

LEARNING STYLE CONCEPTS AND IMPLICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Learning Styles are various approaches or ways of learning. They involve educating methods, particular to an individual that are presumed to allow that individual to learn best. Most people prefer an identifiable method of interacting with, taking in, and processing stimuli or information. Based on this concept, the idea of individualized “learning styles” originated in the 1970s, and acquired “enormous popularity”.

LEARNING STYLE

Learning styles are simply different approaches or ways of learning. Proponents of learning styles contend that teachers should assess the learning styles of their students and adapt their classroom methods to best fit each student’s learning style. There are three main types of learning styles: auditory, visual, and kinesthetic. Most people learn best through a combination of the three types of learning styles, but everybody is different. Learning styles are various approaches or ways of learning. They involve educating methods, particular to an individual that allow him to learn best. Every individual has his own style of learning. Learning takes place when the learner consciously or subconsciously knows what to learn but more effective learning occurs.

When he knows ‘how’ to learn. The idea of ‘learning styles’ originated in the 1970s and with time it acquired huge popularity. Learning styles help to discover the different forms of mental representations; however, they are not good characterizations of what people are or are not like. It is not wise to divide the population into certain set of categories (i.e., visual and auditory learners) as all of us are capable of learning with almost any style, though preferences could vary from one learner to another. What these various instruments attempt to do is to allocate a person on some point on a continuum (similar to as measuring height or weight) .According to Stephen Downes, ‘There is no good understanding of learning styles as it stands. But it certainly does not follow that we all learn the same way the senses may well work in a concert, but some senses work more or less well, meaning that each individual may combine the senses differently’.

DEFINITIONS

Keefe (1979): “Learning style(s) is composite of characteristic cognitive, affective, and physiological factors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how a learner perceives interacts with, and responds to the learning environment.”

Stewart and Felicetti (1992) define learning styles as those “educational conditions under which a student is most likely to learn.”

Cheri Fuller, the author of ‘Unlocking Your Child’s Learning Potential writes “Learning style entails how a person best takes in, understands, and remembers information.” She adds, “...in most children, one sense is usually more finely tuned and influential for learning than the other.

TYPES OF LEARNING STYLES

There are three basic types of learning styles. The three most common are visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. To learn we depend on our senses to process the information around us. Most people tend to use one of their senses more than others. Sometimes people have two or three that all have about the same number of choices. Some people depend on two or more types of learning styles. It is not unusual to use different learning styles for different tasks. That's why people can respond so differently to the same thing.

The Fleming VAK/VARK model, one of the most common and widely used categorizations of the various types of learning styles, categorized the various types of learning styles as follows: visual learners, auditory learners, reading/writing- preference learners, and kinesthetic learners (also known as "tactile learners").

- 1. Visual Learners:** *Learn through seeing:*-Visual learners learn best by looking at graphics, watching a demonstration, or reading. For them, it's easy to look at charts and graphs, but they may have difficulty focusing while listening to an explanation. These learners need to see the teacher's body language and facial expression to fully understand the content of a lesson. They tend to prefer sitting at the front of the classroom to avoid visual obstructions. They may think in pictures and learn best from visual displays including: diagrams, illustrated text books, overhead transparencies, videos, flipcharts and hand-outs. During a lecture or classroom discussion, visual learners often prefer to take detailed notes to absorb the information.
- 2. Auditory Learners:** *Learn through listening and hearing:*-Auditory learners would rather listen to things being explained than read about them. Reciting information out loud and having music in the background may be a common study method. Other noises may become a distraction resulting in a need for a relatively quiet place. They learn best through verbal lectures, discussions, talking things through and listening to what others have to say, Auditory learners interpret the underlying meanings of speech through listening to tone of voice, pitch, speed and other nuances. Written information may have little meaning until it is heard. These learners often benefit from reading text aloud and using a tape recorder.
- 3. Tactile/Kinesthetic Learners:** (Touch). Kinesthetic learning is a learning style in which learning takes place by the learner using their body in order to express a thought, an idea or an understanding of a particular concept (which could be related to any field). Kinesthetic learners process information best through a "hands-on" experience. Actually doing an activity can be the easiest way for them to learn. Sitting still while studying may be difficult, but writing things down makes it easier to understand.

Kinesthetic learning is a learning style in which learning takes place by the student actually carrying out a physical activity, rather than listening to a lecture or merely watching a demonstration. It is also referred to as tactile learning. People with a kinesthetic learning style are also commonly known as do-ers. Tactile/Kinesthetic persons learn best through a hands-on approach, actively exploring the physical world around them. They may find it hard to sit still for long periods and may become distracted by their need for activity and exploration.

