

LEARNING STYLES: From instructor to student focus

**By
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Taekwon-Do is a training institution which promotes the development of trainees and trainers. Most instructors tend to develop their own teaching style or a teaching style similar to that of their instructor. Providing effective training programmes, however, requires instructors to go beyond a focus on their own teaching and gain an understanding of the learning styles of their students. This will enable instructors to adapt their teaching strategies to best suit the learning needs of individual students and, in doing so, improve their learning outcomes.

Past experience from teaching shows that when students are motivated, interested, and enthusiastic about learning, any teaching style will work initially. The focus in this sort of situation is how to keep these students motivated and interested in learning for the long term. If these students are not challenged enough, they will get bored and even drop out. One means of keeping these students in training is to provide variety through implementing a well structured training programme. This type of training programme would ensure that a number of skills and teaching styles are used. It should also cater for different skill levels. Instructors are continuously challenged by the wide range of students attending their classes. Students bring with them a variety of skills and abilities. Adults and children require different teaching approaches. Students who are younger tend to have a shorter attention span. With all these differences it becomes apparent that instructing styles and learning styles play an integral part in student learning. Assessing student's progress regularly will provide feedback to instructors on the knowledge and skills have been mastered and areas requiring further emphasis in the programme. Randomly obtaining evaluations from students will also provide valuable feedback on the effectiveness of the teaching programme.

A plethora of books and research papers have been written in the area of "learning to learn" and one thing that clearly stems out from it is that *we do not all learn in the same way*. Our learning styles are in part biological, and in part built up during our "apprenticeship of observation". These styles are reflected in the:

- type and amount of structure we like to have in our learning
- senses through which we remember most easily
- learning experiences we enjoy and which provide the greatest intrinsic motivation
- the environment in which we concentrate best.

Acquiring an understanding of the different learning styles will allow instructors to determine how students generally learn. Equipped with this understanding, instructors will be able to develop training programmes which will cater for all learning styles (inclusive training programmes). It will also enable instructors to identify students who may have a problem learning or concentrating. If problems are identified early, strategies can be implemented to address those issues early as well.

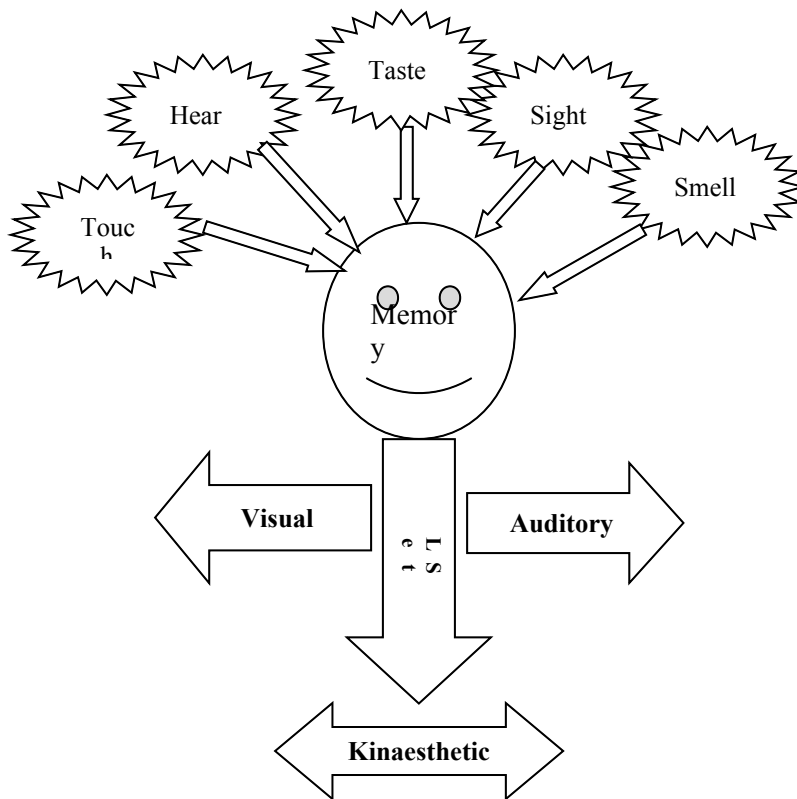
Whilst we all have similar learning styles we tend to focus more on one particular style. Our method of communication, sensory systems and learning are all closely related. We receive information through our five senses (touch, hearing, taste, sight,

and smell) and this is processed by the brain. We express ourselves through speech, writing, gesture and movement. Our personal learning style depends on the way we use our brains and our bodies in receiving and expressing information. Three main forms of communication and learning are *visual*, *auditory* and *kinaesthetic*. We all use three forms to some extent but, for each individual, one is often dominant and used more automatically. Similarly, people tend to be left or right brain dominant. When we identify our own natural preference for visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, we can capitalise on the strongest and begin to develop the others more fully. An ideal training program would be one that tends to focus on all senses.

Visual learners generally tend to memorise by seeing pictures and through watching a demonstration or model. Seeing an instructor demonstrate a movement and looking for visual reference points will enhance their learning. The instructor's role is to assist the student in knowing what to watch for and give feedback on what their attempt looked like. Because they are interested in knowing how patterns look, they will be able to master movements by mirroring pictures. These students will read about Taekwon-do philosophy and learn to do patterns by reading and looking at the diagrams and pictures. Providing access to this type of information and allowing them to analyse videotapes are effective instructional strategies for these students.

Auditory learners focus on sounds and rhythms to learn movement of patterns along with verbal descriptions of the movement. They will listen carefully to what instructors has to say and have a tendency to participate in discussions and ask questions. They will easily get disturbed by distractions and noise. They remember things instructors say to them and can easily repeat things back. These are the students that like music and like talking to others. Instructors who modify their teaching styles by incorporating sound (music) and rhythm may find a dramatic improvement in these students's learning. Tone of voice and the words used have an effect on their learning and understanding. Auditory learners respond well to group work. Instructors should provide students with opportunities to talk through movements and skill cues with other students and provide in-depth verbal description of movements.

Kinaesthetic learners tend to focus on movement and action. They often talk very slowly and breathily. They respond to physical rewards or compliments and like touching things or doing things themselves. These students will do the movements at the same time you are trying to demonstrate things to students. They learn by memorising or practicing movements over and over again. They will be more interested in doing things that they instinctively feel are right. Instructors need to get these students "doing" as soon as possible as they need to know what the movement feels like. Instructors should use a guided discovery style of teaching which allows students to feel their way through a movement or drill. It is beneficial to demonstrate to them what it feels like to perform a particular move, for example, guiding their leg through the line of a side kick. Recognising that replicating movements is essential for the kinaesthetic learner, instructors should ensure that the correct movements are reinforced while incorrect ones are eliminated. "Practice does not make perfect, it makes permanent" is particularly relevant to kinaesthetic learners.



If instructors continue to provide training that is focused around their own teaching styles they will run the risk of alienating students who have different learning styles, creating frustration and stress for both students and instructors. A well-structured training programme is one which is not only motivating, interesting and challenging but caters for differing learning styles. The focus needs to be on providing experiences for students using all the learning styles, thus allowing them their most effective learning whilst challenging them to expand on their own learning style. Practising and strengthening all three learning modes will develop a greater flexibility and productivity in learning. If students do not learn the way we teach, then let us teach the way they learn.

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