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PRACTICES + SKILLS FOR CATECHISTS & EDUCATORS

Video Guide

Designing for Different Styles of Learning
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Designing for Different Styles of Learning

Insights from the Video Presentation

As catechists, one of our greatest fears is that we will see bored-looking faces among our learners if we haven't already. The last thing we want is for faith formation experiences to be boring. Unfortunately, this is too often the perception, especially in the minds of children. But what is the cause of this boredom?

Is It The Message?

Could it be the MESSAGE that is boring? NO! The Good News of Jesus Christ is life-changing and dramatic. It is literally a life and death (and life) story that contains the power to transform hearts and minds.

Is It the Messenger?

Could it be the MESSENGER that is boring? NO! You are not boring! Human beings are not boring. Each of us is a complex human being with layers and layers of experiences, dreams, fears, hopes, longings, and stories.

Is It the Method?

Could it be the METHOD we are using that is boring? Too often the method we rely on for faith formation is boring. We either fall into the read-discuss-read-discuss trap or we simply lecture on and on as though our learners are sponges whose job it is to soak up everything we have to say. These methods leave so much to be desired, and the proclamation of the Word of God deserves so much more.

1. Utilizing a Variety of Methods

In this video, we are going to explore how to break out of these methodological ruts and to implement a variety of activities that will serve to unleash the energy and power of the Word of God and engage the hearts and minds of learners, inviting them to grow in their faith and live as disciples of Christ actively and intentionally.

2. Engaging Different Learning Styles

First, it's important to know that not everyone learns the same way. Experts have demonstrated that there are many different learning styles. In particular, Dr. Howard Gardner, a professor of education at Harvard University, developed the concept of multiple intelligences in the early 1980s. In short, Dr. Gardner showed that individuals process information and solve problems differently. It makes sense, then, that we need to have a variety of approaches to teaching if we hope to reach all of our learners. Let's take a look at these different learning styles and how we can adapt our methods accordingly.

3. Learning through Words

Let's start with those who learn primarily through words, whether that be reading, writing, or engaging in discussion. This tends to be the method that most catechists and teachers rely on, however, it is only one of eight learning styles. For those who do learn primarily through words, we can play to their strengths by emphasizing reading, writing, and discussion. It also helps to invite them to brainstorm ideas, to quiz partners on vocabulary words and the spelling of words, or to summarize the contents of a session in a single word, phrase, or sentence.

Consider the following activities that emphasize the spoken word:

- guest speakers (in-person or virtual)
- interviews

- lectures
- small and large-group discussions
- reading aloud to learners
- panel discussions
- questions and answers

Likewise, consider the following activities that emphasize the written word:

- acrostics
- crossword puzzles
- writing short essays
- composing e-mails, texts, and social media posts
- evaluating, studying, and critiquing Web content
- writing letters
- composing litanies
- writing modern parables/stories
- composing poems
- composing slogans or song lyrics
- writing speeches

4. Learning through Music

The next learning style is learning through music. For those with a good sense of rhythm and melody, be sure to integrate music into your sessions. In addition to sacred music, look for themes and issues in popular songs that are relevant to your session. One caution to mention, however, is: always be sure to preview songs to avoid inappropriate lyrics.

Consider the following activities that emphasize music and singing:

- singing sacred hymns
- listening to recordings of contemporary songs that speak to your BIG IDEA
- playing quiet instrumental music in the background for periods of reflection
- doing call-and-response rhythm games
- using rap to facilitate memorization
- clapping or tapping out beats while reading or studying
- playing musical instruments
- composing and performing songs

5. Learning through Math and Logic

The next learning style is learning through math and logic. Some people are most comfortable with numbers and patterns. For these learners, be sure to invite them to connect or relate new learning to previous learning. Likewise, create word problems or play questioning games, such as Twenty Questions, which require them to recognize patterns.

