

By Jeff Anderson
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Visual Learning is worth a thousand words!

What is your basic learning style? Are you fundamentally a Visual, Auditory, Reading/Writing or Hands-on Learner? Recently at a DLI Class, I experienced an 'ah-ha' moment that helped me to better comprehend a topic about Hill Country rainwater which I had read or heard about many times yet never fully grasped. This time a visual display by the Instructor caused a light bulb to come on in my mind and my learning curve accelerated.

Before this visual learning experience with teacher Jim Stanley, I presumed my basic style of learning was reading & writing with auditory (listening) not far behind. Yet, what I experienced in Jim's Class on Hill Country Ecology made me realize that the seed of a breakthrough learning experience exists in every learning style. Helping me also recognize that the quality of future Dynamic Learning Classes will improve as DLI better integrates multiple learning styles into the delivery of each class.

You were likely inspired to call The Texas Hill Country home because of a personal visual experience with its bountiful natural beauty. Looking back, the crystal clear surface water of our streams and rivers is what first captured my youthful attention and kept me yearning to come back. Do you recall your first experience walking in a Hill Country stream flowing over limestone bedrock? Whatever, it

was likely a visual experience with the beauty of our area that first captured your imagination.

Jim Stanley retired to the Hill Country from the northeast and soon discovered a love for the natural beauty of our area. Instead of simply touring to enjoy the scenery Jim began utilizing his skills as a scientist to better understand this land that he now calls home. He's a Master Naturalist and his teaching about our land, plants, animals and waters has enriched and added a valuable resource to our community.

You could say that Jim is a pioneer in the concept that land has ethical rights and those of us who live here have responsibilities to uphold those rights so future generations may fully enjoy this unique area of Texas. Jim writes a weekly column for the Daily Times and speaking at DLI shared his opinion that a significant visual change our generation is experiencing is the increased growth of cedar versus the days when Kerrville was settled.

When you travel on Highway 290 to Austin and enter the elevated vistas of the MoPac Expressway you gain the perspective of an amazing sea of lush green cedar. While we complain about the allergies that come from cedar there is no doubt that expansive green vistas of cedar are attractive to our eyes. Yet,

Jim and others say extensive cedar brake growth is exacerbating soil erosion, reducing the ground water retention of our land and reducing its productive value to future generations.

For years I have accepted these insights into the harmful impacts of cedar without fully understanding why. Jim's primary DLI teaching tools were voice, power point slides and a few photos. It was his use of visual images that produced my 'ah-ha' moment as he conducted a scientific study on his property and demonstrated it in projected photos.

The photos demonstrated a comparative study of ground water retention within two identical cylinders placed in close proximity to each other. One cylinder was hammered into the ground (a few inches) in an area of native grass. Yards away an identical cylinder was similarly hammered into the ground in an area made barren by cedar. Both cylinders were filled to a similar brim with water and a clock was photographed along side each cylinder to measure the time necessary for the water to be absorbed into the ground. The native grass cylinder fully drained into the land in a few minutes yet the barren cedar area cylinder required almost an hour to fully drain into the soil.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. In Jim's class, that phrase rang true. His display of the water drainage photos helped me to instantly see what I had not previously grasped. Native grass acts as a natural sponge to absorb rainwater into the ground and when grasses disappear and the land is barren, the rainwater simply runs away.

Jim explains it this way, "If we own land, we can have an effect on how the water cycle works on our property. We want the rain that falls from the sky to reach the ground and to soak into the ground, not run off. How the land is managed and its condition determines how efficiently it captures rainwater and how much water the soil can hold. Well-managed land with good stands of native grass does a good job of capturing the rain and not let it run off immediately. If it runs off downhill to the nearest creek or river it can be back in the Gulf in a matter of a few days before it does us any good. We want the rain to soak in and flow downhill underground to local water tables to help maintain the base flow of our rivers between rain events."

Jim's use of visual learning tools accelerated my learning curve and helped bring understanding to the vital importance of good stands of native grass to the ecological well being of Hill Country land. Perhaps you have a topic that you want to better understand? If so, you should consider looking for visual learning opportunities to stimulate your understanding.

Whatever your learning style remember, "Learning is a treasure which accompanies its owner everywhere."

About Anderson - DLI Chairman Jeff Anderson is servant pastor of SERV Kerrville, a nonprofit collaborating with community partners to empower lifelong learning.

Dynamic Learning Institute - The Fall Semester of DLI will return after Labor Day with an exciting roster of Classes featuring Hill Country neighbors with interesting lifetime experiences to share with you.