

Trainer notes

In-Service Teacher Development

Learning styles 1 – Definition



Overview

People approach learning in different ways – we each have a way of learning which best suits our personalities and socio-cultural backgrounds. The term 'learning style' however covers a wide range of approaches, models, theories and methods which are outside the scope of this workshop. Therefore, only the VAK model (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic) is dealt with. See recommended reading for sources relating to the wider topic. An important point to note is that learning styles – their validity and usefulness is much disputed and indeed the VAK model has no scientific basis. However, in this workshop we explore how this model provides a framework for helping teachers to take learner differences into consideration when planning classroom tasks and activities. An appreciation of learning styles will help to ensure that teachers include a range of activities and vary techniques in their lessons to ensure all learners are engaged and catered for.

This is the first of two workshops. The materials are suitable for teachers with a minimum B1 level, working in any educational context – primary, secondary, tertiary, adults.

This workshop should take approximately 1.5 hours.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this workshop participants will be able to:

- Describe visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning styles.
- Identify their own learning styles.
- Consider techniques for identifying their learners' learning styles.

Recommended reading for trainers

For a good overview, including critiques, see:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/learning_styles

For a useful summary, see:

http://www.lifecircles_inc.com/learningtheories/constructivism/kolb.html

Peter Honey and Alan Mumford devised a learning styles questionnaire, *The learning Styles Questionnaire, 80-item version*, (Peter Honey Publications 2006). For information see: <http://www.peterhoney.com/content/learningstylesquestionnaire.html>

See also: Kolb David, *Learning Style Inventory (LSI)*, Hay Group (1984).

Procedure

1 Enjoyable learning



In this activity participants think about an enjoyable learning experience they have had. The aim of this is to introduce learning styles through using their own experiences as a reference point.

Materials required for this stage

- Post-it notes

Instructions for task/activity

- Ask participants to think about something they have enjoyed learning – suggest the examples below to help them and/or give an example from your own experience.
a language or aspect of language learning.
a subject you did at school eg art; professional training eg, a workshop attended.
a hobby such as swimming, or playing a musical instrument; or something practical such as driving a car.
think about why you found the experience enjoyable.
- Distribute post-its and ask participants to write their choices on the post-its, then stick them onto themselves.
- They then move around the room asking each other what it was that made the experience enjoyable.

Feedback

Elicit reasons why they enjoyed the learning experience. There are likely to be many different factors. For example teachers motivate, provide variety, take an interest in getting to know the class as individuals and finding out about learners' preferred ways of learning. An appreciation of learning styles can help teachers to ensure such factors are taken into account when planning lessons.

2 Learning styles – what do you know now?



The aim of this activity is for participants to identify what they already know about learning styles. At the end of the workshop they will compare this with what they learn during the workshop.

Materials required for this stage

- Participant worksheet 'Learning styles – what do you know now?'

Instructions for task/activity

- Divide participants into groups.
- Ask them to discuss the questions on the worksheet. If some groups know anything about learning styles, re-group them with others who don't. At this stage it is not important that they have much pre-existing knowledge. This task will serve as a point of comparison at the end of the workshop. If none of the participants has any knowledge of learning styles, move on to the next stage and explain that you will come back to the questions at a later stage.

Feedback

Elicit examples of what they know about learning styles and explain that the next activity will help to clarify the VAK model of learning styles.

3 Learning style quiz



In this activity participants identify their own learning style and then do an activity to familiarize themselves with the other learning styles.

Materials required for this stage

- Participant worksheet 'Learning styles quiz'

Instructions for task/activity

- Ask participants to work individually through the quiz. When they have done this they work out their scores to see which learning style they are.
- Next, they read through the other learning style descriptors.
- Divide the room into three sections : visual, auditory, kinaesthetic. Call out the following and ask participants to move to the appropriate part of the room. What kind of learners:
 - ... like looking at wall displays, books etc.
 - ... like the teacher to provide verbal instructions
 - ... can adapt to any learning situation
 - ... like dialogues, discussions and plays
 - ... solve problems by talking about them
 - ... use lists to organize their thoughts
 - ... use rhythm and sound as memory aids
 - ... learn best when they are involved or active
 - ... use movement as a memory aid
 - ... look at the teacher's face intently
 - ... recall information by remembering how it looked like
 - ... often recognize words by sight
 - ... find it difficult to sit still for long periods*.

Feedback

Elicit from participants what they have found out about themselves from doing the quiz. Did they already know their learning styles? Did they find anything surprising? Ask if they can recognize any of the learning style characteristics in their learners. Ask what learning style the last activity would appeal to, ie, kinaesthetic.