Consider some of the following activities that emphasize logic and math:

- problem solving
- pattern recognition
- puzzles, riddles, and brainteasers
- strategy and board games
- learning proper scripture citation (book, chapter, verse)
- experiments and demonstrations
- creating surveys

- playing twenty questions
- creating Venn diagrams
- creating patterns with manipulatives
- video games

6. Learning through Art and Space

Next are those who learn through art and space. We often refer to such learners as visual learners, another one of my learning personal learning strengths. I'm a very visual person. For those who prefer to express themselves through art, be sure to offer opportunities to summarize themes of the session by making posters or other displays such as collages, graphs, or charts. Likewise, consider experiences of visio divina ("divine seeing") in which we invite God to speak to our hearts as we look upon an image of sacred art.

Consider the following activities that emphasize visual learning:

- creating banners, booklets, bookmarks, bulletin boards, bumper stickers, or buttons
- designing a coat of arms
- engaging in collaborative drawing
- designing collages, comic books, commemorative stamps, dioramas, displays, fliers, holy cards, mobiles, mosaics, or murals
- artistically writing Scripture passages or quotes from saints on objects such as seashells, driftwood, rocks, or T-shirts)
- doing finger paintings
- working with modeling clay
- creating multimedia presentations
- designing bulletin boards, place mats, plaques, portraits, posters, sculptures, scrapbooks, stained glass, stickers, or storybooks.
- creating sidewalk art with chalk
- doing sponge paintings
- taking a virtual tour or field trip
- engaging with digital media
- utilizing slide presentations, chalkboards, Smart Boards, easels, charts, maps, models, and pictures
- creating and showcasing digital content or interacting with digital learning stations
- using manipulatives
- engaging with QR codes
- showing videos

7. Learning through Physical Activity

Next up are those who learn through physical activity. In other words, they learn best when they are invited to do something. For such learners, be sure to include gestures, body language, and hands-on activities. Consider using role-playing, athletic activities, simulation exercises, ASL (American Sign Language), and content-based games, such as charades and pantomimes, which involve physical movement and tactile activity.

Consider the following suggestions that involve physical activity:

- playing games such as bingo, find the object or image, charades, tic-tac-toe, and trivia games
- engaging in icebreakers
- doing team competitions
- creating prayerful processions in your learning space or when moving from your learning space to the church, chapel, or other space.
- role playing and dramatizing

- building models
- engaging with objects of flashcards
- creating learning stations
- creating puppet shows
- using manipulatives
- short bursts of movement and stretching
- playing charades
- dancing and drumming
- walking the Stations of the Cross
- fingering the beads of a Rosary

8. Learning through Nature

Some people learn best through making connections with nature. In other words, they learn best when the content of a lesson is related to nature. For such learners, consider outdoor scavenger hunts, or invite them to create observation notebooks in which they record various ways of recognizing God's presence in the world around them. Don't hesitate to use microscopes, telescopes, or other scientific equipment to invite learners to see the complexity and beauty of God's creation.

Consider the following activities that emphasize learning through nature:

- nature walks
- nature journaling
- outdoor scavenger hunts
- outdoor Stations of the Cross
- gardening
- sensory exploration
- using sticks or rocks or other outdoor objects to form words or images
- outdoor games
- outdoor meditation/reflective prayer
- outdoor clean-up or restoration
- sidewalk chalk
- bird, animal, critter watching

9. Learning through Interaction with Others

Personally, I like to learn alone, however, many people learn through Interaction with others. For such learners, be sure to provide peer activities, small-group projects and discussions, and large-group activities. You can also develop a pattern for small-group discussions that includes a way to report to the larger group.

Consider the following activities that emphasize interaction with others:

- playing educational games
- choral readings
- dance
- dramatic readings
- gestures to songs
- mime
- plays, pageants, and puppet shows
- role-playing

10. Learning through Introspection

Finally, another style that fits me personally is learning through Introspection. Such folks learn best when given time to process information on their own. To serve such learners, be sure to incorporate independent learning activities, self-designed study projects, and reflective journaling. Consider learner portfolios to provide introspective learners an opportunity to express themselves in a way they are most comfortable.

