

COOL TOOLS FOR SABBATH SCHOOL

Learning Styles in Sabbath School

A bull in a china shop. A sunrise. A natural disaster. A civil war. A wondrous journey. A toothache. A flowering fruit tree. Involuntary confinement. A UFO abduction. A great party. A long nap. Which of these phrases best describes the majority of your experience at school?

A survey of any group would show that someone identifies with each of the phrases. Why do you imagine this is?

Think now of what in your religious education made the biggest impression on you as a child. It may have been the relationship with a special teacher or a parent. Perhaps it was the lessons and memory verses. Or maybe you were allowed to be active, maybe with music or the sandbox or by dressing up as a Bible character.

We're Not Carbon Copies or Even Scans

We each approach learning in a slightly different way. In the early 1970s David Kolb identified two dimensions of learning: perceiving and processing. These are like lenses through which we “see” or take in information and make meaning out of it. The work of Dr. Kolb and many other researchers in various fields has been synthesized to establish four learning preferences and a method for using all four in a complete learning cycle.

How does this work? Just as we connect with objects first depending on whether we are right-handed or left-handed, we each initially perceive information as “thinkers” or “feelers.” (See Illustration 1.) While feelers see first with intuition, thinkers see first with intellect. Feelers learn from experience, while thinkers learn by identifying concepts.

Feelers are more concrete; thinkers are more abstract. Feelers see the big picture; thinkers see the component parts. Feelers make connections; thinkers make distinctions. Imagine a vertical continuum with “Experiencing, Sensing/Feeling” on one end and “Thinking, Conceptualizing” on the other. The individual learner falls somewhere along the continuum in how they first perceive information or situations.

After learners have perceived the information, they then process it. And again, they tend to do this in one of two ways—either by reflecting on it or by doing something with it. (See Illustration 2.) Reflectors step back and take a long look, imagining it first and observing how it works. They need time to ease into it. Doers, on the other hand, dive right in, learning by doing and trying it out. They need to get started. The individual learner falls somewhere on this horizontal continuum between “Active, Doing” on the one side, and “Reflective, Observing” on the other when it comes to how they process new information.

ILLUSTRATION 1 HOW WE PERCEIVE

*Experiencing
Sensing/Feeling
Intuition*

*Conceptualizing
Thinking
Intellect*

Four Learning Styles

Looking at these two continuums together, one overlaying the other (see Illustration 3), we can see how four basic learning styles or preferences emerge (crossed lines with numbers 1 through 4 in the various quadrants).

Why? Those who perceive information first through experience or feeling and then process it by reflective observation make up this group. They ask “Why should we learn this?” of a new learning experience.

What? Those who perceive information first through thinking and conceptualizing and then process it by

reflective observation are part of learning style 2. They ask the question “What is it we need to learn?”

How? The learners who first perceive information by thinking and conceptualizing, but then who jump right in and do something in order to process it learn best in learning style 3. They ask the question “How does this work?”

What if? And finally, those who perceive first through experience or feeling and then process by



jumping right in and doing something with it function with learning style 4. They ask the open-ended question “What would happen if . . . ?” or “What could this become?”

Learning Audiences

When preparing a presentation, whether it is a Sabbath School lesson, a program, or a mission appeal, we can think of having these four types of people in the audience:

Friends—

Learning Style 1.

They need an emotional hook, a personal story, or an opportunity for sharing and relating the topic to themselves and to others.

Professors—Learning Style 2. They want facts, information, quotations, and drills.

Scientists—Learning Style 3. They like to reason with the information and apply it. They want concepts and opportunities to process the data.

Inventors—Learning Style 4. They want to adapt, modify, and extend the concept. They need opportunities for creative self-expression. They need to do something with what they have learned.

How We Know

Different people tend to need different things from a Sabbath School presentation in order connect most effectively with the concepts being shared. (See Illustration 4.)

Let’s review those styles by describing how four people with those four different styles would approach retiling a floor:

- Style 1 learners would have perceived that the floor needed retiling while they were mopping or waxing it. They would have processed this information by going to the store for a book or a video on retiling, which they would have thoughtfully read or watched the next Sunday.

- Style 2 learners would have perceived that they needed to retiling their floor while reading an article in a magazine at the dentist’s office on how to raise the resale value of a home. Like style 1 learners, they would have also processed the information by going to the store for a book or a video on retiling, which they would have thoughtfully read or viewed the next Sunday.

- Style 3 learners would have perceived the need for retiling by reading the same article as the style 2 learners, but instead of going to the store for a book, they would have gone for supplies and would have begun the retiling

job that very afternoon.