**Thank you to Najeeb Maqrami for suggesting this activity.*

4 Our learning styles



In this activity participants find out about the different learning styles in the group.

Materials required for this stage

- Post-it notes

Instructions for task/activity

- Distribute post-its. Participants write their learning style on and stick it onto themselves.
- Participants mingle, finding out what each other's learning styles are.
- Ask participants to form groups according to learning styles.
- As a whole group, ask participants the following questions:
 - What is the biggest group?*
 - What is the smallest group?*
 - Why do you think this is?*

Feedback

One learning style often predominates, though most people will have aspects of at least two styles. Age is often a factor – very young learners are often predominantly kinaesthetic, but tend to become more visual or auditory as they get older.

5 Why are learning styles important?



In this activity participants consider why is an understanding of learning styles important and helpful for teachers and learners.

Materials required for this stage

- Participant worksheet 'Why are learning styles important?'

Instructions for task/activity

- Divide participants into groups.
- Ask participants to brainstorm all the reasons they can think of for why learning styles are important and helpful for teachers and learners.

Feedback

An understanding of learning styles can help teachers to appreciate learner differences and to plan accordingly to cater for these, eg, by adapting materials to suit the different learners in a class. For example, some learners need to see things written down in order to understand and learn, others need to be active – to move around etc. Providing a variety of activity and task types helps to ensure all learners are engaged and motivated. Making learners aware of the different learning styles can help them to understand their own strengths as well as why they may be less competent at some task types. However, learners should never feel that they are stereotyped and only able to successfully perform if a task matches their learning style. Teachers can provide activities to encourage learners to develop different learning styles to help them to become more successful learners.

6 Identifying learning styles



Finding out about the learning styles in a class is helpful for effective lesson planning. The aim of this activity is for participants to consider and suggest techniques for identifying learners' learning styles.

Materials required for this stage

- Participant worksheet 'Identifying learning styles'

Instructions for task/activity

- Discuss the introductory question: *Why is it a good idea to find out about your learners' learning styles?*
- Elicit a few ideas, eg: it helps to understand learners, to get to know the range of learning preferences in a class, to ensure teachers provide variety, to ensure all learners are catered for.
- Ask participants if they have any ideas for finding out about the learning styles in their classes. Note any ideas on the board.
- Ask participants to look at the ideas on the worksheet suggested by teachers, compare with their ideas (noted on the board) and discuss what they think of the ideas. After this, they discuss whether they have any more ideas they can add.

Feedback

All of them are valid. Teachers use what is suitable for their own contexts. Elicit any new ideas participants' have and write on the board.

7 Learning styles in my class



This aim of this is to get participants thinking about how they could use the techniques from the previous activity with their own learners.

Materials required for this stage

- Post-it notes.
- Participant worksheet 'Learning styles in my class'

Instructions for task/activity

- Ask participants to consider the techniques from the above activity, as well as any suggested ones you have noted on the board. Which ones would they like to try with their learners? Why? Alternatively, if they don't want to try any, why not?
- Distribute post-it notes. Ask participants to write the number of the technique they have chosen and put it onto themselves. Alternatively, if they haven't chosen any, keep the post-it note blank.
- Next they move around the room, asking about and explaining the results of their reflections.

Feedback

Elicit some examples of their choices and the reasons for those choices. How many participants have chosen the same technique? Did anyone change the technique they had chosen, after speaking to other participants? For participants who had decided against using a technique, did they change their minds after listening to the other participants?

8 Reflection



In this activity participants return to the questions they discussed earlier and compare what they knew at the beginning of the workshop with what they have learnt.

Materials required for this stage

- Participant worksheet 'Reflection'

Instructions for task/activity

- Ask participants to look again at the questions from worksheet 'Learning styles – what do you know?' and to reflect on the other questions.
- Next, divide them into pairs and ask them discuss and compare their responses.

Feedback

Ask for examples of how participants' knowledge has improved. Next clarify what learning styles have been used in the workshop, eg, discussions – auditory, mingles – kinaesthetic, quiz – visual. Explain that the next workshop explores how to adapt tasks for different learning styles.

Participant worksheets

In-Service Teacher Development

Learning styles 1 – Definition



Enjoyable learning

Think about a learning experience you have enjoyed. This could be a subject you studied at school, something you did at university, or professional training. Alternatively it could be a hobby such as swimming, painting, or something practical such as learning to drive.

Your trainer will give you a post-it note. Write your choice on it, then stick it onto yourself.

Now move around the room explaining what made the experience enjoyable and asking the other participants about their enjoyable learning experiences.

Learning styles – what do you know now?

Work with your group and discuss the following questions.

- What do you know about learning styles?
- Do you know what your learning style is?
- Why are learning styles important?