ADVANTAGES OF KINESTHETIC/TACTILE LEARNING

- The tactile-kinesthetic learner must do things for them to have the best chance of learning.
- The tactile-kinesthetic learner remembers best the things they experience.
- Kinesthetic learning involves use of the whole body rather than just hands-on.
- Getting information from written materials or by listening is not as easy as aforementioned methods.

LEARNING STRENGTHS TACTILE-KINESTHETIC LEARNER

- Remembers what they DO, what they experience with their hands or bodies (movement and touch).
- Enjoys using tools or lessons which involve active/practical participation.
- Can remember how to do things after they've done them once (motor memory).
- Have good motor coordination.

LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR THE TACTILE-KINESTHETIC LEARNER

- To memorize, pace or walk around while reciting to yourself or using flashcards or notes.
- When reading a short story or chapter in a book, try a Whole-to-part approach. This means you should first scan the pictures, then read headings, then read the First and last paragraphs and try to get a feel for the book. You could also try skim-reading the chapter or short story backwards, paragraph-by-paragraph.
- You might not study best while at a desk. Try lying on your stomach or back. Try studying while sitting in a comfortable lounge chair or on cushions or a bean bag.
- Studying with music in the background might suit you (baroque music is best as opposed to heavily rhythm-based music).
- Use colored construction paper to cover your desk or even decorate your area. Choose your favorite color as this will help you focus. This technique is called color grounding.
- Try reading through colored transparencies to help focus your attention. Try a variety of colors to see which colors work best.
- While studying, take frequent breaks, but be sure to settle back down to work quickly. A reasonable schedule would be 15-25 minutes of study, 3-5 minutes of break time.
- When trying to memorize information, try closing your eyes and writing the information in the air or on a surface with your finger. Try to picture the words in your head as you are doing this. Try to hear the words in your head, too. Later, when you try to remember this information, close your eyes and try to see it with your mind's eye and to hear it in your head.
- When learning new information, make task cards, flashcards, electro-boards, card games, floor games, etc. This will help you process the information.

TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR THE TACTILE-KINESTHETIC LEARNER

- Allow tactile-kinesthetic students to take breaks during lessons and move around.
- Encourage tactile-kinesthetic students to write down their own notes.
- Encourage tactile-kinesthetic students to stand or move while reciting information or learning new material.
- Incorporate multimedia resources (computer, video camera, OHP transparencies, photography camera, etc.) into programmes (teacher presentations and student presentations).
- Provide lots of tactile-kinesthetic activities in the class.

TACTILE-KINESTHETIC LEARNER TRAITS

- Remembers what they DO very well.
- Remembers best through getting physically involved in whatever is being learnt.
- Enjoys acting out a situation relevant to the study topic.
- Enjoys making and creating.
- Enjoys the opportunities to build and physically handle learning materials.
- Will take notes to keep busy but will not often use them.
- Physically expresses interest and enthusiasm by getting active and excited.
- Has trouble staying still or in one place for a long time.
- Enjoys hands-on activities.
- Tends to want to fiddle with small objects while listening or working.
- Tends to want to eat snacks while studying.

CRITICISM

Proponents say that the evidence related to kinesthetic learners benefiting from specialized instruction or targeted materials appears mixed at best, because the diagnosis of kinesthetic and tactile learning is coupled together, rather than in isolation, and because teachers are likely to misdiagnose students' learning styles.

Some studies also show that mixed modality presentations, for instance using both auditory and visual techniques, improve results for subjects across the board. Instruction that stimulates more

than the auditory learning style, namely the kinesthetic learning style is more likely to enhance the learning of a heterogeneous student population.

MODELS OF LEARNING STYLES

DAVID KOLB'S MODEL

According to Kolb's model, the ideal learning process engages all four of these modes in response to situational demands. In order for learning to be effective, all four of these approaches must be incorporated. As individuals attempt to use all four approaches, however, they tend to develop strengths in one experience-grasping approach and one experience-Transforming approach. The resulting learning styles are combinations of the individual's preferred approaches. These learning styles are as follows:

1. Converger;
 2. Diverger;
 3. Assimilator;
 4. Accommodator.
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1. Convergers are characterized by abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. They are good at making practical applications of ideas and using deductive reasoning to solve problems.
 2. Divergers tend toward concrete experience and reflective observation. They are imaginative and are good at coming up with ideas and seeing things from different perspectives. Abstract
 3. Assimilators are characterized by conceptualization and reflective observation. They are capable of creating theoretical models by means of inductive reasoning.
 4. Accommodators use concrete experience and active experimentation. They are good at actively engaging with the world and actually doing things instead of merely reading about and studying them.

