

Superintendents' Certification Lesson 3

The Style Factor

Learning Objectives:

- To show evidence of understanding the role of style in making a difference in Sabbath School for ministry leaders and supporters.
- To put such evidence into lesson plans and fellowship planning.

Style. It's a simple concept. But it is not simplistic. The idea is not new. Writing to the early Christian church, Paul wrote: "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us" (**Rom. 12:4-6, NIV**).

Style is real, and it makes a difference. We are each unique, and our lives need to reflect that uniqueness if we are to find real meaning in our lives. That is especially true in how we worship God. Sabbath Schools need to embrace the need for multiple methods of reaching diverse learners. In diversity we find not differences that separate but balance and wholeness, the prerequisites of excellence.

Ellen White promoted the same concept to the early Adventist Church. Writing in a church publication she wrote: "Marked diversities of disposition and character frequently exist in the same family; for it is in the order of God that persons of varied temperament should associate together. When this is the case, each member of the household should sacredly regard the feelings, and respect the right of the others. By this means mutual consideration and forbearance will be cultivated, prejudices will be softened, and rough points of character smoothed. Harmony may be secured, and the blending of the varied temperaments may be a benefit to each" (*Signs of the Times*, Sept. 9, 1886).

Current brain research is opening up a whole new understanding of how incredibly flexible our brains really are. We each perfect specific cognitive operations and note others as a result of personal adaptations to our experiences. Additionally, our brains continue to adapt and expand for our entire lifetime. An enriched environment significantly influences brain power, and an impoverished environment limits brain power. From this broader perspective, cognitive potential is understood to grow and diversify with use. These findings present a serious challenge to the way we conduct teaching/learning acts. Do our Sabbath Schools deal with the developmental reality of learning styles? If we are committed to reaching our members, we must be aware of learning style implications.

I love going to Sabbath School and getting the hugs and handshakes and hearing people say, "Happy Sabbath!" Often I feel as if God is in that touch. That is my wife's least favorite time. She feels uncomfortable when people she doesn't know very well come up and hug her. We have different learning styles. And we bring those styles to Sabbath School and to the way we worship.

Relational, people-centered worshipers. These participants are feeling-directed people. They covet the special feelings that let them know that they belong to an active community of faith. They get involved with others and learn best in settings that allow interpersonal relationships to develop.

They reverence sharing as a family. They value subjectivity, self-expression, and personal introspection. Their comfort zone is harmony, community, discussion, and testimonies. They need worship to connect with their experience. They come to church to experience grace. The relational people-centered worshiper asks, "Why study this lesson? Why do I need to know this?" They draw on past knowledge and experiences and offer to their peers the context why everyone should pay attention to this subject, because it is really important. They can become the foundation on which the rest of the lesson is built.

Analytical, word-centered worshipers. These thinking or intellect-directed people learn by watching and listening. They expect the teacher to be the primary information giver, while they sit and carefully assess the value of the information being presented. They reverence reflection and stillness. They value predictability, self-control, and objective reflection. Their comfort zone is knowledge, order, handouts, and homework. They need worship to conceptualize authoritative information. They come to church to be enlightened by grace.

The analytical word-centered worshiper asks, "What do I need to know?" And answers, "The facts, stories, concepts, *and* something new in the lesson." The facilitator needs to add new facts and concepts to what is already known. This new information is now seen not only as relevant (because of the relational worshiper focus) but because new information helps learners deal more effectively with the subject and because of the analytical worshiper's focus.

Practical use-centered worshipers. These members like to play with new ideas to see if they are rational or workable. They are hands-on people who love to get the job done. They learn best when learning is combined with doing. They reverence united commitment. They value objectivity, self-denial, and practical application. Their comfort zone is relevance, simplicity, responsible action, and projects. They need worship to personalize practical applications. They come to church to apply grace. The practical use-centered worshiper asks, "How does this work?" They experiment to see if what they have learned really functions. They bring practicality to what has been studied. As a preparation for real life, they test whether what they have learned works in the classroom.

Dynamic, discovery-centered worshipers. Oh, how these worshipers enjoy action as part of the learning process! However, rather than thinking projects through to their rational conclusion, as the practical worshipers do, they have a gift for following hunches and sensing new directions and possibilities. They reverence challenging and renewing. They value unpredictability, self-development, and personal possibilities. Their comfort zone is innovation, diversity, options, and creativity. They need worship to create new possibilities. They come to church to be empowered by grace.

The dynamic discovery-centered worshiper asks, "What can this become?" They love to come up with creative, unique applications for what they have learned. They like to take some risks and thrive on situations that call for flexibility and change and find real joy in starting something new. They love putting their stamp of originality on an idea.

Building Sabbath Schools around the four quadrant pattern of learning and worship styles just makes sense. Combining all four ways of worshiping creates a whole-brain approach to worship that will benefit each member:

- **Life Need? Relational people-centered:** Why study this topic? What personal need will it meet?

- **Bible Learning? Analytical word-centered:** What do I need to know from Scripture to meet my need?
- **Bible Application? Practical use-centered:** How does what I learned work in meeting my need today?
- **Life Response? Dynamic discovery-centered:** How can I creatively respond on Sunday through Friday to what I have learned and tested on Sabbath?

“Knowing our leading spiritual instinct,” writes Gordon McDonald, “will help us identify the situations in which we can most naturally enter God’s presence. Being aware that others have different instincts can prevent us from judging them as inferior and help us appreciate the diversity in the Christ-following family. We cannot prescribe any single way as best for all” (“What’s Your Worship Style?” *Discipleship Journal*, Issue 70, p. 32).

Why Sabbath School? What’s in it for me? If the Sabbath School is honoring my diversity, it is meeting my needs and making me a whole-brained Christian!

To totally integrate what they have learned into their lives, class participants must use it. When you make sure they leave Sabbath School with a plan for personal application, you help make Sabbath School relevant for them, both their spiritual growth and their capacity for productive outreach.

Follow Through

- Create an experience that will help teach the content of the lesson. This section is based entirely on past experience and what the learner suspects or intuits about the subject.
 1. Examine and discuss what was done in this experience.
 2. Imagine the experience in such a way that learners begin to think about the concepts that are part of the lesson. The method here should be informational, but the information should be based on the experience that the group has had. The information presented will include the class reactions to that experience. This leads into the lesson study.
- Expand content by learning new material. Look at the parts and define what needs to be known.
- Practice defined givens. Try them. Test them and see if they work and how they work. This is reinforcement for what was taught.
- Let the learners develop originality and refine the effectiveness of their personal additions to the lesson content.
- Probe, enlarge ideas, encourage, and challenge. Allow the class to experience self-discovery as they take what they have been taught a step further by adding their own creativity to it.
- To totally integrate what they have learned into their lives, class participants must use it. When you make sure they leave Sabbath School with a plan for personal

application, you help make Sabbath School relevant for them, both their spiritual growth and their capacity for productive outreach.