Learning style quiz

This is a quiz to help you work out what your learning style is. Answer the questions and work out your score. Then read about your learning style.

Tick **A** if the statement is always true for you, **B** if the statement is sometimes true for you and **C** if the statement is never true for you.

		A	B	C
1.	You like to think through problems whilst exercising or walking.			
2.	You are good at co-ordinating colours.			
3.	You don't like sitting listening to lectures.			
4.	You have a good sense of rhythm.			
5.	You are good at understanding verbal instructions and explanations.			
6.	You picture words in your mind to help you spell.			
7.	You can easily identify what people mean from the intonation they use.			
8.	You have good 'dress sense'.			
9.	You 'sound out' words to help you spell.			
10.	You are good at doing reading tasks.			
11.	You enjoy participating in discussions as a listener and a talker.			
12.	You find it difficult to stay still!			
13.	You are good at processing information from lectures and talks.			
14.	You use gestures when you are speaking.			
15.	You have a very active 'mind's eye'.			
16.	You see pictures in your head when you are reading.			
17.	You learn best when you are doing 'hands-on' work.			
18.	You like listening to music when you are working.			
19.	You prefer looking at a map to following spoken directions.			
20.	You prefer to find out for yourself how things work rather than following instructions.			
21.	You often read information aloud to help you understand it.			
22.	You need variety to keep you motivated.			
23.	You use images, drawings, diagrams to help you learn.			
24.	You recall events, information etc through remembering what was said.			
25.	You enjoy activities where you can move around.			
26.	You are not very keen on reading.			
27.	You prefer to use the phone instead of having formal face to face meetings.			
28.	You prefer to dress for comfort rather than style.			
29.	You prefer face to face contact to using the phone.			
30.	Your mind tends to 'wander' if you have to listen to someone speaking for more than a short period.			

Now work out your scores

If you chose A for numbers 2, 7, 8, 10, 15, 16, 19, 23, 29, 30 you are a **Visual learner**

If you chose A for numbers 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 21, 24, 26, 27 you are an **Auditory learner**

If you chose A for numbers 1, 3, 12, 14, 17, 18, 20, 22, 25, 28 you are a **Kinaesthetic learner**

If your answers were mainly Bs you have a **mixed learning style**.

Learning style descriptors

Visual learners In a learning context you learn best through seeing. Flash cards, videos, diagrams and charts work well for you. To assimilate learning and information you always need to see something written, eg handouts, worksheets. You prefer illustrated materials, preferably in colour. When you make notes they are well-organized and often illustrated by diagrams and drawings and you are good at detail. When you need to remember something you visualize how it looked, eg, place and people. You are good at remembering faces, but forget names. You are sensitive to 'body language' and understand meaning, emotions, moods from facial expressions and posture. You are not good at following oral instructions, preferring to see something demonstrated, or written down. You 'switch off' if you have to listen to others' speaking for prolonged periods and you have a tendency to daydream.

Auditory learners In a learning context you learn best through listening. You have a good ear and do well in pronunciation work. You are confident about speaking out and answering in class. You can follow lectures quite easily without becoming distracted and are able to assimilate spoken information efficiently. You are usually successful in oral exams. You also like to read things aloud to yourself to help you understand. You prefer spoken instructions and explanations. You find written instructions difficult. When you need to remember something, you think about sounds and things people said. You can memorize facts and information easily and you are good at telling jokes and stories. You like working in groups, brainstorming, discussing and exchanging information. You are not keen on reading, making notes or writing things down.

Kinaesthetic learners In a learning context you learn best through moving, doing and touching. You need to have 'hands-on experience' to assimilate learning. You like to take things apart to find out how they work, rather than reading instructions or studying diagrams. In class you respond well to discovery techniques. You are good at drawing and you often doodle during listening activities. You perform well in role plays and activities where you can move around and talk to others. You are easily distracted and have a tendency to fidget during lectures and talks. You get bored quickly if you have to sit for too long. You remember things by recalling actions. You like to think things through and work out problems while you are taking exercise.

Mixed style In a learning context, these learners are very lucky as they can adapt to any learning situation. You benefit from visual stimuli such as diagrams, charts pictures. You use visualization to remember things and you can pick up meaning from body language. You are equally comfortable with listening to lectures and spoken information as you are with written instructions. You are an able communicator – a good listener as well as a good speaker. You also enjoy moving around, for example doing mingle activities and you enjoy role plays.

Now read the descriptors for the other learning styles and listen to your trainer's instructions.

Our learning styles

Your trainer will give you a post-it note.

- Write your learning style on it, then stick it onto yourself.
- Now find out what the other participants' learning styles are.
- Form a group with participants who have the same learning style as you.