- Style 4 learners would have perceived the need of retiling while mopping or waxing, just as the style 1 learners did, but they would have gone and bought the supplies and started right in, just as the style 3 learners did.

It is not an overwhelming task to incorporate this knowledge of your audience’s learning styles into your next presentation. In reality, answering the learning question of each of the styles, in order, creates the outline for a balanced and appropriately structured communication. No matter which learning styles your hearers prefer, they will be connected most thor-

oughly to the knowledge you are trying to share if they are connected to it in all four ways. In other words, decide on the central concept of what you are presenting. Boil it down to one main point. Then proceed style by style around the whole learning cycle.

Step One: Help learners connect the concept to their experience. Create a reason for them to

know it. Open their hearts to the idea. Answer “Why do we need to learn this?”

Step Two: Teach the concept to them. It should be logical, sequential, and clear. This is what most peo-

ILLUSTRATION 2

HOW WE PROCESS

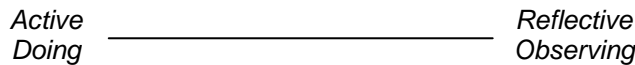
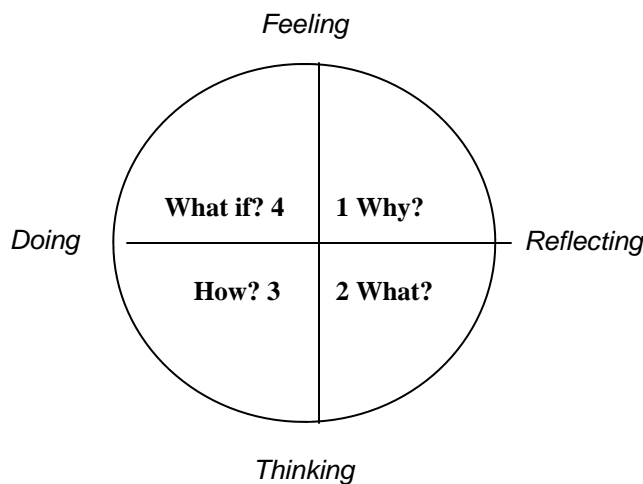


ILLUSTRATION 3



Step One: Help learners connect the concept to their experience. Create a reason for them to

know it. Open their hearts to the idea. Answer “Why do we need to learn this?”

Step Two: Teach the concept to them. It should be logical, sequential, and clear. This is what most peo-

ple have been taught that teaching is. Help the learners understand. Answer “What is it we need to learn?”

Step Three: Let learners try out the idea, conceptualize how it would work, test and personalize it. Let them respond. Answer “How does this work in my life?” When teachers fail to get this far in the lesson, learners may build up a backlog of information—if they can’t see meaningful application for their lives.

Step Four: Help learners add value to the concept, practice it. Help them integrate it into their lives. Answer “What could this become?” In this fourth part of the learning cycle, learners integrate what they’ve learned and create newness out of it. This is sometimes referred to as “insight.” This is the point at which spiritual maturity can happen.

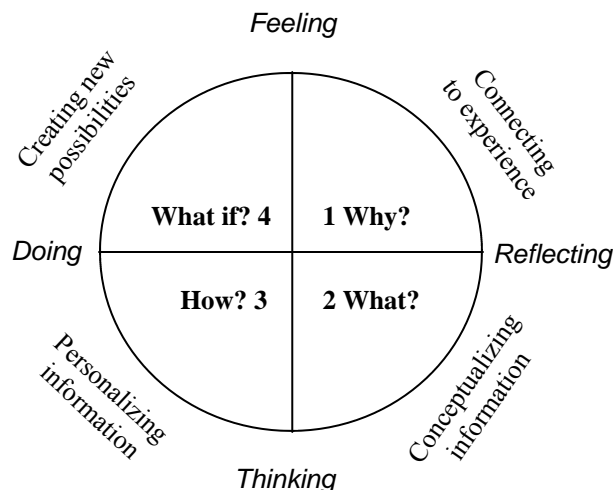
By taking these four steps, you not only will have spoken to every style of learner in your audience, but you also will have communicated with all the learners

in a manner that makes use of the way that God created our brains to learn. Unless we facilitate people’s complete learning cycle, helping them to exercise *all* of their mental “muscles,” we cannot build the character and maturity that testifies to the God of heaven.

Remember John 4:24. God wants us to worship Him in spirit and in truth—in experiencing and in

thinking, in our hearts and in our minds.

ILLUSTRATION 4



Kathy Beagles

