

Good example of essay on pedagogy and learning styles: an uncomfortable relations...

[Psychology](#), [Behaviorism](#)



Have learning styles changed over time? If we think about Gardner's multiple intelligences, or the range of learning styles that have been identified since the second half of the twentieth century, some might say 'yes'. But, in fact, people have not changed so drastically since the institutionalization of formal schooling in the 18th Century, or since the onset of the Internet generation (otherwise known as the Millennials). What has enabled the genesis of learning styles to emerge is a better understanding of pedagogy. For far too long the only way to learn was through the sage on the stage modality. Students sat in rows and obediently absorbed what the teacher said, or wrote on the chalk board. Times have changed, but not as radically, or successfully, as some desire.

This paper aims to compare and contrast the evolution of pedagogical thought since the early twentieth century to present day. This presentation will allow for an opening into the window of learning styles. The argument to be made is that variance in learning styles have always existed, yet the formal school system has been rather inflexible in identifying this. The paper will conclude with some thoughts on inadequacies in regards to recognizing individuals, ethnicities, and their learning styles.

Three types of pedagogy

Pedagogy can be divided into three major branches. Each has succeeded the other in terms of perceived sophistication, although in present day, we see predominantly the second branch in formal schooling. The other two exist on the fringes, yet there is a near consensus among educationists that society needs the third branch instilled in schools more than ever. Let's begin with the first branch.

Behaviorism is most famously associated with famed psychologist, by B. F. Skinner (1968). Behaviorism posits that students are required to master particular subject content and absorb certain behaviours that are conducive to being a good citizen. This can be otherwise characterized as a transmission model of learning (Miller & Sellers 42). Children were understood as empty vessels awaiting for knowledge to be poured in to their minds. Once full, they are ready for adulthood. Despite its continued popularity in mainstream schooling, the behaviorist approach is problematic as it ignores the historical and political contexts of social reality. There is a troubling attempt to utilize schools as mechanisms for social conformity and that students are passive recipients of knowledge (Giroux & Penna 213). The constructivist approach or transaction model of learning views the student as an active participant in the creation of knowledge, rather than as a passive recipient as articulated in the behaviorist model (Miller & Seller 65). In this context, formal schooling should engage students in the processes of problem-solving and dialogue. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development suggests that children are independent thinkers, rather than empty vessels, and carry the capacity to create knowledge; a process that is accelerated through social interaction, particularly with the proximal tutelage of an individual who possesses more lived experience (Vygotsky 211). Detractors lament that whereby students are positioned to construct meaning from their interactions with the natural and social environment, they remain oblivious to the dominant voices that mandate the school structure and course curriculum, and therefore perpetuate inequality through their subservience to the status quo (Giroux & Penna, 214).

The third branch is labelled as critical pedagogy or the transformation model of learning. Its main impetus is to reconcile the apolitical shortcomings of behaviorism and constructivism by acknowledging that schools function to reproduce economic, cultural and social inequalities (Giroux & Penna 214). In the school context critical pedagogy functions to build awareness and to strive to change the improprieties that are prevalent in society. Giroux describes critical pedagogy as, “ the importance of linking pedagogy to social change, connecting critical learning to the experiences and histories that students brought to the classroom, and engaging the space of schooling as a site of contestation, resistance, and possibility” (Giroux 6). To counteract the perceived injustices in society it is necessary to first identify how a particular educational setting is connected to these societal forces. By recognizing the existing divisions that exist in society along lines of race, gender, class, orientation, etc., this approach advocates for social change and justice by identifying and replacing those structures that maintain and reproduce these divisions.

Learning Styles

There are a range of theorists who have identified a compendium of learning styles (e. g., Kolb and Fleming). Yet few have garnered more attention than Gardiner’s multiple intelligences. It is perceived as the most comprehensive and accurate depiction of individuality as it relates to learning. Gardiner’s multiple intelligences are listed as follows: Visual-Spatial; Bodily-kinesthetic; Musical; Interpersonal; Intrapersonal; Linguistic; Logical-Mathematical; Naturalistic; Existential. Among his most famous books, the *Unschooled Mind*

stands out. He suggests that all individuals possess these nine intelligences, although we express them differently. In regards to the education system, he asserts that schools are improperly structured. The conventional methods of teaching and assessment favor the linguistic and logical-quantitative intelligences (Gardner 104). He argues that " The broad spectrum of students - and perhaps society as a whole - would be better served if disciplines could be presented in a number of ways and learning could be assessed through a variety of means." (Gardner 105).

If we consider the application of one of three pedagogies (or some combination) to Gardner's multiple intelligences we are left a bit flat footed. The method to proceed seems far removed from any of the pedagogical approaches mentioned. At the same time, the challenge for an educator to reach out to nine supposed intelligences that may exist within a single classroom seems a herculean task. How can mathematics be taught to the student who is predominantly musical? How is music taught to the bodily-kinesthetic? The purpose is not to brainstorm lesson plan ideas, but to consider how our understanding of learning styles has evolved. It would seem that the opening up of the classroom through the 1970s and 1980s with the rise of problem based learning (inspired by constructivism that became popular in teacher training during this time) increased awareness of how children learn. The trend of problem-based learning probably met its greatest opposition during an extremely popular TedTalk by Susan Cain (Ted.com). Lamenting both the traditions of the teacher lecturer (behaviorist) to the teacher facilitator (constructivist), the Susan Cain advocates for greater attention to be given to the deep thinker, or Intrapersonal Intelligence. The

merits, she cites, are that through deep personal thought, students can also come to a higher level of understanding, an argument that may not sit well with Vygotsky. Another critique of the conventional school system as it operates around the constructivist pedagogy is the absence of the Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence. A significant amount of research has been conducted on the concept of Black Cultural Ethos (Boykin 325). Among its nine dimensions, the most highly researched is that of verve, defined as a form of expression that is characteristic of African Americans. It is described as possessing high energy, enthusiasm and even stylistic body language; traits, suggests Boykin that traced to West Africa. The student who expresses verve, as depicted by Boykin, may be labelled off-task, distracted, or hyperactive. Such perceptions have consequences for how individuals learn and may, to a larger extent, negatively affect the minority group in question.

Conclusion

Introverts or extroverted African Americans have not surfaced over the last twenty years since Gardner introduced his multiple intelligences. Yet, the school system seems to favor a universal concept of learning that is centred on collaboration, to the tune of a fraction of students. In this short essay aimed to provide a trajectory of pedagogical approaches and mapped these to the popular learning style model of Gardiner. As can be gleaned from this paper, there is disconnect between learning styles and pedagogy. Better alignment of pedagogy and learning style may be found in critical pedagogy, where conformity is questioned.

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