Learning Style and The Special Needs Child

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In order for a teacher to teach their students well they need to know their students and their learning styles. They need to know the best strategies of teaching in order to help them to become better learners. When the teacher accommodates their teaching to those students helps to level the playing field in the classroom. Leveling the playing field gives special education students a better chance of being successful inside and outside the classroom. Students, especially younger students, do not know or recognize their learning styles and therefore it is the educator’s job to find those preferred styles and help accommodate their teaching to those styles (VanKlaveren, K., Buckland, T., & Williamson, J. (2002). Once students realize their learning style and know how to make things fit their needs, they will become more proficient learners.

People choose to discover new ideas and opinions through their own learning style. A person’s learning style is developed through how a person feels that they learn best. When dealing with various spectrums of the learning environment, two theories are developed that address the ideals of perception, intellect, and personality. These ideals are discussed by Willing (2008) through the categories of field independent and field dependent learners. Willing discovered that people differ from each other in the way they “perceive both their environment and themselves” (Town, 1993). People who are either field dependent or field independent differ in human relations, learning styles, and information processing.

Students with disabilities may hide their personalities as well because they don’t want to come across as unintelligent to their peers. Students with disabilities may be as bright as their peers it just takes them more time to process information and get the correct answers out. Educators should develop strategies for students with disabilities that allow the students to interact with the rest of the class (York, 2008). Some strategies may be as simple as standing directly in front of the student when they are going to be called on or providing a clue word that informs the student that they are going to be next. Simple strategies such as these can provide a better learning environment for students with disabilities, which allow them to express their personality in the learning choices they make.

Students with autism thrive in environments that provide structure. The language learning classroom may be structured a certain way, but the structure of language itself is ambiguous and may cause for difficulty in language learning for these students. Teaching students with autism to communicate is often done through prompting, which involves the teacher saying a phrase and the student repeating the phrase. This type of structured learning may work well for beginning language/communication skills, but educators should strive to wean students off prompting and teach them to speak at their own will. Along with difficulty in communicating, students with autism also have problems with social activities and events. The ambiguity of language may pose more of a problem in social events because the students are unable to decipher how to act and response to the language of others. Providing these students with social stories is a strategy that allows the students to see a social event taking place in
the story, and helps them learn how to react in that event.

Every student’s brain functions differently and processes information differently. Due to this, students have different types of learning style. Once the teacher can understand the disability and the preferred learning styles of the student, they can better adapt to that student.

Teachers need to learn strategies to increase student achievement in order to help them function at the same level as their peers. When students know how to change things into the format that they learn best, students can fully take charge of their education. If educators can teach students to be more reflective about their learning and actions, they can retain more information. When students are reflective about what they do in the classroom and how it affects other students then impulsive behaviors will diminish, which makes for a more conducive learning environment. The more flexible students are about the things that happen around them, the more focused they can be on the important information (Ehrman and Leaver, 2003). For example, if an autistic student needs to stay after school to make up a test, then they might get thrown off by the upcoming change in their daily schedule and not be able to focus their attention on what is important in the classroom.

Student’s whose learning styles are more versatile and utilize many different types of learning styles will be more proficient learners (Zhao, 2007). If a student thinks they are just an auditory learner and believe that they cannot learn any other way, then they are not going to. Student’s need to be open to new experiences and be willing to try learning and using different learning styles even if it is not their preferred one.

Considering the learning styles of English speakers of other languages (ESOL) is very important in the classroom. Since ESOL students do not know how to read or speak very well they are usually visual learners. Showing them pictures of different things as they are learning English can help them to pick up the language faster. If the teacher thinks the student needs to use the bathroom they can show them a picture of a bathroom and ask in English if they need use the bathroom. This will help them associate the words with the object or thing.

Every person has different ways of processing and storing information. Students with disabilities often have a disability because they do not learn the same way other students do. When the teacher is knowledgeable about these different ways of processing they are able to show students patterns and different strategies to help them learn. This is not only helpful to student with disabilities but also regular education students. Just because one student does not learn the same way as another student does not mean that they are any less intelligent. It is the teacher’s job to tap into that intelligence and find different ways for the students to express themselves.

According to Piaget, cognitive change takes place only when previous conceptions go through a process of disequilibration in the light of new information (Gruber & Van Ecke, 1977). Learners make sense of the new information by attempting to assimilate it into existing knowledge. When determining what subject content to cover in the classroom, the teacher will need to determine what skills the student will need in future classes to determine its importance, as well as, to what previous material one can relate the lesson to create knowledge (Sze & Cowden, 2009). If a learner is unsuccessful at assimilating the information, they will accommodate it by restructuring their present knowledge (Slavin, 2007). Rather than having students memorize the lesson, learning needs to incorporate the students past experiences into the classroom. It is the learning which makes a child most happy in themselves that also makes them most likely to succeed (Sze & Cowden, 2009). For the learner, this concept remains relevant. It is important to teach students how to make what we are learning fit to their
learning style. If a student is a visual learner, encourage them to draw a picture in order to help them solve a word problem. If they are an auditory learner, they may want to read a question aloud to themselves in order to help them understand the problem. The first step in order to help students help themselves is to have them identify their learning style. Once they know their learning style they can start to learn ways to change what they are learning to accommodate them.

References
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