

What's your style? Learning styles for better learning and teaching

Zubin Austin BScPhm, PhD
University of Toronto, Canada

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this workshop, you will be able to:

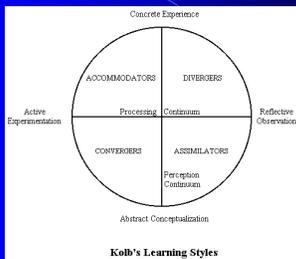
- Describe major psychological theories of teaching and learning
- Discuss effective principles of pedagogy
- Apply learning styles theory to design of educational events
- Reflect upon your own teaching and learning style

The Psychology of Teaching and Learning

- **Behavioural** approaches emphasizing rewards and punishments
- **Cognitive** approaches highlighting the supremacy of reason over feeling
- **Developmental** approaches focusing on the stages of human growth
- **Psycho-analytic** approaches aiming at making the unconscious conscious

The Learning Styles Tradition

- *Piaget*: Infant and child development
- *Eysenck*: The biological basis for personality and learning
- *Maslow*: Hierarchy of needs, and the adaptive, survival value of learning
- *Kolb*: Learning preferences vs. learning styles



The Four Learning Styles

- Divergers*: "Let's just all get along, okay?"
- Assimilators*: "Lack of organization on your part is no reason for an emergency on my part"
- Convergers*: "Relax everybody – I'm here to help"
- Accommodators*: "Are we there yet?"

Comparing Learning Styles: *Approach to Material*

Divergers: emphasize inter-relationships and connections

Assimilators: emphasize theory and expertise

Convergers: emphasize application and value

Accommodators: emphasize utility

Comparing Learning Styles: *Process of Learning*

Divergers: Reflection-in-action

Assimilators: Reflection-on-action

Convergers: Action/activity

Accommodators: Action/activity with a reason

Comparing Learning Styles: *Teaching Approaches*

Diverger: A friend, values relationships

Assimilator: An expert, values credentials

Converger: A coach, values drive

Accommodators: A colleague, values outcome

Comparing Learning Styles: *Psycho-educational needs*

Divergers: Supportive peers, time to reflect and discuss before performing

Assimilators: Expert teachers, time to reflect and discuss before performing

Convergers: An audience to impress with an outcome to achieve

Accommodators: A legitimate reason to care and be involved

Comparing Learning Styles: *Relating to Others*

Divergers: Values harmony, group process over objective outcomes

Assimilators: May confuse others' confidence with competence

Convergers: May mistake own confidence for competence

Accommodators: Values efficiency, sometimes at the expense of efficacy

Comparing Learning Styles: *Approaches to Feedback*

Divergers: "Fantastic! The best ever..."

Assimilators: "Excellent"

Convergers: "Great, but..."

Accommodators: "Good"

Teaching to Accommodate Learning Styles

- Importance of educational design that respects different learning needs
- Recognition that each individual has personal preferences/strengths, but that all professionals must be able to function competently in any learning style
- Multiple teaching and assessment methods provides opportunities to “play to strengths” but to also develop new skills

Teaching to Accommodate Learning Styles

“Divergent” teaching methods:

- Reflection
- Non-time pressured group work
- Mentoring
- Creative, unstructured activities
- Learning for the sake of learning, not simply for the purpose of application

Teaching to Accommodate Learning Styles

“Assimilative” teaching methods:

- Expert-driven lectures
- Homework
- Individual activities
- Web-based, non-interactive
- Mentoring
- Learning for the sake of learning that also has practical application

Teaching to Accommodate Learning Styles

“Convergent” teaching methods:

- Purpose-driven group work
- Competitions
- Role-playing
- In-practice activities
- Mentoring
- Learning for the purpose of practical application

Teaching to Accommodate Learning Styles

“Accommodative” teaching methods:

- “Just-in-time” curriculum
- Time/resource efficient learning
- Practical problem solving
- Mentoring
- Learning for the purpose of solving problems

Learning Styles and Teaching

- Role of “diagnosing” learning styles...it is not ‘blood typing’ or citizenship!
- Used as a tool for understanding oneself, one’s interactions with others and the environment
- Most useful in providing a respectful vocabulary with which to begin discussion around teaching and learning

Questions for Reflection

- How does my own learning style influence my perception of a “great” teacher or student? A “lousy” teacher or student?
- How do the educational programs I’m involved in meet needs of learners with different learning styles?
- How do the educational programs I’m involved in push learners to expand into different, non-dominant learning styles?

Conclusions

- Learning styles theory can be a powerful tool for teachers, students, mentors, preceptors...and that’s everyone!
- Learning styles instruments should not be used to ‘segregate’ or ‘stream’ individuals; rather it should be used to challenge fundamental assumptions about what is “good”, “effective” and “efficient” teaching and learning
