ST1's Learning Styles 2012

This picture goes to show that we all have different preconceived ideas and concepts. Some of you see an old lady, others a young one, may be some of you cannot make heads or tails of it. The point is this: the fact we perceive this picture differently must surely mean some of us acquire information differently. If we acquire information differently, that must mean we learn in different ways. And having different learning sets means one instructional method for teaching will not cater for us all.

In addition, as individual, we might have different preconceived ideas about a certain topic but as a group we can learn a lot from each other and appreciate the different perspectives or points of view which then widen our understanding and learning.

The way we acquire information depends on two things
   a) our built-in **personality based preference**
   b) **the situation** – different tasks require different approaches (e.g. most people would probably like to be shown and have a go at giving and intramuscular injection rather than reading or be told how to do it).

Whilst the following models are generally helpful, please remember that **all people have a mixture of learning preferences** and that **sticking to a particular model rigidly might 'pigeon hole' people who are otherwise quite flexible.** So use them as they were intended: as **aids** to increase our understanding of people and not to 'brand' them permanently.

The final thing to remember is that there are **no right or wrong types** and they are **not markers of intelligence**; we're all different and we all have our pros and cons. These differences are what make us strong as a group: the different perspectives and wealth of knowledge and experience furnished through group work outweighs anything one individual could possibly offer (even if a so called expert!).

Honey & Mumford (1986)

Honey and Mumford's work was based on original ideas by Kolb (1984). They postulated that learners sit somewhere along the lines of **4 different axes** AND that the **all rounded learner is one who can flexibly perform on all four axes** depending on the context of his/her environment (**= style flexibility**). A lack of this flexibility results in learners struggling.

There is a questionnaire to help determine where you sit in relation to these four axes. Here is a bit about the different axes: maybe you can identify yourself without the questionnaire (a very crude way).

Axis	More about the Axis	How you might recognise them	Their downfall	Teaching methods they like
Activists	Involve themselves fully & without bias in new experiences. Open minded & Not sceptical, enthusiastic about anything new. Days are filled with activity. When one activity is dying down, they're on the look-out for another	Famous sayings : -"I'll try anything once" -"Sounds brilliant, let's give it a go" Enjoy the here and now and are dominated by immediate experiences. Their days are filled with activity and are always on the go. When one activity is dying down, there on the lookout for another.	Act first & consider the consequences after. Centre all the activities on themselves! Thrive on challenge, but bored with implementation and long term consolidation (may not finish a job!)	Anything with Activity -Brainstorming -Role Play -Simulations -Demonstrations -Practise -Field Trips -Group Work -Games
Reflectors	Stand back and ponder about experiences. Enjoy observing other people, adopt a low profile. Act on the past, the present and the opinion of others. When they say something, they offer a more 'rounded' reflection than others.	Famous sayings: -"I'd like to think about it" -"We need to be cautious". They often take the back seat in meetings and discussions. They act, having taken different perspectives into consideration.	Thorough collection and analysis of data can delay reaching a definite conclusion. They often postpone reaching a definite conclusion for as long a possible. So sometimes, decisions are never made!	They like to listen and read -Reading -Audiotapes -Video/Film -Seminars -Group Discussion – they love them but often take a back seat observatory role
Theorists	Observe and make theories. Analyse and synthesise. They think though problems in a vertical, step by step, logical way. Go back to basic assumptions, principles, theories, models and systems. Their philosophy prizes rationality and logic.	Famous sayings: - "If it is logical, it is good." -"Does it make sense?" -"How does this fit in with that?" -"What are the basic assumptions"" Always thinking of basic assumptions, the principles, the theories, the models and of systems currently in place.	They're perfectionists: won't settle unless things fit into a nice rational scheme. Because they are always analysing, they often remain detached from the rest of the team. Feel uncomfortable with subjective judgments, lateral thinking and anything flippant	They like to get their concepts right first. -The lecture -Structured group discussion -Question & Answer sessions -Reading – mainly concepts and theories rather than the attitudinal stuff that reflectors like to read
Pragmatists	Keen on trying out new ideas, theories & skills. Return from management courses brimming with new ideas that they want to try out. Essentially practical down to earth people & get on with things Like practical decisions and problem solving	Famous sayings : -"There is always a better way" -" How can I apply this to practice" -"If it works it's good" Positively seek out new ideas; always taking the first steps in experimenting. Problems are always seen as challenges.	impatient with ruminating and open-ended discussions	They like to put ideas into practise as soon as they get home. -Demonstration & Practise -Practical Workshops - Field Trips?

From the graph on the right, you can see that no-one fits neatly into just one of these four categories.   We all have a bit of each but the question is to what extent.

This graph shows where the average person sits (outlined in black) and a specific example of a person with strong reflector-theorist preferences (in red).

