

quick guide

effective practice

Learning styles and their application for effective learning

By Ian Duckett and Marilyn Tatarkowski

The aim of this leaflet is to provide up-to-date knowledge concerning learning styles and some strategies to promote effective learning and teaching by exploring:

- Why we are focusing on learning styles?
- An analysis of learning styles
- What is meant by visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning styles?
- The development of learning styles for use by practitioners and learners in the learning environment
- A practical understanding and application of preferred learning styles

Why are we focusing on learning styles?

There can be a discrepancy between the way the brain learns and the way students are taught. Students will learn content better through their preferred learning style. We know that teachers tend to teach in their own preferred learning style.

The reasons why we should find out students' preferred learning styles are:

- It can inform teaching and learning
- Use of this data will lead to clear learning plans for individuals and/or groups
- It can empower students to be more effective and independent learners
- This information can be linked to targets with goals and objectives
- Students can work using their strengths but also strengthen their weakest areas
- Students' individual needs can be met
- It can be used for differentiation in learning

What is meant by a learning style?

A learning style is the way in which an individual learner tries to learn. It includes how they approach learning, experience learning and utilise information. Filling in questionnaires and quizzes to determine preferred learning styles can be fun but will not be effective unless they become part of an ongoing programme of learning how to learn for students. How you present something is often as important as what you say - indeed it may determine whether it is understood at all.

What is meant by a learning style? cont.

Research shows that approximately a third of the population has a preferred learning style which is visual, a third that is auditory and a third that is kinaesthetic. It is possible that each preferred learning style could be genetic, dependent on which part of the brain is most receptive in each of the three areas, or because of the way that we were taught.

Some students have a preferred learning style that is:

- Visual - they learn mainly through seeing
- Auditory - they learn mainly through hearing;
- Kinaesthetic - they learn through doing

Some students will have a combination of two or sometimes all three of the learning styles. The visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning styles are the ones associated with accelerated learning and are widely used throughout primary and secondary schools.

Students learning styles can change and develop and do not necessarily stay the same.

A practical understanding & application of learning styles

By finding out a student's preferred learning style you will be able to identify possible challenges for a student on their particular course or courses. Evidence suggests that students attracted to vocational courses are more likely to have a kinaesthetic preferred learning style. Many students enjoy the practical element of a vocational course but find the theory part of the course quite challenging. This can be when inappropriate behaviour can emerge. One of the reasons for this is that theory tends to be taught in a visual and auditory way and therefore the kinaesthetic learner finds it even more of a challenge than the other learners.

There is a simple activity on the LSDA website that can be used with both staff and students to illustrate that each of us notices different aspects of the same room.

An analysis of preferred learning styles

There are many quizzes and questionnaires to help analyse VAK learning styles. If you use a diagnostic procedure to find out preferred learning styles then there

should be some kind of spread of learning styles. For example if all students are coming out as equally efficient in all three styles then there is something wrong with the test. In the same way, a survey on the height of students which suggests that everyone is the same height - is not possible. Try the common sense way of diagnosing preferred learning styles on the next page below - it is a bit of fun but also illustrates the point of them.

A common sense way of diagnosing preferred learning styles

- A. Ikea test - one good way to find out your preferred learning style is to do the Ikea or MFI test or anything that you buy that you have to assemble.. If you buy something that you have to assemble when you get it home, do you:
1. *open the packaging and try to put the item or furniture together without reading the instructions?*
 2. *read all of the instructions before you attempt to put the item together?*
 3. *hand the instructions to someone else to read them to you, or read them aloud to yourself?*
- B. Mobile phone test — similarly with a new mobile phone do you:
1. *take it out of the box and fiddle with the pieces before you read any instructions?*
 2. *read all of the instructions before you attempt to press any buttons?*
 3. *ask someone else to read the instructions and explain it to you or read the instructions out to yourself aloud?*
- C. Map reading - Many people use a map and possibly write down some instructions when finding their way to a new location. Do you:
1. *look at a map & follow all of the roads with your finger?*
 2. *look at the whole map and then look at every road?*
 3. *read out every road to yourself?*

