

Professionals Against Improperly Labeling Active Learners PAILAL Newsletter

February 2009
Volume 2, Issue 1

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About this issue of PAILAL

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Many of us have heard of the 'gifted' learner. When some hear of the gifted learner one might envision the children that are very quick to pick up the curriculum being taught in the traditional classroom. They may be the best readers and possess very good test-taking skills. They are often finished with their work before others in the class and can easily become bored waiting for others to catch up. Some of these learners will be recognized for their gift and might be placed in advanced curriculum classrooms and honors programs. Hopefully, they will move on to college or trade schools and do their part to make a difference.

On the other side of the room is another child with a gift. This child has been performing multi-task operations much of their lives. They are used to moving around and exploring new information about their environment. Often, they pick up major concepts rather quickly and then continue to search for new information; a never-ending search. In the classroom, they can be a nuisance to the teacher who is looking for the student that can sit up straight and listen to a reading or lecture for hours at a time. Math concepts may be difficult because they cannot see and do what is being learned. They are supposed to watch the teacher do the problem and learn it 'just because.' Many of these learners will not be going to advanced classrooms although some may be going to classrooms to help them learn how to be like the other category of gifted children.

So how is one category of gifted children recognized for perhaps their linguistic-mathematic abilities and capabilities for sitting and patiently soaking in the information while another group of gifted learners struggle with the traditional classroom? How is it that these learners, are often not placed in advanced classes, and in fact may be left behind?

One answer of course may be the teacher's teaching style. Instructors and teachers should know about the learning styles and intelligences of their learners and how to incorporate them into their teaching but far too many, including some professors and teacher supervisors have not kept current with the latest research (Dunn, Honigsfeld, & Martel, 2001). Or, perhaps they may know the learning and cognitive theories and can even quote them generously, but do not know how to apply them, or choose not to apply them.

Teachers must recognize the gifts that each child possesses. There is more than one classification of gifted learner. God didn't make junk and for those believing in something other than divine creativity, I am sure many can agree that the human race is extremely unique as a result of years and years of adapting to various conditions throughout our history. This issue will explore some of those conditions and look for ways that educators can recognize how these gifts have developed and ways to reach more categories of gifted learners.

Dunn, R., Honigsfeld, A., & Martel, L. D. (2001). Learning-style characteristics of JROTC cadets and instructors: Implications for training and instruction. *A Research Report Prepared for the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps Cadet Command*. [Electronic version]. Fort Monroe, VA: National Academy of Integrative Learning.

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Did You Know?

Many teachers will address the behavior of their learners but fail to address their own teaching styles.

Recognizing the Other Gifted Learner: The Active Learner-The Hunter Child By Timothy C. Clapper, M.A.

While Dunn & Dunn's (1978) work with learning styles and Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences are finally becoming staples in our knowledge of learning theory, there is another less known theory that corresponds well with these two important theories; that would be Hartmann's (1993) *Hunter Gene Theory*. Few educators are aware of this important theory and the result is that learners may not receive the academic stimulation required for them to fully develop their understanding of the course content. Hartmann (1993) suggests that people may possess either a *hunter-gatherer gene* or a *farmer gene* which has been handed down to us by our ancestors of long ago. Hartmann (2003) describes the hunter-child as always being aware of their surroundings, perhaps as a result of our ancestors of long ago looking for food or otherwise becoming food (Geake 2008). We can observe them in the home taking apart items in the home to see how they work. They may move from toy to toy and while some may refer to this as lacking attention, they seem to know exactly what they are doing, often becoming creative and innovative and using the toys in new ways and in more scenarios.

As Hartmann (2003) notes, the hunter child may often struggle in the traditional classroom that require focusing on one domain for long periods of time. This contrasts those learners possessing the farmer gene that may assimilate much easier by virtue of their patience, focus on the task at hand, and planning abilities. Many teachers may have received training in learning modalities but do not adjust their own lessons to meet the needs of their learners. Many may go as far as testing for the learning style of their learners but fail to act fully on that inventory. Geake (2008) suggests that testing children for their learning style (LS) and then teaching them in one dominant LS goes against the brain's natural interconnectivity. Specifically, Geake (2008) notes that in his earlier work teachers found that their pupil's LS were not stable and that the LS varied with the demands of the lessons. This demonstrates the need to incorporate strategies into lessons that address all learning styles continuously.

Teachers need to understand that gender may have an effect on how one learns and teaches. Males tend to be more visual, tactual, or kinesthetic, prefer to move around, and prefer to work alone (Dunn, 1996; Marcus, 1979) while females generally tend to be auditory learners (Dunn, 1996). This will not be so much of a concern as long as we place activities in each lesson to respond to the needs of the learner. Teachers and students share an excitement on that first day of school. Sadly, as Hartmann (2003) observes, the hunter-child starts school with the same excitement as other children but unfortunately many become aware that their style does not match the teacher's dominant teaching style. Some teachers may view the child as having learning disabilities or behavioral issues and so the labeling process might begin and the learning excitement the hunter-child felt may instead turn to dread. Fortunately, there are teachers who are aware of the needs of the active learner; the hunter-child.