Why are learning styles important?

Work in groups.

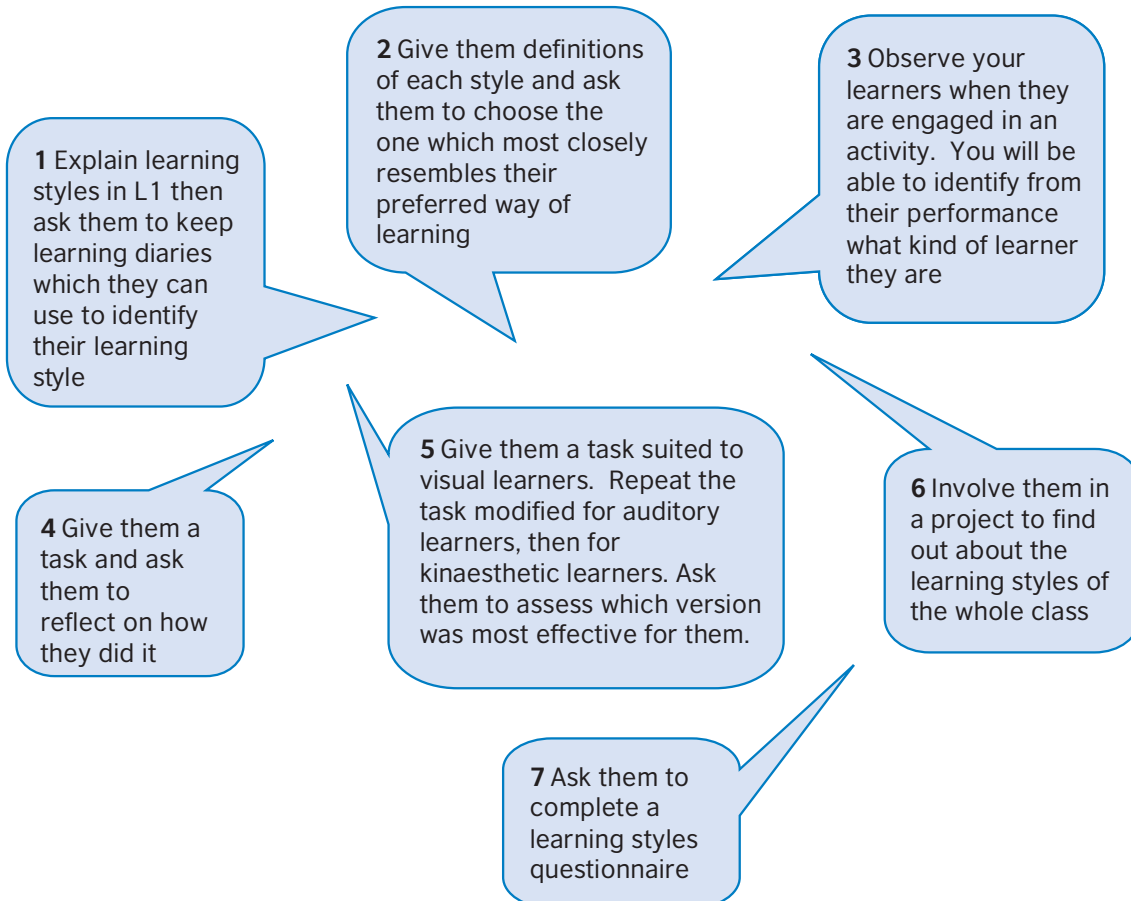
- Why is an understanding of learning styles important and helpful for teachers and learners?
- Brainstorm all the reasons you can think of.

Identifying learning styles

Look at the ideas suggested by teachers for finding out about learners' learning styles. Work in groups:

What do you think of these ideas?

Can you suggest any other techniques you could try?



Learning styles in my class

Reflect on the techniques from the previous activity.

Which ones would you like to try with your learners? Why?

Would you prefer not to try any of these techniques? Why not?

Your trainer will give you a post-it note:

Write on the number of the technique you have chosen and stick it on to yourself.

Mingle, ask the other participants about their choices and explain yours.

How many participants have chosen the same one as you?

Have you decided to try any other techniques as a result of speaking to the other participants?

Reflection

Look again at the questions you discussed in the first activity:

What do you know about learning styles?

Do you know what your learning style is?

Why are learning styles important?

Work in pairs and discuss the following:

Have your answers changed? How?

What new information have you learned?

How will you use what you have learned?

What learning styles have people been able to use in this workshop?

For more information on learning styles visit our website at:

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/articles/learning-styles-teaching>

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/try/activities/planning-lessons-students-preferred-learning-styles>

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/try/lesson-plans/learning-styles>