

Processing Information

People process information in different ways. Some people process information visually, others auditorily, and still other experientially. Some are dominant in one area, others in two, and yet others in all three ways.

Should a subject be taught visually as it is in reading a book, then the dominant auditory and experiential learners would suffer. Like wise should a subject be taught auditorily as it is in a lecture, the visual and experiential learners would suffer. So too would it be for visual and auditory learners if a subject were taught experientially as in a laboratory section.

Let's take the case of three students who are in the eleventh grade. They have the same IQ, same gender, same economic group, same culture, and they all study together equally. The only difference is that one is a visual learner, the second an auditory learner, and the third an experiential learner.

In general most social science subjects in high school are taught through lectures and through reading assignments. Rarely is such a subject primarily experiential. In the example of a course in civics/government, the information would be imparted visually through the reading, and auditorily through the lecture. It is obvious that an experiential learner would suffer. The experiential learner would do the reading, and take notes during the lecture, yet their brains would not be able to process the information. The auditory learner, in the history class would get fifty percent of the course, processing the lecture, but not the reading. The visual learner would get one hundred percent of the reading, and if they took good notes, would get most of the lecture, because by taking notes they would be taking the auditory information and making it visual. By reading their notes as they wrote them their brain would be able to process the information. So the visual learner would get close to one hundred percent of the course, the auditory learner would get about fifty percent, and the experiential learner would get little out of the course even though that student had completed all the reading and attended the lectures taking great notes.

In the case of the history class, the visual learner would get an A, the auditory learner would get a C, and the experiential learner would get an F, strictly on the way their brains processed information. What would happen to a person who had the ability to process visually, auditorily and experientially? Given one hundred percent is being divided by three, then that person would be getting only one third of the lecture and one third of the reading. This would be better than the experiential learner who gets nothing out of the class and yet less well than the auditory learner who gets one half of the course, being able to process the lecture one hundred percent.

The way a person's brain processes information seriously affects their self-esteem. Obviously the visual learner would appear to be the brightest and the experiential learner being the least smart with the auditory and the person who picks up a third of each area in between. A learner with an equal IQ and an equal effort can be either "brilliant, average, or stupid" strictly based upon the way their brain processes information.

The solution? An experiential learner must first have the direct experience, and then they can successfully read about the subject or be lectured on it. An example of this taking the subject of a civics/government course, one would provide the experiential learner the direct experience by taking that student to a series of city council meetings, and concurrently offer that student a short internship in one of the city offices. After completing this experiential section of the

course, then the introduction of the reading and the lectures would be processable. For the auditory learner the solution would be to give that student the book on tape. By listening to the tapes the student would be able to process the information easily.

By delivering the information to the experiential and the auditory students in the way their brains can process the information, their performance would equal the visual learners. What a gift to these students who are not only equal in their inherent intelligence and backgrounds, but now equal in their ability to perform.

The question is, why are students performing in general less well in the fundamentals than they did in the previous generation? The answer is that most of the information that is being taught since the popularization of the computer is less personal, so less experiential and auditory, and more abstract making it more visual. More and more students are being cut out of a successful educational effort, because the design of modern education provides more through fewer avenues within which the brain can process information. Many children lose their motivation to study because they cannot get the results. Mostly they all put out the effort initially, then because of the poor results, they quit trying.

Education must be retrofitted to provide information in the specific ways/learning styles that people process information. I believe that most people/children are experiential learners who need the direct experience before they can successfully abstract the effort. If most people are experiential learners then education needs to back up and include them in the educational experience. Math needs to be presented concretely as one lives math, through balancing a checkbook, by budgeting, etc. For those who are interested in the theory and games of math, then they can pursue others avenues that math provides. It is foolish to make a fifth of the curriculum from K-12th grade math oriented. People remember and can manipulate what they use. How many kids are dropping out, doing drugs, running with gangs because they are experiential learners? How many kids are developing emotional problems because they are auditory learners, getting just enough to move ahead, but not enough to really feel good about themselves or to compete successfully with the visual learners?

This can make all the sense in the world, yet until educators choose to review their efforts in the above light, all the new books in the world are not going to help the experiential and the auditory learners one bit.