

Learning Methodologies at Learnlife

Overview

Learning methodologies are the different approaches we can take to learning something. There are many of them, some of them overlap with each other, and it can all be a little confusing at times. That is, if we think of them as distinct items on a menu of options, and feel as though we have to know what they all mean, and how best to use them. The truth is, that most of us have already used many of these approaches to learn something in our lives; without knowing that it was a “methodology”. If you have children, you have most certainly used several of these approaches!

Learning methodologies are really just tools in a toolkit; different resources at our disposal. They may sound scientific, and yes there is a great deal of research behind each of them, but at the core, these are very organic, human methods of learning. Did you learn to play a computer game by...playing it? That’s experiential learning. Did you learn the times tables by memorising them? That’s rote learning (but let’s forget about that one).

At Learnlife we use a wide range of methodologies because we need to be fluid to adapt to learners’ needs. Let’s take a look at some of them, what they mean, why we use some and why we avoid others.



In this Article

- What is a learning methodology, and what is it not?
- How to use learning methodologies as learners and educators

What is a learning methodology, and what is it not?

If you put that question into a search engine, you don't get a lot back.

Many results focus on "teaching methodologies", but that is aimed at traditional education, where the person at the front of a classroom is figuring out how best to impart the knowledge or build the skill they want to focus on. Learning methodologies are not how to teach, but how to *learn* and that's an important difference in a world where learning is lifelong and life-wide.

Other results come back with the dreaded "learning styles", which is definitely not the same thing. Learning styles were a very popular way of thinking in education for a long time. Some people thought a learner had a style of learning that worked best for them, such as learning visually or kinesthetically (by touch).

The idea of learning styles has been [thoroughly debunked](#), even though it still creeps into teacher training courses, and so many educators around the world still talk about it as something of fact.

The idea of learning styles is actually quite dangerous, as we learn best by a combination and variety of inputs, approaches, dynamics and experiences. Why should we grow to believe we are limited to one style, and why rob ourselves of the opportunity to experience the full breadth of learning? We are anything but one thing.

All of this to say that learning methodologies are not about what the "teacher" does, but how the learner approaches the learning process. Learning methodologies are not about "learning style" but are simply diverse approaches to learning, which can be used in different ways, settings and can interact with other approaches easily. Oh, and the best ones are *transformative*.

Let's find an example.



Not so very long ago, traditional teaching methodologies were focused on memorisation. A teacher would *tell* you a maths formula, maybe *show* you an example, you would try to *copy* it in practice, *remember* it, and when asked (either in class or in a test) you would try to *recite* that bit of information. Gladly, those days are largely behind us, but not as much as we'd like to think.

In contrast, just look at what [Urban Math Trails created](#) from a simple walk in the park. The geometry of leaves, and the rate of decline in a forest. The gradient of a bend in the river to the rate of precipitation over a week in two different environments. Even in more traditional learning environments, maths can be connected to authentic learning opportunities.

But let's go further and broader. Fast forward to a more learner directed scenario. A young learner is out in the forest, and remarks on the poor condition of the trail, the weird stuff growing out of a tree, and a story they read about how plants "communicate" with each other.

Each of these observations and remarks of interest can lead to wonder and curiosity, and these are the seeds of learning. Let's see how learning methodologies build that development from here:

We are out here in the forest on a learning walk in the first place, and deriving learning through a connection with the natural world is *nature-based learning*.

We see a tree that looks like a silver birch but has some strange clumpy mushrooms growing from the trunk, so the learners post online to ask their community what it might be (and whether we can eat it!). That is *crowd-sourced learning*.

Part of the forest trail is poorly maintained, and the learners decide to repair some of the footholds and lay some planks over small streams so that less sure-footed visitors are not disadvantaged. Learning and applying these things to help others, is *service learning*, and makes a clear social contribution. The learners might iterate the process to add a serrated edge to the wooden planks, or perhaps some other technique to help it grip better in the wet? Well, that's *learning by tinkering and making*.

Naming the things that surround us in the diversity of languages that make up our learning community is *multilingual learning* and also a good example of peer-to-peer learning too.

