

The Truth about Effective Teaching and Learning

A recent headline in *The New York Times* reads "Forget What You Know About Good Study Habits." It says that many commonly held beliefs about studying, such as sticking to a set study area and schedule, are mainly unproven theories.

The article points to some tantalizing research that parents can use to help their kids do better in school. However, they cite research from 1978 that pertains only to learning 40 vocabulary words. The article also questions the importance of understanding a student's specific learning style and teacher's teaching styles.

I'd like to address several of the points made in the article, in order to help parents understand what I've found to be important contributors to effective learning.

First, in terms of discovering what works, there is no substitute for classroom observation and teacher feedback. At Quantum Learning Network, we have trained over 50,000 teachers. We observe them in action all the time and we hear what they have to say about the Quantum Learning teaching techniques they employ. We know when learning is happening in a classroom and when it isn't.

Parents can do the same thing at home by being aware of their kids' behavior. For example, when are they more active and alert? That's the time of day when they'd be the most productive doing their homework.

With regard to the article downplaying students' individual learning styles, they have missed the mark on the real issue. Students, like anyone, have personal preferences. When they do what pleases them, they do better. If a student is naturally a hands-on learner, they're going to learn better through hands-on activities. Research supports this fact.

We train teachers to teach to the three learning modalities . . . auditory, visual and kinesthetic. Not only will individual students learn better because they will connect with their preferred style, all students will benefit from the reinforcement of making multiple connections for each topic.

The article quotes a psychologist as saying "we have yet to identify the common threads between teachers who create a constructive learning environment." I disagree. As I said, we know what works because we've seen it working in Quantum Learning classrooms for 20 years.

The common thread among effective teachers is a classroom where joyful, engaged, meaningful learning that challenges students to be their best is taking place. It's not about teaching styles. Instead, it's about teaching substance. We provide teachers with hundreds of techniques to engage students and to make the learning both joyful and meaningful.

As an example, going back to the multiple learning styles issue, we teach teachers strategies to reach all learners seamlessly. Teachers vary the tone and volume of their voice to engage auditory learners. To help visual learners, teachers stay close to the white board when they've written new information on it so the students can absorb the information while looking at the teacher and board at the same time. We instruct teachers to gesture, create hand motions and get the students using the same movements, so the kinesthetic learners will better implant the new information in their brains. In addition, our contention is that when a teacher creates an experiential learning environment where most activities include VAK (Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic) strategies, then all kids learn.

The concept of learning styles is most impactful for students who are struggling in one or more subjects. They often think that they are the problem and not able to be successful. Knowing learning strategies that fit their style and having teachers that engage them makes a significant difference for these learners.

We also focus on a learner's emotional and mental state. If a student isn't in the most effective learning state, then they're not going to be able to process new information effectively. As a result, we train our teachers in strategies that increase students' energy and improve their attitudes such as beginning each day with a couple of minutes of high energy music where the students stand up, clap and move around. They're engaged and they're waking up at a time of day when research shows that most students aren't in an optimal learning state.

Last month I wrote about setting up a home study area for each student in your family. The article in *The New York Times* theorized that alternating the room where a person studies improves retention. This can create multiple associations that strengthen learning, however, we have found that having a well designed study area is an anchor for students, as it helps their brain know it's time to study.

While parents don't have much control over what goes on in a given teacher's classroom, there are a few things that can be done at home. While you've seen some of these points in my previous articles, I will summarize them here:

Set a daily study time: doing so enables students to keep up with their work *and* reduces arguments in the home.

Understand your kids' learning styles: observe your kids and discuss their learning styles with them. Then suggest ways they can learn using their dominant style.

Break it up: encourage your kids to set a timer and focus without distractions on one topic or section for 30 minutes. Then take a short break and do it again, if there is more homework.

Create a home office: as discussed in depth in last month's article, get each child to participate in the creation of their home study space. Design it together!

And most important ð

Acknowledge every effort: Your child may not have control over getting an A+ grade, but they have complete control over doing their best. Acknowledging the effort they put into a test or project, helps build your child's confidence, self-esteem and intrinsic motivation to do well.