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work with your learning style, not against it

by jody capehart

In a previous article we discussed successful study strategies for students. Today we will assist in identifying the best learning style for our students to help them optimize their retention of material and enhance their enjoyment of learning. Schools generally instruct in the most widely approved and effective method for the majority of students. We realize, for some, a different approach may be necessary. Take a look at the following suggestions and try adopting some of them to your child's study routine and see if you notice any improvements.

STUDY IN STYLE! Begin with providing motivation by studying in the modality in which the child learns best. Does he learn more when he can see it and write it down (visual), hear it and talk about it (auditory), touch it (tactile), or do an activity (kinesthetic)?

EQUIP AND ENRICH THE ENVIRONMENT. Ask, "What factors in the environment help my child to focus more efficiently? Does she work best with bright light?" Then open the blinds during the day, turn on an overhead light, and add a lamp to the desk or work area. "Does she work best with soft light?" Then close the blinds, turn off the overhead light, and just turn on a lamp. "Does she work best at the desk or table, or on the bed or floor?" One is not better than the other if we truly use it to enhance our work. We may not be able to provide both alternatives in a classroom, but a student can set up a study environment conducive to the way he/she learns. There are 21 elements in the environment that affect learning, but light, sound, and room design are three of the most important. Now ask yourself, "Do I work better with sound or with quiet?" If you require sound, I strongly suggest classical music since it

organizes the brain to be more efficient. I strongly discourage television, rock music or music with words.

HOW 'BOUT SOME M&M'S FOR STUDY TIME? You are hoping that I can cite some significant research, which shows that M&M's will increase brain power, aren't you? If it were true, I would be a genius. However, the main problem with this hypothesis is that eating M&M's only increases your weight and not your IQ score. I tell people that I am always getting my IQ and weight mixed up ... Ha, ha! Here come the "M and M's for successful learning styles.

MOTIVATION. What motivates you? Getting a good grade? Approval? Knowing you are getting smarter? Getting into a school of your choice? I tell kids that studying different subjects opens up the brain to uses in other areas that will affect their career choices. Use it or lose it. School and studying are a chapter in the book of life, but they are not life. It's often hard for kids to have the right perspective on this.

MANAGE YOURSELF. Observe yourself. Ask yourself questions. Learn what you need to be at your best! Use what you need to enhance your studies. If you get easily overwhelmed, have someone help you to break up your work into manageable tasks and do one thing at a time. If seeing a whole page of math overwhelms you, take a piece of paper in your favorite color and cut out a box. Use the paper to cover your work and only do what is in the box. Move the box to continue on.

MEMORIZE. We all realize the value of remembering what we have learned. We want to be able to retrieve information when we want it. We don't want to simply memorize senseless data only to regurgitate it for a test and promptly forget it. The best way to remember for retention is to memorize it in our primary learning modality. For example, I am a visual learner and if I highlight things in different colors, I can "see" the page in my mind. This helps me to remember it. My auditory daughter remembers it when she talks about it or puts it to music. I have had other students "type" at their desks like they are bringing it up on their computers. Find out what works for you and simply do it. Try different techniques until you find the one that works for you.

Nothing motivates us like encouragement. Let's remember to encourage our students, which will in turn, energize and empower them to be better students.



Jody Capehart has been an educator for over thirty years, primarily serving as Head of School or principal. She is the author of 12 books on education and parenting, and she is Head of School at Legacy Christian Academy.