Consider the following activities that emphasize processing information individually:

- journaling
- solitary activities and independent research and reading
- self-paced study
- deep personal reflection
- goal setting
- mind mapping
- creating quiet space/sacred space
- memorization of traditional prayers such as the Act of Contrition, the Angelus, the Glory Be, Grace before meals, the Guardian angel prayer, Hail Holy Queen, the Hail Mary, the Lord's Prayer, the Memorare, or the Morning Offering.
- memorization of doctrinal formulas such as the Apostles' Creed, the Beatitudes, the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, the Deadly Sins, the Gifts and Fruits of the Spirit, the Mysteries of the Rosary, the Seven Sacraments, the Ten Commandments, or the Virtues

11. Considering Learners with Disabilities

In addition to these various learning styles, it is critical for catechists to be aware of methods and strategies for learners with disabilities. In fact, this is so critical that we will cover this topic in its own separate video.

12. Considering Cultural Diversity and Inclusivity

Another aspect of learning styles to pay attention to is cultural diversity and inclusivity. Diversity is a hallmark of the Body of Christ. Get to know the traditions, customs, devotions, prayer styles, and values of the various ethnic groups present in your group. Invite learners to share their own unique customs and traditions. Highlight stories and images that reflect ethnic diversity. And, finally, be sensitive to the many learners that come from families experiencing divorce, mixed-families, various forms of abuse, and lack of attendance at Sunday Mass.

13. Considering 21st Century Learners

One of the characteristics of the 21st century learner is that they are accustomed to switching tasks frequently. As a catechist, this means that your approach must include a variety of learning activities to meet the many learning styles in your group. Be sure that the activities you choose help you to achieve your learning outcomes. Activities are not just for fun but are educational and formational tools.

And finally, review the age, gender, and spiritual maturity of your group, asking yourself if they are capable of being engaged with the approach you have in mind. Perhaps they are not mature enough. On the other hand, maybe they are more sophisticated than the activity you've chosen.

14. Employing a Variety of Learning Activities

Varying your learning activities provides many benefits. Good learning activities will encourage creative expression, respect varied learning styles, help learners to adjust to new settings, create a comfortable learning environment, develop skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and conflict management, encourage interaction, reinforce learning, encourage communication, build a sense of community, and keep learners engaged. Having said all that, don't overdo it. While it is good to have variety

in your methodology, don't lose sight of the fact that the simple activities of reading a text, leading a simple discussion, or lecturing may actually be the most effective strategy for a particular lesson.

Employing a variety of activities in your sessions requires more preparation but results in more effective catechesis, a more relaxed catechist, more highly engaged learners, better discipline, and increased spontaneity on your part. Learning activities are not designed to "cover" material but to "uncover" learning!

Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences

Howard Gardner, a professor of education at Harvard University, developed the theory of multiple intelligences in the early 1980s. His core idea was that intelligence isn't a single, fixed ability, but rather that people process information and solve problems through several distinct “intelligences” or learning styles. This means effective teaching requires a variety of methods to reach different learners, rather than relying on just one approach.

Verbal-Linguistic (Words)

This intelligence reflects a strength in understanding and using language, whether spoken or written. People strong in this area tend to think in words, enjoy reading and writing, and learn well through discussion, storytelling, and verbal explanation. In a catechetical setting, this is the intelligence most often relied upon by default — through lecture, reading aloud, and group discussion — even though it represents just one of eight ways people actually learn.

Musical-Rhythmic (Music)

This intelligence involves sensitivity to rhythm, melody, tone, and sound patterns. People strong in this area often think in musical terms, remember information more easily when it's set to rhythm or song, and respond deeply to both sacred and popular music. Catechists can engage this intelligence through singing hymns, using rap or rhythm for memorization, or incorporating quiet instrumental music during moments of prayerful reflection.

Logical-Mathematical (Math and Logic)

This intelligence centers on the ability to reason, recognize patterns, and solve problems systematically. People strong in this area are comfortable with numbers, enjoy puzzles and strategic thinking, and learn well by connecting new information to what they already know in a structured way. In faith formation, this intelligence can be engaged through activities like scripture citation practice, logic games such as Twenty Questions, or creating Venn diagrams to compare and organize ideas.

