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EDU 519 SP 08 HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

Learning Styles Essay

Learning Styles Essay:

Gregorc's Learning Styles and Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory

Gregorc's Learning Styles and Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory are theories I can use to assess how I personally learn. These theories reveal how my learning styles and intelligences may differ from the students I teach. (Woolfolk, 2008, pp. 122-137).

"Learning preferences are often called learning styles." (Woolfolk, 2008, p. 134). A learning style implements additional tools for assessing a student's preferred method of learning. For example, as part of my final project for the Educational Assessment class in which I am currently enrolled, I am assessing my own note-taking learning styles and preferences. By utilizing various note-taking strategies and organizers, I hope to determine which strategies best meet my personal preferences and styles of learning. My research involves locating and testing various strategies and organizers designed to build note-taking skills. When taking notes for the Educational Assessment course, I actually use the various strategies and organizers I am researching. My goal is to determine what strategies or organizers work best for my personal note-taking learning styles and preferences, while also building my personal note-taking skills. I have yet to draw a final conclusion; however, I have determined that I seem to grasp more about a text when I use a concept web for note-taking along with reading the text. I then use bullet-style notes to summarize my final thoughts. Thus far, I have determined that reading and taking notes in this manner, best enables me retain the information I have read.

To determine a learning preference, I may simply question whether a student learns best while: working with a group, studying alone, using text or pictures, or learning in a structured or unstructured environment. I have always been a person who asks a lot of questions. I also have always been a person who is very outgoing and enjoys social interaction. I prefer to work in a

group structure, so that I can discuss the things I have learned. An environment which is too structured, and does not allow for any interaction with others, is not my preferred method of learning. The use of text along with pictures, also works best for me. For example, when putting together a piece of furniture, I prefer written directions along with pictures to understand how things fit together. I also prefer text with pictures when reading, as I enjoy visualizing what is being described. The use of text along with pictures, may not work well with some types of text. My preference is, however, this combination of text and pictures. In the classroom, a person's preference can be adjusted to what the teacher determines is best for the classroom as a whole. Learning styles can be adjusted to what works best for the individual student.

The Theory of Gregorc's Learning Styles investigates what "characteristic approaches to learning and studying" (Woolfolk, 2008, p. 137) best fit the student's needs. I strongly disagree with the outcome of the research cited in Woolfolk's text: "The reason researchers roll their eyes at learning styles research is the utter failure to find that assessing children's learning styles and matching to instructional methods has any effect on their learning." (Woolfolk, 2008, p. 134). If I agreed with this statement, why would I be conducting my own research on the relationship between my personal learning styles and note-taking skills? It is important for a person to understand what their personal learning styles are. How can we learn to improve our skills if we do not understand what works best for us? I selected this type of self-assessment to learn more about my own learning styles. Once I understand how to help myself, I can then model strategies which will help my students assess their own learning styles to build their note-taking skills. I am conducting this experiment because I have found a correlation between learning styles and instructional methods. My personal learning style requires use of creative and

flexible methods of instruction. I am easily distracted when reading text which is very intense. To accurately interpret a difficult text when reading, I also need structure. For example, my note-taking skills seem to increase when I use graphic organizers that combine the creativity of a concept web and structure of bullet-style notes. I value the Theory of Gregorc's Learning Styles, and acknowledge the relevance between a student's performance in school, and how it is impacted by various learning preferences and styles. It is up to the educator to differentiate their lesson plans to accommodate the way various students learn and study.

The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium Standards (INTASC), Principle #3 states, "The teacher understands how students differ in their approaches to learning and creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners." (INTASC, 1992). If a teacher expects to meet the standard of knowledge and performance levels set forth in this principle, it is important to understand and apply the Theory of Gregorc's Learning Styles.

An example of how a teacher could apply Gregorc's theory and differentiate instruction would be through the use of tiered graphic organizers. I recently examined this strategy while reviewing an article titled, *Different Routes to the Same Destination: Drawing Conclusions With Tiered Graphic Organizers*. Graphic Organizers are designed on three levels of complexity such as: introductory, intermediate and challenging. The teacher would format each organizer so that there is a logical sequence to help students draw a conclusion to what is being read or studied. (McMakin & Witherell, 2005, pp. 242-252).

The use of tiered graphic organizers is a strategy I will incorporate into my method of classroom instruction once I begin teaching. Use of this strategy would enable me to meet the needs of students in my classroom whose learning styles differ from my own. I may prefer one particular type of graphic organizer; however, this strategy requires that I design several graphic organizers best suited for the needs of my students. Recently while substitute teaching, I was provided an opportunity to instruct and observe how the tiered graphic organizer strategy could be adapted to meet the learning styles and preferences of students.