A wise teacher will use the gifts of the hunter-child to their advantage. The innovation and creativity that the hunter-child may generate may be exploited fully during project-based learning for example. While the farmer-gene child is focused on a specific paradigm of the project, the hunter-child may be used to help the class see how all the parts of the project fit together and may be applied across other domains. They may help others think outside the box and try to see things in other ways or capture things others miss. The hunter-child may not be the only ones to benefit from this noisy, fast-moving, productive classroom scenario. Strategies such as project-based learning have a way of naturally integrating the learning styles and multiple intelligences leading to better understanding of the content.

In the book, *The Edison Gene*, Hartmann (2003) recalls a teacher that called the parent of a hunter-child and said the student was not doing their class work and homework. The parent asked the teacher, "What are you going to do about it?" While some mouths may open upon reading this and think of scolding the parent's remarks, think first of what may be occurring (or not occurring) in the classroom. Teachers are not psychologists so it is not their job to change behaviors through negative and positive reinforcement. Their job is to teach; to find those strategies that reach the child and increase their understanding of the content.

"A wise teacher will use the gifts of the hunter-child"

Recognizing the Other Gifted Learner: The Active Learner-The Hunter Child Con't

Barring extreme external conditions that the learner brings into the classroom from the community and home, it is the teacher's job to motivate the learner through the lesson. As noted earlier, children enter school with excitement about learning; it is the teacher that must maintain that excitement by differentiating their instruction.

Hartmann (2003) observes that "wanderlust, adventure, and innovation" are characteristics of those 10% of our population that carry this hunter-gene, highlighting that Thomas Edison, while considered a nonconformist to some, was responsible for thousands of inventions. More importantly, he notes that while the survival of the human race depended on the hunter-child in the past, the future may also depend on this group of gifted learners. In the meantime, educators would be advised to reach out to this group of learners to help add a new level of understanding to the learning environment.

Dunn, R., Honigsfeld, A., & Martel, L. D. (2001). Learning-style characteristics of JROTC cadets and instructors: Implications for training and instruction. *A Research Report Prepared for the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps Cadet Command*. [Electronic version]. Fort Monroe, VA: National Academy of Integrative Learning.

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“survival of the human race depended on the hunter-child”

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Other strategies for aiding the Active Learner and developing all learners in the classroom:

Cooperative Learning Techniques

Differentiated Instruction

Carousal of Learning

Multiple Intelligences Activities

Thinking Maps® and Graphic Organizers

Project-Based Learning

Wikis and Web 2.0 Based Activities

Games for Reinforcement and Understanding By Lauren Hoffman

In my final semester I find myself student teaching at an alternative school five days a week. The school offers remedial support for social adjustment behavior and/or mental health needs. It is a huge challenge and it is a fascinating environment to be a part of. There are twelve students in my homeroom that I am with for the majority of the day. The students range from first grade up to fifth grade. After giving a spelling test which most of the students did not pass, I decided to create a review game. I wanted to come up with something that would be leveled enough to accommodate the three spelling groups, along with something that the students would actually want to participate in. Observable behavior in the class is that most students look out for their own well being and do not always work well with their classmates. My goal was to create a game where the students would be forced to work together, demonstrate good sportsmanship and work on building communication skills.

With such a range of grades and academic abilities in one classroom, there are three leveled spelling groups. I divided the blackboard into groups A, B, and C, and the students into their respective groups. With a list of their spelling words in hands, I made dashes on the board to represent the letters in their first word. Each group took turns going; they came up and spun the spinner, and guessed a letter. If they guessed correctly, they received the points on the spinner and get to spin again. If they did not guess the right letter they received no points and the next team received a turn. Once the team had guessed their word, and spelled it correctly, another series of dashes were put up for the next word, and the other groups continued working on the word they had not solved yet. The object was to have the group agree upon which letter they wanted to choose. That of course caused some chaos and disagreement, but I wanted the students to work together and agree upon a letter to choose. The skill of communication with teammates is important in this game, and mastery of communication now will assist each student later in life. It will make the transition back to their home school district easier, along with making it easier to talk to a partner in a relationship or co-workers in a job environment.

I have found this to be a great-leveled activity to do with the whole class. The students can either sit together on the floor or group their desks together and it is not the typical studying or repetitive writing words ten times each. I was impressed with the effort each student made to work as a team and to communicate with one another. They discovered communication was the key to solving whose turn it was to spin the spinner. This game can be used for five spelling words, or twenty spelling words. Furthermore, this game can be adapted for math equations, science review, filling in a social studies time line, etc. The possibilities are endless.

Lauren Hoffman is a student at East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania. She is a dual major in Early Childhood Development and Elementary Education. She is sure to make a positive difference in many little lives. Her email address is MissLaurenFaye@aol.com

“Work on building communication skills”