

Which Teaching Method Should You Use? (4/15/09)

If you're already this far along, congratulations!

Now that you've been versed on various aspects of homeschool, the next thing you need to define is the best teaching method for your student.

And really, when you are asking about the best teaching method to fit your child, you're really asking yourself what learning style your child favors the most. When you know and understand your child's learning style, then it will be much easier to determine the best teaching method for her.

Learning Styles

Before we start, you may have noticed there are numerous psychologists with important looking papers who have identified the various learning styles of children in their own insightful sounding way - LSI, ELT, learning models with multiple levels characterized by dynamic hierarchies and cycles (whatever that means) - it's enough to throw your hands up in the air and forget about the whole thing, or leave you wondering whether you should earn a psychology major before even thinking about doing *anything* with your child.

Not to worry, because you can actually determine the learning style of your child by yourself without (gasp!) any assistance from psychologists. So, let's put the academic research papers down and approach this from the parent's viewpoint (a parent assessing her child's behavior instead of a licensed professional?! What a fantastic concept!).

The true "secret" behind determining your child's learning style really comes down to nothing more than what you think, based on years of interacting with your child - I've listed these below:

1. Visual - Best understands new concepts and instructions by "seeing" what is being taught. Reinforcement of new concepts is learned best by drawing on paper to illustrate the new concept and using visual aids to respond to the child's follow-up questions.
2. Auditory - Best understands new concepts and instructions by hearing about the concept. Reinforcement of new concepts is learned best by your child asking you to repeat the concept and by asking follow-up questions (and follow-up questions to her follow-up questions).
3. Tactile - Best understands new concepts and instructions by using props. Reinforcement of new concepts is learned best by your child using those same props to illustrate her follow-up questions.

Based on the explanations above, don't think you have an odd kid if your child demonstrates more than 1 or even all 3 of the styles above, children usually do. However, (and here's the rub) your mission is to find out if there are any "regions of dominance" of learning styles when your child is learning a given subject. For example, which style prevails when learning to read or do math? How about history or science? And this is exactly where your ability as a parent can outrank any hoity poity research. Because what you are doing is identifying *by subject* which learning style prevails for your child.

Still Confused?

“What if I still don’t have clue?” you ask.

No problemo. Cobble samples of any subject you want to teach and teach it to your child – just make sure you have a representative sample of visual, auditory, and tactile curriculum. Then assess which style your child favors most.

“But will I confuse my child if I do this?” you ask.

Your child is way more resilient than you think. A lesson here or there to assess her learning style for each subject won’t destroy her chances of getting into college. And your mileage from determining the learning style of your child will go a long way to avoiding unnecessary frustration down the line – so it’s totally worth it to proceed this way if you don’t know yet your child’s learning style.

So now that you’ve determined your child’s learning style, the next step is to customize the best teaching method to fit her learning style.

Again, no rocket science here – just apply the best teaching method to match your child’s learning style. For example, if your child is prominently tactile in math, then bring out the counting teddy bears, shapes, and Lego blocks, to allow your child to “touch” (and sometimes eat, in the case of M&Ms) each math problem. If your child is primarily auditory in reading, make sure you have a clear voice to emphasize repeating consonant, vowel, and blending sounds for each lesson. If your child is primarily visual and tactile in science, you better be prepared to get a little dirty when explaining by actually getting out to the environment (if possible) appropriate for the subject matter and pointing to the science happening in that environment (and touching it too, as long as its not harmful to your child). Anyway, you get the idea.

To those who wanted more out of this article, I’m afraid there isn’t more to this since it really is a simple and quick process to determine your child’s learning style so that you can then apply the best teaching method for her. And always remember, you don’t need the academics to tell you how to classify your child’s learning style, you can do it better than they can – hands down.

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