Please circle the relevant answer below

A1 = K	A2 = V	A3 = A
B1 = K	B2 = V	B3 = A
C1 = K	C2 = V	C3 = A

Conclusion =

For further examples of learning styles assessments please go to www.lsda.org.uk

Remember that diagnostic assessment of quizzes and questionnaires are only guides to learning styles. You may know that a student has a preferred learning style by their behaviour. For example people who are:

- Visual learners usually enjoy reading books and may appear to day-dream during a session with a lot of verbal activities
- Auditory learners usually like discussion in lessons and may tend to whisper when reading
- Kinaesthetic learners usually tend to remember things that they do and experience and may tend to tap their pencil or pen during a lesson

For more information on learning styles contact the IFSP in house development administrator Helen Asemota hase-mota@lsda.org.uk

The Development of learning styles for use by practitioners and learners in the learning environment

Now that you have looked at the visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning styles, the next step is to look at your schemes of work and lesson plans. Do the schemes of work include visual, auditory and kinaesthetic strategies in each lesson? You can work through these schemes and colour code the VAK strategies that are included. For example, visual can be highlighted in blue, auditory in green and kinaesthetic in yellow.

If you undertake this exercise as a whole department activity and pool resources then lesson preparation will be used more effectively.

By deploying teaching styles that include all three learning styles in your lesson you can ensure differentiation is embedded in every lesson and then students' individual learning needs will be met.

Preferred learning styles can also be included in an individual or student action plan. The action plans can help students work using their strengths and help with their challenges. Very specific achievable goals and targets can be included in the action plan. Look at some of the strategies below that can be used to help students become independent learners.

How to enhance the visual approach of learning

- Use lots of post-its, posters, cue cards, diagrams and charts
- Place information, key words and posters, above eye-level in the room
- Use coloured pens and paper
- Tracing
- Use mind maps and spider diagrams

How to structure a variety of oral input

- Engage in class discussion
- Use poems, rhyme, rhythm, rap and jingles
- Read passages or questions out loud
- Have background music on while studying
- Learners revise best when they are asked questions when studying for a test or exam

How to aid kinaesthetic learning

- Build in regular planned physical breaks (20 minutes)
- Use brain gym
- Get involved in group work, role-play and games
- Use card or post-its to make key points, reviewing sessions etc and manoeuvre it about until the content makes sense
- Model making

Finally, remember the key to meeting individual students' needs is to ensure a variety of learning styles in every lesson.

further information

There are many potential sources of information on learning styles. Contacting the LSDA and keeping a check on the websites below is likely to prove a useful starting point:

LSDA

Regent Arcade House
19-25 Argyll Street
London W1F 7LS

020 7297 9000

www.vocationallearning.org.uk

IFSP key contacts

Mark Ellis, Programme Leader	mellis@lsda.org.uk
Ian Duckett, Development Adviser	iduckett@lsda.org.uk
Helen Gormley, Development Adviser	hgormley@lsda.org.uk
Val Beamish, Development Adviser	vbeamish@lsda.org.uk
Sarah Lane, Development Adviser	slane@lsda.org.uk
Paddy Rowe, Development Adviser	prowe@lsda.org.uk

For general information

Nick Bloom, Senior Information Officer	020 7297 9140	nbloom@lsda.org.uk
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Useful websites

www.dfes.gov.uk

www.qca.org.uk

www.aqa.org.uk

www.edexcel.org.uk

www.ocr.org.uk

www.wjec.org.uk

References

Buzan, T (1993) *The Mind Map Book: Radiant Thinking* London: Longman
Hughes, M (1999) *Closing the Learning Gap* Stafford: Network Educational Press
Robinson, Ken (2001) *Out of our Minds: Learning to be Creative* Oxford: Capstone
Smith, Alistair (1999) *Accelerated Learning in Practice* Stafford: Network Educational Press