

S-A-V-I Learning Styles

One insight from recent studies on learning exposes our departure from God's intent. For a century, our educational society has viewed intelligence as primarily linear, reflective learning. Just look at our IQ tests, which strive to measure linear thinking abilities. Most of us teachers have been trained this way. Teachers are therefore most comfortable teaching like this and so perpetuate this style. God is so much more creative!

Experts have discovered a number of different intelligences or ways that people learn. I want to focus on four main ones. Now we can become **S-A-V-I learners** and teachers (adapted from "*The Accelerated Learning Handbook*," by Dave Meir, pp. 41-56.).

- **S** – *Somatic* learning – "*Soma*" means body. Other terms for this hands-on approach are kinesthetic or tactile learning. This is learning from practice, by doing, by experiencing, often through physical activities and through direct physical involvement. "*I can do that.*" "*That feels right*" are comments we hear.
- **A** – *Auditory* learning – These learners learn best through hearing, including telling, listening, and dialoging. Since hearing is so critical, interacting with others in a group setting is particularly vital. "*I hear what you're saying.*" "*That sounds about right.*"
- **V** – *Visual* Learning – These learners picture their own thoughts and see the big picture more easily. Images, word-pictures, diagrams, demonstrations and videos are vital to their learning. They use their imagination in healthy ways to experience what Bible characters experienced. "*I see what you mean.*" "*I get the picture.*"
- **I** – *Intellectual* Learning – By this I mean linear learners who are problem-solvers, grasping information one link after another in the chain of knowledge. These learners are often more abstract, reflective, internal, cognitive. "*That makes sense.*" "*I think that's a good way to put it.*"

As I was reflecting on these four types of intelligences (guess which style is my strongest?!), I was thinking about the contrast between my wife, Fran, and myself. I have always scored well on

tests, and so my rep is, “*Wow, Jim sure is smart!*” By contrast, Fran worked extremely hard and earned every bit of her “B+” grades. When we married, she often perceived herself as a person with below-average intelligence (I have always disagreed!) For comparison sake, let’s weigh each of these four types equally with Fran and me. Let’s say a “10” is genius and a “1” is “learning challenged.”

Fran:

- **S** – She is brilliant as a somatic learner. She can work with her hands and put things together in ways that amaze me.
- **A** - In Germany, Fran would go buy some bread, and come back speaking German phrases that she heard on the streets because she is also a strong auditory learner.
- **V** - Fran can picture a finished project in her head and just jump in without any formal plans because she is also a very high visual learner (with a hidden flare for art).
- **I** - Fran has viewed herself as a slow intellectual learner.
- **Summary:** Fran is: Somatic = 9.5, Auditory = 8, Visual = 9, and Intellectual = 5 (that is, in her mind; I am convinced she is better), or a high average of “8.”

On the other hand for me:

- **S** - I am about a .5 as a somatic learner (I am mechanically “challenged”),
- **A** - an average 5 auditory (although I am growing here),
- **V** - 1 as a visual learner (I am visually “challenged” far beyond my need for glasses!)
- **I** - 9.5 as an intellectual learner.
- **Summary:** I am about a 4, well-below average.

Now, if we weighed the styles equally, Fran would be considered the brilliant one in our family and I would wear the dunce-cap. Folks would murmur behind my back, “*Why would a beautiful, brilliant gal like Fran ever marry a dunce like Jim?*”

Which of the four *S-A-V-I* styles of learning is your dominant style that best fits you? Awareness improves the speed and quality of your learning. See, learning is like a mosaic. Each of you are unique, one-of-a-kind treasures of the Trinity, the creative, Three-in-One Community-God. You have a unique mosaic piece to bring to this multi-faceted mosaic of learning because you have been fashioned in the image of the Creative One. Will you bring your mosaic piece to the *T-E-A-M*? It’s beautiful to behold!

Our creative God shaped this vast variety in His physical creation. He also created every human being as a lifelong life-learner. What tremendous variety, even those of you who may have struggled in school in the past. So, why do so many struggle with education? *We must expose and shatter the power of lies about learning!* We are beginning to do this as we learn together in community. There are at least four different styles of learning.

- **S** – *Somatic* learners like to be hands-on. Studies show that the movement of our bodies actually releases chemicals that stimulate the brain. *“That feels right.”*
- **A** – *Auditory* learners find the give-and-take interaction in a community setting vital, as they ask and answer. *“I hear what you’re saying.”*
- **V** – *Visual* learners picture their own thoughts. Images and word-pictures accelerate learning. *“I see what you mean.”*
- **I** – *Intellectual* learners grasp information one link after another in a chain. They are often more reflective, internal, sequential, logical, and detailed. *“That makes sense.”*

Recent research shows us that each learning style uses different parts of the brain. By involving more learning styles, we remember more of what we learn.

The primary focus of our traditional learning philosophy is linear learning supported by lecture-based teaching, repetition, and pressurized testing that feeds back what we heard. Unfortunately, much of the church has also bought into this flawed educational philosophy. It’s not all wrong, just incomplete. *Not everyone learns best in a linear way.* One is not inherently better...just different. In a learning community, each of us freely adds our unique mosaic piece. Each is needed and highly valued. When the mosaic is completed with each beautiful piece in its place, oh my, what an extraordinary masterpiece!

Learn like Jesus. Do you still remember how Jesus learned as a young boy in the temple according to Luke 2:46-47? He was *listening* with an open heart and mind, *asking* honest questions, and *answering* questions with understanding as an active learner.

Listening ears prepare understanding minds & responsive hearts.

“I wonder how we can...” unlocks the latent abilities within and opens up possibilities as agile, adaptable disciples. Learning to

approach life like this begins to shatter the “*I can’t*” limitation that diminishes creativity.

Because of our more narrowly focused educational philosophy, many high potential disciples have a bad taste for schooling because they have been bombarded by lies. Perhaps *you* wonder if you measure up in the learning arena. “*I may not measure up as a student!*” “*I’m really not sharp enough!*” “*I don’t know if I am saying this with right words*” are all condemning words from the enemy. “*If I throw my hat into the learning ring with the rest of you, I’ll come out wearing the dunce-hat.*”

Does this resonate within? In the past when asked about school, *somatic* learners in particular have blurted out things like, “*My educational experience has been a living hell!*” Somatic learners, this has less to do with you, and more with a faulty system.

Jesus has a better way!

We are entering the process of discovery together.

I believe these negative emotions regarding learning may have more to do with our incomplete teaching/learning philosophy than with how you label yourself (the lie: “*I am just not a good learner*”). You *do* recognize that is a lie, don’t you? In fact, if a person believes that past failure is primarily due to their lack of personal aptitude, they tend to give up since their actions would have little effect anyway. This in turn becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. *We must expose and shatter the power of this lie!*

I am challenging us to rethink how we learn (especially reuniting knowing and doing again in community). Jettison the rusting holdovers from the last centuries so we can step up to the fast-paced, rapidly changing environment of the 3rd millennium. God’s people must be equipped to engage their full powers as agile disciples in the fluid, crazed haste of our rapidly changing world. Personal Bible reading and study should and can be one of the most rewarding, exciting and fulfilling Christian experiences!

Jesus has come to break off this ball and chain of past educational failures. God Himself comes alongside His people to help us learn. Trust Him. He longs to free us to experience the joy of lifelong learning. *Do you believe this is possible **for you**?*