come from the facilitator or from other students. Rubrics provide a useful tool for giving students feedback. Students can use rubrics to self-assess their practice, get feedback from their peers, and get feedback from the facilitator.

Give Opportunities for Discovery

When students are comfortable that they are making appropriate meaning through constructive feedback, they are ready to discover how their new learning can be used in other ways or different settings. In other words, they are ready for a "solo flight" with their new learning. "Solo flights" can be taken through homework assignments, in- or out-of-class projects, follow-up assignments or through any activity that causes learners to apply knowledge to new situations. Discoverers will be especially comfortable with this portion of the teaching/learning cycle.

Get Feedback

One of the most powerful tools I've used over the years to get feedback about instructional time is an adaptation of the "Minute Paper."[12] Getting feedback from students provides me with crucial information about what they learned and/or what they still have questions about. At the end of an instructional session, I ask students to anonymously answer these questions:

1. What was the most important, interesting, or unexpected thing you learned during this session?

2. What helped you learn this, or what prevented you from learning this?

3. What questions do you still have about anything we discussed or did?

4. What else would you like me to know?

Getting answers to these questions provides me with valuable information about what/how students did or did not learn. I generally begin the next class session by addressing any questions that students wrote that they had.

Final Thoughts

As facilitators, we may move completely around the teaching/learning cycle one or more times during a single learning session, several times in a week, or in an instructional unit. What matters most is that we move around the teaching/learning cycle—that we structure teaching and learning in ways that engage the whole student. By doing so, we give students with all learning styles an opportunity to experience learning in their preferred mode. At the same time, we also cause students to work in styles less comfortable for them. This makes them more comfortable with varying teaching and learning situations, enhances their flexibility, and helps augment their learning-to-learn skills. It also helps students do much more than just memorize; it helps students learn! After all, learning is one key to enhancing not only what we know, but also what we do.

Notes

[1] Cynthia Barnes, "Teaching for a Change: The Faculty Development Program." Unpublished manuscript for Community College of Aurora, Aurora, Colorado, 1994.

[2] Some may argue rightly that "students" could be distinguished from "learners", but in this article, I use the terms interchangeably.

[3] Cynthia Barnes, "Teaching/Learning Cycle," unpublished manuscript developed for faculty induction, Community College of Aurora, Aurora, Colorado, 1989.

[4] Bernice McCarthy, *The 4MAT System: Teaching to learning styles with right/left model technique,* Oak Brook, IL: EXCEL, 1981.

[5] D. A Kolb, *Learning Style Inventory,* Boston: McBer & Co., 1976.

[6] Regis University's "Tradition" booklet that outlines its educational philosophy states, "Jesuit education is value-oriented. Values bring meaning to life and provide motives for action, and they involve one's mind and heart, one's whole person." Richard W. Dunphy, S.J., *Tradition: Our Intellectual, Ethical and Religious Foundations* (Denver, CO: Regis University, n.d.), 25.

[7] D. A Kolb, *Learning Style Inventory,* Boston: McBer & Co., 1976.

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] This was a characteristic of the early Jesuits, and a quality that students at Jesuit institutions are often encouraged to adopt. As James Martin notes, "While Ignatius counseled his Jesuits always to carve out time for prayer, they were expected to lead active lives…. [T]hey were to be active people who adopted a contemplative, or meditative, stance toward the world. To be 'contemplatives in action.'" James Martin, S.J., *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 8.

[10] Bernard Lonergan, S.J., *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973), 11-12.

[11] Vernon A. Magnesen, "A Review of Findings from Learning and Memory Retention Studies," *Innovation Abstracts* 5, no. 25 (1983): 3.

[12] Thomas A. Angelo and K. Patricia Cross, *Classroom Assessment Techniques*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993).

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