



LEARNING STYLES; A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT Learning style is a preferred way of thinking, dispensation and understanding information. Each person prefers a pattern of thought and behaviour that influences his or her learning process. Most teachers are sequential deadlock presenters but the majority of their students do not learn in this way. Keeping this in mind it is essential to alter the teaching strategies to meet the needs of all the students. Learning is the process of gaining knowledge and it is an active process, which may be useful in life situations. People learn in different ways. An individual's learning style will affect the way in which information is processed which will have an effect on the learning effectiveness and efficiency. Individual learning style differs Based on the high v/s low academic achievement, individual learning style differs. Rita and Ken Dunn describe Learning style as individual's personal reactions to each of the 21 elements when concentrating on new and difficult academic knowledge or skills. Honey and Mumford suggest that we need to be able to adopt one of the four different styles in order to complete any given learning task satisfactorily. The four styles described in the Honey -Mumford model are: Activist, Reflector, Theorist, and Pragmatist. Kolb's theory comprises four basic types of learning styles. i.e. Converging, diverging, assimilating, and accommodating. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) system is a means of establishing an individual's personality profile and is used widely in aptitude testing for employment. This paper highlights about different types of learning styles and theories of learning style as well as how far it is beneficial to the students.

KEYWORDS : Learning style, Vak model. Honey and Mumford's theory, Kolb's views, MBTI, Educational implications

Introduction

Learning style is a favourite way of thinking, comprehending facts, and understanding facts. Each person prefers a design of thought and behaviour that authorises his or her learning process. In other words, everyone learns in distinctive ways. Learning style is a favourite way of learning and studying; for example, using pictures instead of text; working in groups as opposed to working alone; or learning in a structured rather than an unstructured manner. Learning favourite refer to an individual's favourite, creative, intellectual way towards learning, which has an important posture on how learning proceeds for each individual, especially when considered in combination with what teachers expect from learners in the classroom. The main objective of this paper is to understand and critically analyse different theories of learning styles. It also helps to the teacher educators and educationalists different to sensitize themselves about Learning.

Need for the study

Most teachers are sequential, deadlock, presenters but the majority of their students do not learn this way. Knowing this it is essential to alter the teaching plan of action to meet the needs of all the students. In other words, if students cannot learn the way teachers teach them, then teachers must teach them, the way they learn them best.

Current educational reform involves changing the class room from a teacher centered to a learner centered environment. It is old fashioned and ancient to see the teacher as the provider of all knowledge with students simply learning the information in whichever way the teacher chose to present. For many years, educators have known that students learn by different means but finally we are beginning to change the way we teach to surround these different styles.

Present generation of students have more resources available to them at their convenient environment than any of the previous generations. As a society we revel in the freedom of choice to have just about anything tailored to our exact needs and wants, from food, restaurants to personalised cell phone plans. To meet the demands of today's intensely different learners, teachers need activities that utilize current technological applications and are tailored to each individual's devoted learning style.

Every child is born with the scope to learn. Yet children and adults generally have a favoured style in which they learn best. A student may learn through a blend of styles, but usually he or she favours one learning style over the others. For example, a teacher is able to spell by visualizing a word. But the students may not be able to memorise word spellings unless they write them out first. A Student may prefer to make a model to demonstrate a concept rather than write a description of the concept.

Today's classrooms are greatly distinct. Students have a wide range of backgrounds, interests, knowledge, abilities and learning styles. Willing to help all these distinctness is in some way is the single greatest challenge for today's teachers. To meet this challenge, teachers need a deep understanding and a strong aspiration to make the contents appropriate for the various numbers of individuals. Besides understanding the content, teachers must also have a solid compassion of their students. They must identify and appreciation the importance of building strong relationships with each student. To be successful leaders, teachers must provide a variety of learning ways for their students so these individual differences can be recognised and accommodated. Accepting the various ways in which children learn as well as how they interact with and process information, can help educators to modify their lessons so that all the students have an equal favourable circumstances for success. This familiarity is also advantageous for parents so they can be more supportive at home.

It is necessary that today's teachers be able to portray and identify Learning Style. Students do not have a single learning style. The intellect works in many different ways. We use many styles to learn, depending on the circumstances. Once teachers are able to identify various learning styles, they can use that information to extend teaching customized to the particular styles represented in their classrooms and to manage their classrooms according to these styles. Knowing his or her Learning style helps the student to recognise his or her preferential methods for Learning.

How does Learning styles differ among students?

Individual's learning style differs based on their high v/s low academic achievement. Although many gifted students learn differently from each other, and under-achievers have many different learning style variations, gifted and underachieving students have significantly different learning styles and do not perform well with the same methods (Dunn 1989) Conversely, gifted students in nine diverse cultures, with talents in athletics, art, dance, leadership, literature, mathematics or music, evidenced essentially similar learning style characteristics to other students with the same talent.

