

Perceiving and Processing

We think of the ways in which people receive information. We think of the factors that affect how people receive information.

Environmental Conditions (the arrangement of a room and furniture can affect the way people are attentive; the size and/or amount of text on a Powerpoint slide; heat or cold; lighting; too many or too few people in the group, and so on)

Relationship with Other Courses or Experiences (attentiveness may be increased or decreased in relation to previous exposure to the information; attentiveness and retention can be increased and improved if the learner is able to build on prior knowledge—or related knowledge, and so on)

Nature of the Subject Matter (Organized or not? Relevant? Irrelevant? Suited to the outcomes intended?)

Degree of Complexity, Difficulty of Subject Matter (if material is too simple—“why bother? If material is too hard—“Don’t get it, turn off”)

Conceptual Awareness (tough to describe—there has to be a certain level of capacity to be “aware” of a subject; we can accept that a person who is mentally disadvantaged may not be aware but even someone with all their faculties may not be aware; for example, a person who is obsessive, or holds rigid beliefs may not be able to “see” new information or anything outside their narrow world of knowledge)

Skills Needed (does the learner need to possess certain skills in order to receive “this” information?)

Extent of Involvement (disengaged learners seldom receive or retain; to what extent and in what ways does the method chosen for delivery of or exposure to information secure and sustain involvement—even a lecture can stimulate involvement)

Background Experience (what experience can the teacher build on to increase attentiveness)

Number of Points of Contact with Subject Matter (provide “hooks” for remembering; create an advance organizer to remind them of the previous class period’s information and to build a bridge to current session)

Degree of Retention (sometimes receiving and attending is helped or hindered according to how much is remembered from previous sessions)

Perception of Relevance (learners often will not attend to that which they perceive as irrelevant—therefore, receiving and retaining of information is greatly hindered)

Perception of Purpose (even though the material may not be seen as relevant to the learner personally, a sense of its purpose can be energizing and stimulate both attention and remembering)

Perceived Needs (obviously if there is a felt need, the learner is more likely to be ready for receiving information that will help meet that need)

Characteristics and/or Style of Teacher (receiving and retaining can be affected by student’s perception of teacher – intimidating; boring; not genuine; too obscure; talks too fast, too slow; distracting appearance; energized by his/her subject; enjoys the learners; enjoys teaching; and so on)

We think of the ways in which people process Information. We think of the factors that affect how people process information; that enable them to process knowledge.

Internalization (the more experience a person with something, and the more they engage it at an attitudinal-emotional-valuing level, the more likely it is that that something will be internalized—they will make a commitment to it)

Decision-Making (when people are led to make decisions, they also need to be helped to actually think about the nature of the decision, the subject matter or issue in relation to the decision and so on)

Problem Recognition and Efforts at Solution (seeing a problem is often the first stimulus to learning. Thomas Edison quit school and then picked up learning again when he encountered the problems related to artificial light)

Evaluation/Critical Thinking (judgment and discernment can be learned;

Forming Concepts, Ideas, Themes (knowledge by nature doesn't sit well in boxes; information likes to find connections with other information; information must become concepts and principles in order to shape, guide and stimulate responsible action)

Discerning Structures, Principles, Issues (knowledge sometimes has structures or principles or issues embedded within it that have to be teased out or discovered)

Seeking Meaning (meaning often doesn't emerge without thoughtful reflection on information)

Application of Truth, Concepts, Principles to Life (application of truth to life isn't as much a function of how much you know but what you are doing with what you know)

Reflection on Experience (it is often assumed that knowledge informs or leads to experience; however, experience also shapes knowledge – see Acts 15 as a case in point)

Integration with Other Concepts, Subjects, Experiences (it is common today to speak of the need to integrate—understanding is heightened as more points of view are brought into the conversation)

Skill Practice and Critique (skill in anything takes practice and also sensible reflection on how well one is doing—practice toward improvement; knowledge plays a part in skill development otherwise the learner is just a thoughtless actor)

Use of Resources (in this age we are glutted with resources and have more access to what was once the privileged information of scholars than at any other time in history; the question today is not what resources to I need as much as it is How do I discern or make judgments about the resources I am discovering?)

Meaningful Experiences (the operative word is “meaningful”—a professor of mine was fond of saying “what could you conceivably see your students going about doing for the rest of their lives—that's what is important – that is a meaningful experience.” The Christian world is full of experience, not so full perhaps of wisdom. Action and wisdom are two sides of the same coin.)