Kolb's model gave rise to the Learning Style Inventory, an assessment method used to determine an individual's learning style. An individual may exhibit a preference for one of the four styles – Accommodating, Converging, Diverging and Assimilating —depending on their approach to learning via the experiential learning theory model. Fleming's VAK/VARK Model

One of the most common and widely-used categorizations of the various types of learning styles is Fleming's VARK model (sometimes VAK) which expanded upon earlier Neuro-linguistic Programming models. There are three types of learners:

1. Visual Learners;
 2. Auditory Learners;
 3. Kinesthetic Learners or Tactile Learners.
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1. Fleming claimed that visual learners have a preference for seeing (think in pictures; visual aids such as overhead slides, diagrams handouts, etc.).

2. Auditory learners best learn through listening (lectures, discussions, tapes, etc.).
3. Tactile/kinesthetic learners prefer to learn via experience—moving, touching, and doing (active exploration of the world; science projects; experiments, etc)

APPLICATIONS OF LEARNING STYLES IN THE CLASSROOM

Various researchers have attempted to provide ways in which learning style theory can take effect in the Classroom. Dr Rita Dunn and Dr. Kenneth Dunn in their book, "Teaching Students Through Their Individual Learning Styles: A Practical Approach", wrote that "learners are affected by their:

- (1) Immediate environment (sound, light, temperature, and Design);
- (2) own emotionality (motivation, persistence, Responsibility, and need for structure or flexibility);
- (3) Sociological needs (self, pair, peers, team, adult, or varied); and
- (4) physical needs (perceptual strengths, intake, time, and Mobility)". They analyzed other researches and made the claim that not only can students identify their preferred learning Styles, but that students also score higher on tests, have better Attitudes, and are more efficient if they are taught in ways to which they can more easily relate. Therefore, it is to the educator's advantage to teach and test students in their preferred styles.

Although learning styles will inevitably differ among Students in the classroom they also contented that teachers should try to make changes in their classroom that will be beneficial to every learning style. Some of these changes include room redesign, the development of small-group techniques, and the development of Contract Activity Packages. Small-group techniques often include a "circle of knowledge" in which students sit in a circle and discuss a subject collaboratively as well as other techniques such as team learning and brainstorming.

Contract Activity Packages are educational plans that facilitate learning by using the following elements:

1. clear statement of what the students needs to learn;
2. Multisensory resources (auditory, visual, tactile, Kinesthetic) that teach the required information;
3. activities through which the newly-mastered information can be used creatively;
4. The sharing of creative projects within small groups of classmates;
5. at least 3 small-group techniques;
6. A pre-test, a self-test, and a post-test.

Another scholar who believes that learning styles should have an effect on the classroom is Marilee Sprenger, who based her recommendations for classroom learning on three premises.

1. Teachers can be learners, and learners can be teachers. We are all both.
2. Everyone can learn under the right circumstances.
3. Learning is fun! Make it appealing.

She detailed various ways in which teachers can teach So that students will remember. She categorizes these teaching Methods according to which learning style they fit—visual, Auditory, or tactile/kinesthetic.

1. Methods for visual learners include ensuring that students can see words written down, using pictures when describing things drawing time lines for events in history ,writing assignments on the board, using overhead transparencies/handouts, and writing down instructions.
2. Methods for auditory learners include repeating difficult words and concepts aloud, incorporating Small-group discussion, organizing debates, listening to books on tape, writing oral reports, and encouraging oral interpretation.
3. Methods for tactile/kinesthetic learners include providing hands- on activities (experiments, etc.), assigning projects, having frequent breaks to allow movement, using visual aids and objects in the lesson using role play, and having field trips.

By using a variety of teaching methods from each of these categories, teachers are able to accommodate different learning styles. They are also able to challenge students to learn in different ways. Just as Kolb suggested that students who use all our approaches of his learning cycle learn more effectively, students who are able to learn through a variety of way are more effective learners.

CONCLUSION

Learning styles are the ways or methods of learning. There are three main styles of learning i.e. visual, auditory and Kinesthetic based on our sense organs; as we learn through their process. Visual learners learn through seeing; auditory Learners learn through listening and hearing whereas tactile kinesthetic learners learn through their touch sensation after using their bodily organs, Physical activities and games/sports are learnt through this learning style. There are many advantages of kinesthetic/tactile learning style. Teaching and learning strategies for this type of learning have been discussed.

Out of the various models of learning style, Kolb's model is the most well known which is often used. It is based on experiential learning theory. According to it, there are four approaches: converger, diverger, assimilator and accommodator. All these styles are useful in classroom teaching.