Learning Style; Theoretical Framework

The term 'Learning choices' has been used to refer to the condition circumscribe environmental, sentimental, sociological and physical conditions –that an individual learner would choose, if they were in a position to make a choice (Dunn *et al.* 1989). Choice is another angle on the notion of preferred learning styles that has a bearing on how learning progresses.

Each individual will adopt an approach to learning with which they are most appropriate, feeling good and, in doing so; leave behind the approaches with which they are less appropriate. It is helpful for

learners if they are aware of their own specific learning choices, as it will allow them to use an appropriate learning style to suit the particular learning that is being undertaken and to take opportunities to improve their potential for learning when faced with a learning activity that might guide them towards one of their 'weaker' – or, at least, one of their less favoured – styles.

Different theories of Learning Style

According to Dunn and Dunn (1993) Learning style is the way students begin to concentrate on process, internalize, and remember new and difficult academic information, Restak (1979) Thic (1979, 1999/2000) and the Duns (1992,93) theorise that Learning style is comprised of both biological and developmental characteristics that make the identical instructional environments, methods, ineffective for others. Most people have learning style preferences, but individual preferences differ significantly.

The Dunn and Dunn L.S Model

Rita and Ken Dunn describe Learning style as individuals reactions to each of the 21 elements when concentrating on new and difficult academic knowledge or skills (1992, 1993, 1998,1999). To capitalize on their learning style, students need to be made aware of their

- Reactions to the immediate instructional environment. Healthy v/s Stillness, Brilliant v/s Squishy, Lighting warm v/s cools temperatures and Formal v/s informal setting.
- Own emotionality, motivation, endurance, responsibility (Conformity v/s non conformity) and preference for structure versus choices.
- Sociological preference, for learning alone, with peers with either a collegial or authoritative adult, and/ or in a variety of ways as opposed to patterns or routines.
- Physiological Characteristics, perceptual strength (Auditory (Hearing, Aural) Visual (Ocular), Tactual, and /or Kinaesthetic strengths)
- Universal v/s. Analytic processing as determined through correlations among sound, light design persistence, sociological preference.

The Dunn and Dunn Learning style model is based on the theory that

- a. Most individuals can learn
- b. Instructional situations, assets and approaches respond to different learning style strengths.
- c. Everyone has mental and physical abilities, but different people have very different mental and physical abilities.
- d. Individual education choices exist and can be measured accurately.
- e. Teachers can learn to use learning style as essential of their instruction.
- f. Students can learn to capitalise on their learning style strengths when concentrating on new and difficult information.

The Honey –Mumford model

Learning styles are not fixed traits that an individual will always display. Learners are able to adopt different styles in different contexts. For most of us, one or two styles are preferred over the others. Honey and Mumford (1986) suggest that we need to be able to adopt one of the four different styles in order to complete any given learning task satisfactorily. And the inability or reluctance to adopt any particular style has the potential to hamper our ability to learn effectively.

The four styles described in the Honey – Mumford model are:

1. Activist;
2. Reflector;
3. Theorist;
4. Pragmatist.

Activists

Activists prefer to learn by doing rather than, for example, by reading or hearing. They thrive on originality and will 'give anything a try'. They like to immerse themselves in a wide range of experiences and activities, and like to work in groups so that ideas can be shared and tested. They like to get on with things, meaning that they are not interested in planning. Activists are bored by repetition, and are most often open minded and enthusiastic.

Reflectors

Reflectors stand back and observe. They like to collect as much

information as possible before making any decisions; they are always keen to 'look before they leap'. They prefer to look at the big picture, including previous experiences and the views of others. The strength of the reflectors is their painstaking data collection and its subsequent analysis, which will take place before any conclusion is reached. Reflectors are slow to make up their minds, but, when they do so, their decisions are based on sound consideration of both their own knowledge and belief and what they have taken in when watching and listening to the thoughts and ideas of others.

Theorists

Theorists like to adopt and integrate all of their observations into frameworks, so that they are able to see how one observation is related to the other observations. Theorists endeavour towards accumulating new learning into existing frameworks by questioning and assessing the possible ways that new information might fit into their existing foundation of accepting. They have neat and well organised minds. They sometimes cannot relax until they get to the fundamental of the situation in question and are able to explain their observations in basic terms. Theorists are usually sound in their approach to problem solving, taking a logical, one-step-at-a-time approach.

Pragmatists

Pragmatists are keen to seek out and make use of new ideas. Pragmatists look for the practical implications of any new ideas or theories before making a judgement on their value. They will take the view that, if something works, all is well and good, but, if it does not work, there is little point in spending time on the analysis of its failure. The strength of pragmatists is that they are courageous in their use of new ideas and will combine them into their thinking. Pragmatists are feeling at home in problem solving situations.

