

DIVERSITY IN THE CLASSROOM

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Teachers must be aware of the fact that there are different learning styles among students in the classroom. However, we may believe that most people are comfortable with the primary mode of communicating in America that is primarily verbal. This could be a fatal mistake, especially when speaking to groups composed of a significant number of people from diverse cultures.

First, let's examine the four basic learning styles. In the United State, most keynote speeches and seminars are presented primarily aurally which is probably why we are known as professional "speakers". However, only 30% of all audiences favor the auditory learning style. We must remember, however, that leaves 70% who prefer obtaining information in ways other than verbally.

Studies show that 30% of people prefer learning kinesthetically where hands-on experience helps make the learning stick. Some 20% are visual/verbal learners who learn best when information is presented in a written language format such as that which is found on the Internet. Another 20% are visual/nonverbal learners who learn best when information is presented in a graphical format such as charts and graphs.

What does culture have to do with learning style? Over one-third of the average audience is composed of people from diverse cultures. Hispanics tend to be highly kinesthetic. Studies show that, "They tend to prefer hands-on learning such as structured group exercises and the use of drawings as opposed to listening or reading".¹ Asians tend to be much more visual than verbal because the Asian language is based on pictures. They tend not to perform well when the primary mode of instruction is verbal². Anyone who has spoken in Asia knows that speakers have to change to a much more visual mode of presentation when presenting in this part of the world.

The harsh reality for speakers is that if we do not speak or train using a "multi-modal" technique it becomes very difficult to connect with one or more of the learning style groups. The challenge in a diverse society is to provide information in a way that reaches all types of learners.

One of ways to reach more than one of the senses is not only to lecture but also use a visual verbal technique such as PowerPoint, making an effort to incorporate charts and graphs for the visual nonverbal learners and add activities and games for the kinesthetic. As you can imagine, this can makes for a much more interesting and engaging program for the audience and keeps the speaker involved as well.

A question that many speakers often ask is whether keynoters can present in a multimodal format without detracting from their presentations. The answer is an unquestioned "yes".

Many audiences complain about motivational keynotes as “all fluff and no stuff”. By using as many of the communication formats as practical a keynoter will have a more impactful and memorable performance. Just the simple act of adding a prop or two will help the visual/nonverbal learners remember your points..

Other ways to make your learning more mutlimodal would include: group discussions, audio and video clips, pictures, roles plays, small group work, etc. The challenge is to smoothly integrate these media and activities into your programs. I think you’ll find that they will add to the impact of your presentation and make your programs more fun.

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