Spatial (Art and Space)

Often referred to as visual learning, this intelligence involves a strong capacity to think in images, understand spatial relationships, and express ideas visually. People strong in this area are drawn to color, design, and imagery, and often process concepts more fully when they can see them represented visually rather than only hearing or reading about them. Activities like creating posters, collages, or engaging in visio divina (prayerfully gazing upon sacred art) tap directly into this intelligence.

Bodily-Kinesthetic (Physical Activity)

This intelligence reflects a preference for learning through movement, touch, and physical doing rather than passive listening or reading. People strong in this area often think and process best when their bodies are engaged — through gesture, role-play, or hands-on activity — and can struggle to stay focused during long periods of stillness. Catechists can reach these learners through drama, simulation games, physical prayer practices like walking the Stations of the Cross, or simply building in short bursts of movement.

Naturalistic (Nature)

This intelligence involves a deep attunement to the natural world — noticing patterns, cycles, and details in plants, animals, weather, and the outdoors. People strong in this area often feel most present and reflective when learning is connected to nature, and they respond well to activities that let them observe,

explore, or interact with the created world. Outdoor scavenger hunts, nature journaling, or simply relating a lesson's theme to the beauty and order of creation can effectively engage this intelligence.

Interpersonal (Interaction with Others)

This intelligence reflects strength in understanding, relating to, and working well with other people. Those strong in this area often learn best through dialogue, collaboration, and shared activity, and they tend to process ideas more fully when given the chance to discuss and build on them with peers. Small-group projects, peer discussions, and structured group activities with a clear way to report back to the larger group are especially effective for these learners.

Intrapersonal (Introspection)

This intelligence centers on self-awareness and the capacity for deep, independent reflection. People strong in this area learn best when given quiet time to process information on their own, often preferring journaling, solitary study, or personal goal-setting over group interaction. In a faith formation context, this intelligence can be nurtured through reflective journaling, self-paced study, quiet sacred space for prayer, or memorization work done independently.

References

Primary Sources (Gardner's Own Work)

Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. New York: Basic Books. — This is the foundational text where Gardner first introduced the theory, originally proposing seven intelligences (linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal).

Gardner, H. (1999). *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century*. New York: Basic Books. — In this follow-up, Gardner added the naturalistic intelligence (bringing the total to eight) and discussed additional candidate intelligences, such as existential intelligence, along with updates to his original theory.

Gardner, H. (1993). *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice*. New York: Basic Books. — This work focuses on applying the theory in educational settings, which is likely the more directly relevant text for catechetical and classroom application.

Gardner, H. (2006). *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons in Theory and Practice*. New York: Basic Books. — A revised and updated edition addressing critiques and expanding on classroom applications.

Secondary/Applied Sources

Armstrong, T. (2009). *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom* (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). — A widely used practical guide for educators applying MI theory, often cited in catechetical and religious education contexts for translating the theory into concrete classroom activities.

Armstrong, T. (2000). *In Their Own Way: Discovering and Encouraging Your Child's Multiple Intelligences* (Rev. ed.). New York: Tarcher/Putnam.

Practice using the Multiple Intelligences

Focus

Explore how you might use the multiple intelligences to teach a Gospel story using a learning activities tailored to each intelligence.

Read Jesus Heals the Gerasene Demoniac (Mark 5:1-20)

They came to the other side of the lake, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him anymore, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; and he shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.' For he had said to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!' Then Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'My name is Legion; for we are many.' He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; and the unclean spirits begged him, 'Send us into the swine; let us enter them.' So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and were drowned in the lake.

The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. But Jesus refused, and said to him, 'Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.' And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

Application

Develop at least one idea/activity for teaching the story of the Gerasene Demoniac in the Gospel of Mark 5:1-20 using each of the multiple intelligences.