Back home afterwards, we decide to find out what that mushroom thing really was, as we have different answers from our community. Through research-based learning



online, we discover that it was in fact chaga. That stuff is pretty expensive...how do we use it? By bringing some into the studio, we can use *challenge-based learning* to see who can make the most delicious tea from it, and work out the best way to market it as a new product in the local community.

We could go on, but we don't want to get sidetracked here. You see, the key point here is that all of these learning methodologies can accompany us our whole lives. Whether we are learning through experience, play, problem solving, figuring out why something happens or what makes it work; these are learning skills that will really serve us well in the future.

Learning methodologies help us learn to learn. What would you rather have- a memorised list of natural phenomena that someone told you in a classroom, or the ability to follow your own curiosity towards solutions, social contribution, deeper learning and all of the confidence from knowing that you got there yourself?

Learning methodologies are the real prize here, and not necessarily the end "product". Learning is its own reward, and in an uncertain and fluid future, those who can learn independently will more easily adapt and flourish. As educators, we only have to guide, support and help to facilitate such opportunities.

How to use learning methodologies as learners and educators

This is going to be a short section. To circle back to the point we made about the harmful belief in "learning styles", the reason it is harmful is that it boxes us in. We believe we learn best in one way, and we pursue that; robbing ourselves of the beautiful diversity of learning approaches that might help us develop other skills, connections, interests, abilities and all the rest of it.

The key here is diversity. Service learning helps reinforce our sense of belonging to a community, and empowers us with the understanding that we can make a real impact on others (and that it feels pretty good too). Research-based learning helps us develop information literacy skills, identify bias, and build tolerance for more complex texts. [Play-based learning](#) is just amazing full stop, and gives us a first-hand insight into [flow states](#) and the joy of discovery. Oh, and the journey often involves *multiple* learning methodologies at play.

Sounds complex? It is actually the most organic process. The question comes first, or the need, or simply the curiosity. An experienced Learning Guide will be able to



make suggestions, and not only help to guide the learner towards their own goals, but to identify learning opportunities along the way.

When the learning environment is as fluid as this (and it should be, because that's how the world is), the use of diverse learning methodologies comes naturally.

Importantly, whatever route we take to learning, we should always reflect. How did we learn, what worked well, what did not, what might we do differently, and how are we growing and developing? That space for reflection, both solo and supported, and 360-degree feedback, is where a good learning environment really adds huge value.

At Learnlife, learning methodologies are just one tile in the mosaic, but a vibrantly colourful one. We believe developing broad expertise in learning methodologies is the responsibility of every learning environment, and we don't have to do it all ourselves.

By working with partners, parents, communities, we really can offer such a diverse experience to learners, who will grow and develop in a space that is reflective of the truly pluralistic world that awaits them as independent, lifelong learners.

In Summary...

Learning methodologies are different ways to learn something, and there are a lot of them. Rather than get hung up on the myth of "learning styles", and definitely not allowing the traditional model of "teacher-led instruction" shape our learning for us, these methodologies help us discover *how to learn* on our own terms.

They make learning fun, rich, diverse, and build the skills and abilities we really need in a complex world where the way forward is not going to be neatly packaged for us. We have a responsibility as educators to use a broad variety of approaches and support learners in figuring out who they are and what sparks their passion.

Our Blogs on learning methodologies

- [25 Learning Methodologies That Every Education Professional Should Know](#)
- [Learning Methodologies Unpacked: Place-Based Learning](#)
- [Learning in Nature](#)



- [Learning Methodologies Unpacked: Experience-based Learning](#)
- [Play-Based Learning Brings Its Own Reward](#)

Our Programmes

- [Primary Programmes](#)
- [Secondary Programmes](#)
- [Home Hub](#)
- [Community Programmes](#)

Elements of the Learning Paradigm

- [Element 10: Diversifying Learning Methodologies](#)

Sources

- [Diversifying Learning Methodologies](#)
- [Busting the learning styles myth: Why learning generalists perform best](#)
- [What the research says about learning Introduction and summary](#)
- [Learning through play](#)