REFLECTOR

ACTIVIST

THEORIST

PRAGMATIST
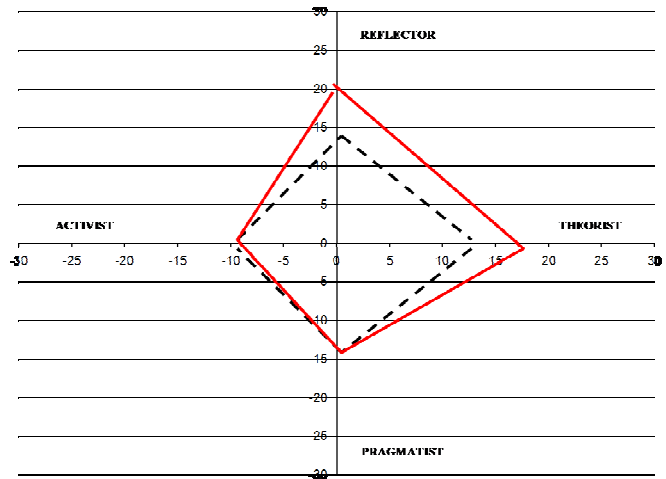
How to Use This Model in teaching
You can use the model to
   a) **Match your teaching style to that of the learner's**: i.e. using complementary methods
   b) Provide learning methods to **boost a learner's weaker areas**: to make them ultimately a more 'all rounded' learner
   c) **Identify potential problems specific learners might encounter**: for example
      Reflectors–Theorists: reflect and theorise so much that they end up in a state of *'analysis to paralysis'*
      Activists - Pragmatists: end up doing things too quickly
      Activists – Theorists: jump to conclusions too quickly
   d) **Implement a variety of teaching methodologies when designing a course** or educational session for a group of learners (who will inevitably come with different learning styles).   Your session needs methods to cater for them all. So think what sorts of methods learners from each of the four axes might desire.
   e) **Split a group of learners** so that each subgroup has a mixture of people with different learning styles to promote understanding from different perspectives and thus create more 'all rounded' learners.
   f) **Help allocate people to specific task groups** in keeping with their learning style.
      For example, if your team wants to implement a new service:
      • group all the pragmatists in your team in a task group to figure out the practical problems one might encounter and how they might be resolved
      • group the activists to implement a trial run and so on...

Visual-Auditory-Kinaesthetic (VAK) Model (1920s)

If you find Honey & Mumford's learning styles all a bit too much, the VAK model is much easier to understand and apply in practice. VAK was a model originally devised in the 1920s to help teach dyslexic children but its wider applicability and relevance is now well established. VAK questionnaires can be found freely on the internet if you fancy finding out more about yourself.

The model is **based on our senses**: that we represent information **in terms of three modalities** – visual, auditory or kinaesthesia.   **Each of us has all three representation systems but usually one dominates**; some people may be evenly balanced in all three.

VISUAL	AUDITORY	KINAESTHETIC
•preference for seeing •eg pictures, diagrams, flip charts, handouts, demonstrations, videos	•preference for listening •eg hearing a lecture, dialogue, discussions, music	•preference for touching, feeling and doing •eg practising skills, role play, simulations, anything hands-on

How Can I Assess Someone Without A Questionnaire?
Well, now you know the definitions from the diagram above, you can have a rough guess. This usually works okay if you know the person well.
Otherwise, you could do a couple of things:

1. Listen to **how they speak**:

Visual	Auditory	Kinaesthetic
Often say: *"I see what you mean"* *"Can you show me how.."* *"Look, this is how you..."* *"That seems great"*	Often say: *"I hear what you're saying"* *"Tell me ....."* *"Listen, this is how you..."* *"That sounds good"*	Often say: *"I know how you feel"* *"Can I have a go"* *"Why don't you have a go..."* *"I'd feel happy with that"*

2. Ask them some **test questions**:

Spelling: *If I was to ask you to spell a word would you*	**Concentration:** *If you are studying or watching a TV programme that you have been looking forward to, which would you become distracted by*
• try to picture the word in your mind (V) • try to sound out the word, or (A) • write it down to see if it feels right (K)	• untidiness/movement (V) • by sounds/noises or (A) • only if there was activity around you (K)
Meeting someone again: *If you met someone that you had previously met a while back do you* • forget names to remember faces (V)	**Contacting people on business:** *If you're planning a meeting with a friendly work colleague would you prefer* • meeting face-to-face (V)

• forget faces but remember names or (A) • remember best what you did together (K)	• talking on the telephone or (A) • doing some activity (like walking) and discussing at the same time (K)
Reading: *When reading a novel do you prefer* • descriptive scenes & pause to imagine them (V) • reading a dialogue or conversation between people and hearing the characters talk (A) • action stories or don't prefer to read at all (K)	**Putting something together:** *If I ask you to put a small table together would you* • like to see the directions and pictures first (V) • prefer me to tell you how to do, or (A) • just get on with it; try to figure it out yourself (K)

Help with a computer: *If you need help with a computer application would you prefer to*
 	
      • see pictures and diagrams (V)
      • call the help desk/neighbour/friend/shout at the computer or (A)
      • keep trying until you succeed (K)	

Now, which was the commonest type of reply – V, A or K?

How to Use The Model

1. **Use learning methods that match the learner's preferred style** e.g. visual media for visual learners, role play with kinaesthetics etc.
2. **Instantaneously build rapport** with a learner by 'mirroring' the style they are displaying e.g. using the same verbs in their speech
3. **Optimising learning and memorising**: Some say that you can optimise learning and memory if you **present each key learning point in all three modalities**. In a group you'd use all methodologies representing the three modalities anyway to cover the diversity within the audience. But you can extend this further by presenting each learning point in three different modal ways. A lot of schools for children do this these days and there is no reason why the same should not be applied to teaching adults.