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

- **Diversers:** “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

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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

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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

“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