Multiple Intelligences	Learning Activities
Verbal-Linguistic (Words)	
Musical-Rhythmic (Music)	
Logical-Mathematical (Math and Logic)	
Spatial (Art and Space)	
Bodily-Kinesthetic (Physical Activity)	
Naturalistic (Nature)	
Interpersonal (Interaction with Others)	
Intrapersonal (Introspection)	

Engaging Multiple Learning Styles - Checklist

Faith formation methods often fall into a “read-discuss-read-discuss” rut or rely too heavily on lecture. Use this checklist when planning a session to make sure your methods reach the range of learning styles present in your group — based on Dr. Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences.

1. Learning through Words

- ☐ Have I included at least one activity emphasizing spoken word (discussion, Q&A, guest speaker, reading aloud)?
- ☐ Have I included at least one activity emphasizing written word (writing, journaling, letters, poems)?
- ☐ Am I relying only on this style, since it tends to be catechists’ default?

2. Learning through Music

- ☐ Have I integrated music into this session (sacred or contemporary)?
- ☐ If using a popular song, have I previewed it fully for appropriate lyrics?
- ☐ Have I considered background instrumental music for reflection time?

3. Learning through Math and Logic

- ☐ Have I included an activity involving patterns, puzzles, or logical problem-solving?
- ☐ Have I connected new learning explicitly to previous learning?
- ☐ Have I considered a game like Twenty Questions or a Venn diagram to reinforce content?

4. Learning through Art and Images

- ☐ Have I offered a visual/artistic way to summarize or express today’s theme (poster, collage, drawing)?
- ☐ Have I considered visio divina or another way of prayerfully looking at sacred art?
- ☐ Am I using visual aids (images, slides, charts, maps) to support the lesson?

5. Learning through Physical Activity

- ☐ Have I included movement, gesture, or a hands-on activity (role-play, procession, game)?
- ☐ Have I built in short bursts of movement or stretching if the session is long?
- ☐ Could this content be taught through simulation, dramatization, or physical prayer (Stations, Rosary)?

6. Learning through Nature

- ☐ Have I connected today’s content to the natural world in any way?
- ☐ Could I use an outdoor activity, nature journal, or scavenger hunt for this lesson?

7. Learning through Interaction with Others

- ☐ Have I included peer or small-group activities, not just individual or whole-class work?
- ☐ Do I have a clear structure for small groups to report back to the larger group?

8. Learning through Introspection

- ☐ Have I given space for independent reflection, journaling, or quiet processing?
- ☐ Have I considered a self-paced or portfolio-style option for introspective learners?

9. Considering Learners with Disabilities

- ☐ Am I aware of any learners in my group with disabilities that require adapted methods or materials?
- ☐ Have I made a plan (or sought guidance) for how to include them fully in today's activities?

10. Considering Cultural Diversity and Inclusivity

- ☐ Do I know the traditions, customs, and prayer styles represented in my group?
- ☐ Have I invited learners to share their own customs and traditions when relevant?
- ☐ Do my stories and images reflect ethnic diversity?
- ☐ Am I being sensitive to learners from varied family situations (divorce, mixed families, irregular Mass attendance)?

11. Considering 21st-Century Learners

- ☐ Have I planned enough variety to hold the attention of learners accustomed to frequent task-switching?
- ☐ Does each activity serve a clear learning outcome, not just entertainment?
- ☐ Have I reviewed the age, gender, and spiritual maturity of my group against the activities I've chosen?

12. Employing a Variety of Learning Activities

- ☐ Have I included more than one learning style in this session, not just my own natural preference?
- ☐ Have I avoided overdoing variety to the point that a simple, effective method (reading, discussion, lecture) would actually serve the lesson better?
- ☐ Am I confident that today's activities help "uncover" learning, rather than just "covering" material?

Quick Session Planning Table

Use this table to plan which learning styles you're engaging this session.

Learning Style	Activity Planned	Materials Needed
Words (spoken/written)		
Music		
Math/Logic		
Art/Image		
Physical Activity		
Nature		
Interaction with Others		
Introspection		

Reflection After the Session

- ☐ Which learning styles did I actually engage today?
- ☐ Which learners seemed most and least engaged?
- ☐ What would I adjust next time to reach a learning style I missed?

"Learning activities are not designed to 'cover' material but to 'uncover' learning!"