These four dimensions can be used as a way of classifying learners. The four basic types of learners, as characterised by preference for active, reflective, theoretical or practical learning, are clearly different, from one another, but most learners are not extreme examples of just one preference. Most people have characteristics of all the four dimensions.

Neuro-linguistic programming

The next description of learning styles comes from a different, but obviously related, area of human research; namely, Neuro – linguistic programming (NLP). Neuro – linguistic programming is concerned with how we communicate and how this affects our learning. Over many years, and throughout a lot of research projects, including close and detailed observation of the way we communicate, three particular learning styles – visual, auditory and kinaesthetic (V–A–K) – have been identified.

Visual learners (Ocular Learners)

Visual learners prefer to learn by seeing. They have good visual recall and prefer information to be presented visually; in the form of diagrams, graphs, maps, posters and displays, for example. They often use hand movements when describing or recalling information.

Auditory learners (Aural Learners)

Auditory learners prefer to learn by listening. They have good auditory memory and benefit from discussion, lectures, interviewing, listening to stories and audio tapes, for example. They like sequence, repetition and summary, and, while recalling memories, tend to tilt their head and use level eye movements.

Kinaesthetic learners

Kinaesthetic learners prefer to learn by doing. They are good at recalling events and associate feelings or physical experiences with memory. They take pleasure in bodily activity, field trips, manipulating objects and other practical, first-hand experiences. They often find it difficult to keep still and need regular breaks in class-room activities.

Though we all use all the three styles of learning to some extent, some learners have confidence in any one of them. An overreliance on one style, and an failure or unwillingness to adopt another style where it might be appropriate, can be limiting in some learning situations and can mean that learning might be hindered.

An extension of the NLP description of learning styles has been developed by Fleming (2001). Fleming tells us that, when we gather information from the world around us, which includes the information

that we need for learning, we make use of all of our senses. Some of us, though, employ one sense over the others. The V-A-R-K system assesses the extent of people's confidence on learning styles which include:

- Visual;
- Auditory;
- Reading;
- Kinaesthetic.

David Kolb's Learning style theory

Kolb (1978) proposed a theory of Learning style that is intended primarily to school settings. The theory comprises four basic types of learning styles. i.e. Converging (Gathering, assemble) diverging, assimilating, and accommodating.

Convergers are hypothetical to conceptualisers and are interested in active experimentation. They like to use deductive reasoning and to focus it on specific problems.

Divergers; they prefer concrete experience and reflective observation, radiate learners, they go in different directions and are inventive and emotional in their dealing with the things and the people.

Assimilators; are abstract conceptualisers and reflective observers. They like to create the practical models and to use inductive reasoning to assimilate observations into an integrated explanation. Assimilators are less interested in people than in abstract concepts.

Accommodators; Like concrete experiences and active experimentations and they like to take risks.

The Myers-Briggs model

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) system is a means of establishing an individual's personality profile and is used widely in aptitude testing for employment. Designed as a tool for investigating the many different strands of personality type, the MBTI also has something for teachers to be aware of. The MBTI describes four personality types that can be interpreted along the lines of some of the other learning style descriptions.

The Myers-Briggs model (Briggs and Briggs Myers 1975; or Briggs and Myers 1980, for example) classifies individuals according to their preferences on scales derived from the theories of psychological types developed by Carl Jung. According to the model, learners may be:

Extraverts (E) v/s. Introverts (I); Follow the direction of an original general attraction and such indicates where their curiosity and inspiration lie.

An introverts drive and curiosity generally stem from and are driven by their inner world, whereas an extravert is for the most part motivated by the world outside of themselves. And most of their interests are outwardly directed.

People with the Intuition (V) choice to perceive the world and think in broader classifications, distinguish, whereas, sensing (S) individual perceive the world and think about things in more factual, honest and sincere way.

People with the feeling (F) preference tend to judge and respond to events based on their awareness, reaction, whereas people with the thinking (T) preference tend to do it based on intellect and mental analysis.

People with the judging (J) preferences comprehend information in a more methodical way and are likely to prefer a more orderly and analytical learning process. Whereas people with perceiving (P) preference might favour a less rigid, more inquisitive means of arriving conclusion and might prefer a trial and error method of understanding facts.

Educational Implications

Learning techniques has cognitive, emotional and psychological aspects. Cognitive components are about the in-house control of the system of running knowledge and these can be changed through education. Emotional and psychological components influence the preferences of the person and suggest answers to both education and

teaching strategies. Learning style gives opportunities to recognise individuals and the differences between them. For this reason, a teaching style is required to diverse learning approaches that take cognitive, emotional and psychological factors into account. Learning style has an important place in the lives of individual. When the individual knows his/her learning style, s/he will incorporate it in the course of learning as a result s/he will incorporate it in the process of learning so every person will learn more easily and fast and will be successful. Discovery of the own learning style by the student is that it will help the student to grow to be an effective problem solver.

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