An Introduction to Learning Styles

Before you mark our tests, Mrs Brown, you might just like to consider that I’m an auditory - activist - innovator ...

What are learning styles?

Ellis (1985) defines learning style (or cognitive style) as the more or less consistent way in which a person perceives, conceptualizes, organizes and recalls information.

… in other words the way you learn.

Ellis R, Understanding Second Language Acquisition, Oxford 1985 (Chap.5)

What are learning styles?

Premise: different people will have different learning styles. Eg:

- Mary – gets bored with abstractions. Likes to discuss concrete problems and share ideas with other people.
- John – likes to read up on theoretical background and find the “right answer”
What are learning styles?

Some of the most popular models:
- VAK (Bandler and Grindler, NLP)
- Kolb / Honey and Mumford
- Left or right brain dominated
- Field dependent / field independent
- McCarthy
- Multiple Intelligences (Gardner)

Visual – Auditory – Kinaesthetic

- **Visual learners** – like looking at things: pictures, the teacher, notes and texts etc
- **Auditory learners** – like listening: to lectures, to other people’s ideas, to dialogues, to rhythm and music etc
- **Kinaesthetic/Tactile learners** – like moving around, “hands-on” learning, manipulating objects etc

Honey and Mumford (based on Kolb)

Kolb’s learning sequence

- **Concrete Experience**
- **Reflective Observation**
- **Abstract Conceptualization**
- **Active Experimentation**
Honey and Mumford (based on Kolb)

**Activists**
- learn by doing
- need concrete experiences.
- open-minded approach to learning, willing to try things out without bias.

Honey and Mumford (based on Kolb)

**Reflectors**
- learn by **observing and thinking** about what happened.
- may avoid leaping in and **prefer to watch from the sidelines**.
- prefer to stand back and **view experiences from a number of different perspectives**, collecting data and taking the time to work towards an appropriate conclusion.

Honey and Mumford (based on Kolb)

**Theorists**
- want to understand the theory behind the actions.
- need **models, concepts and facts** in order to engage in the learning process.
- prefer to **analyse and synthesise**, drawing new information into a systematic and logical ‘theory’.
Honey and Mumford (based on Kolb)

**Pragmatists**
- abstract concepts and games are of limited use unless they can see a way to *put the ideas into action in their lives*.
- *experimenters*, trying out new ideas, theories and techniques to see if they work

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**So what?**

**Premise 1:**
You’ll learn best if the learning activities you engage in suit your learning style

**Premise 2:**
If you only use one or two learning styles you may be missing out. The best learners may be those who use a variety of styles.

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**So what?**

**Premise 3**
In your teaching you’ll tend to use activity types which you’ve found useful in your own learning – ie those which reflect your own learning style.

But these may not match your students’ learning styles
So what?

Premise 4
In each lesson we need to provide activities which cater for a variety of learning styles.