On Friday, February 8, 2008, while substitute teaching in a 7th grade science class, I was able to follow the instructions left by the teacher, and also provide additional instruction to build note-taking skills. The teacher had left instructions for the students to “take out a piece of paper, takes notes and write 10 interesting facts” about what they observed while watching a video. This was an opportune time for me to introduce this class to at least one note-taking strategy. On the chalkboard I demonstrated the use a concept web for note-taking. Several students asked if they could use bullet-style or simply list things as a method of taking notes. I told them that any of these note-taking strategies would be fine. At the end of class, I collected the papers from each student and was elated see that all of the students did a great job taking notes. I commended the students on a job well done! There were various adaptations to the concept web approach I had demonstrated, and also to the bullet and listing styles used by several students. I noticed that some students drew pictures to go along with their “10 interesting facts.” My conclusion is that each student has their own learning style. Through differentiation of various note-taking strategies or methods, I obtained a high level of interest and participation from the students in this classroom. I also observed that all of the students had done as I

requested, and completed the assignment in detail. My assessment would be that the students learned what their teacher had hoped they would learn; however, my additional instruction provided students a choice of note-taking methods to meet their specific learning style. What pleased me most was confirmed after I reviewed the student's notes. The students understood the assignment, and had learned "10 interesting facts." I have attached three note-taking examples from this group of students for your review.

Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory is absolutely intriguing. I loved the statement, "At the heart of the MI perspective—in theory and in practice—[is] taking human difference seriously." (Woolfolk, 2008, p. 127). I completely agree with Gardner's Theory that the quality or state of the environment in which a person is raised, lives, or works directly correlates to their "mental abilities." (Woolfolk, 2008, p. 126). The characteristics which make up the person I am today are the result of the environment in which I was raised, have worked, and have lived. I appreciate the way Gardner suggests that "there are at least eight separate intelligences: linguistic (verbal), musical, spatial, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic (movement), interpersonal (understanding others), intrapersonal (understanding self), and naturalist (observing and understanding natural and human-made patterns and systems)." (Woolfolk, 2008, p. 126). I also agree with Gardner, that we all have general abilities.

I was so fascinated by Gardner's theory, that I found a website where I was able to test myself. I scored highest in the area of interpersonal and the results of my personal evaluation read as follows:

A Short Definition of your Highest Score

Interpersonal - the ability to organize people and to communicate clearly what needs to be done, to use empathy to help others and to solve problems, to discriminate and interpret among different kinds of interpersonal clues, and to influence and inspire others to work toward a common goal. Possible vocations that use the interpersonal intelligence include administrator, manager, politician, social worker, doctor, nurse, therapist, teacher, sociologist, psychologist, psychotherapist, consultant, charismatic leader, politician, and evangelist.

(Multiple Intelligences, n.d.)

When I examined the results of my Multiple Intelligences Personal Evaluation, there was at least a 5 point difference between the area of interpersonal and any other area. My lowest score was in the area of logical-mathematical. When I compare my personal evaluation of Gardner's Multiple Intelligences to Gregorc's Learning Styles, the theories seem to connect. I would conclude that my learning style falls somewhere between "abstract random and concrete random." (Gregorc, n.d.). My learning style is a combination of Gregorc's abstract and concrete random. I am very sociable when learning involves group situations. I am also slightly independent when learning and problem solving requires that I use my intuition. (Gregorc, n.d.). I disagree with Gregorc's statement, "Although all people have both concrete and abstract perceptual abilities to some extent, each person is usually comfortable using one more than the other." (Gregorc, n.d.). I am comfortable using both my concrete and abstract perceptual abilities and strengths. What "natural strengths" (Gregorc, n.d.) I use to communicate are

determined by the environment I am in at a particular moment. My ability to feel comfortable and “communicate in a direct, literal, no-nonsense manner” or “more subtle ways to get a point across” (Gregorc, n.d.), may be due to the years of training I have had as a sales professional. My ability to adjust and communicate effectively in various environments, with various people, seems very natural, and part of my communication style. My recent self-reflection using Gardner’s and Gregorc’s theories, closely reflect what I had already determined about myself.

Upon completing the multiple intelligence self-test shown above, I found it interesting that I already use the word interpersonal to describe myself on my resume. My resume states:

Professional offering 20 years of experience with a track record of success through development of leadership and interpersonal skills while building and maintaining long term relationships. Successful ability to meet goals as well as identify and develop new opportunities when presented. Firm belief in loyalty, ethics, character and perseverance while maintaining an attitude of handling myself with the utmost of excellence given whatever task is put before me.

In conclusion, both Gregorc’s Learning Styles and Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence Theory are important for educators to understand. I have learned that the most important thing to consider when meeting the needs of students in a classroom is to recognize that we all have different learning styles and abilities. It is important to differentiate instruction so that student’s various styles and abilities can best be met. The motto for the insurance business which I own is, “I Sell Health Insurance Designed to Meet Your Specific Needs.” As a teacher I would revise this to say, “I Teach in a Manner Designed to Meet Your Specific Needs.”

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