

AN INTRODUCTION TO LEARNING AND TEACHING STYLES

What are they and why do they matter?



INTRODUCTION

- ◉ For discussion: What was your favorite class/ worst class in high school or college? Why was that?
- ◉ What do you think is/are your own preferred style(s) of learning?
- ◉ How would you describe your preferred teaching methods?

INTRODUCTION

- Average number of graduate level courses on teaching methodology at the post-secondary level taken by U.S. faculty: Studies indicate that 85% of faculty have had no training courses!
- But, according to Derek Bok, in *Our Underachieving Colleges*, 90% of college professors believe their teaching is above average!

LEARNING STYLES: AN OVERVIEW

- ◉ Premise #1: students learn better when they recognize their preferred learning style and can make use of a variety of strategies
- ◉ Premise #2: Faculty can enhance student learning by incorporating multiple paths to learning in their classes

LEARNING STYLES: CAVEATS

- ◉ Learning Style theory has developed over the last 40 years, representing a shift away from behavioral learning theory in educational psychology
- ◉ Approximately 70 theories have been identified; none is complete in itself; each focuses on some aspects of learning theory to the omission of others
- ◉ These theories draw from research in psychology, education, etc. but often are more intuitive than validated by hard research

LEARNING STYLES: CAVEATS

- ◉ Some theories have achieved significant commercial success because of marketing efforts (but don't have consistent research validation)
- ◉ However, some generalizations based on work with these theories can be appropriated by faculty in higher education settings
- ◉ Cognitive learning theory provides more objective/researched evidence (some aspects to be presented today)

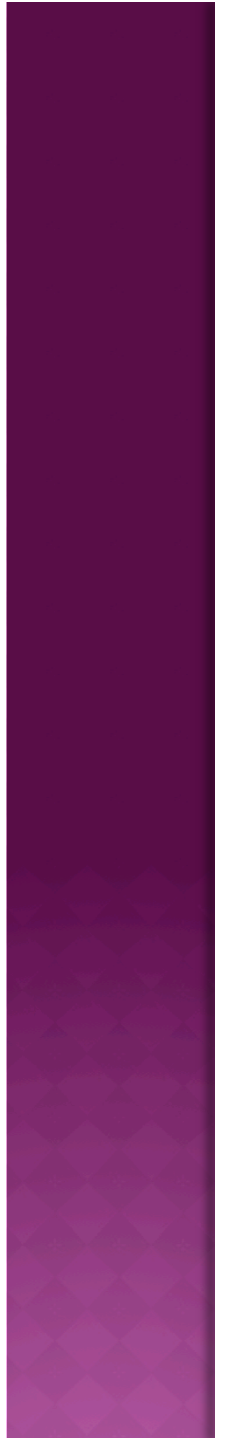
LEARNING STYLES--OVERVIEW

- ◉ We **receive** information through 4 primary modalities:
 - Visual (what do I see?)
 - Auditory (what do I hear?)
 - Tactile (What can I touch?)
 - Kinesthetic (What can I manipulate or move?)
- ◉ We **process** information through 2 primary approaches (cognitive style):
 - Abstract (objective data management)
 - Relational (personalized, connectedness)

1. THE FOUR MODALITIES IN THE CLASSROOM

- ◉ Visual learners = 30% of students
- ◉ Auditory learners = 25% of students
- ◉ Tactile-kinesthetic learners = 15% of students
- ◉ Mixed modalities = 30% of students

- ◉ Modality = combination of perception and memory or how the mind receives and stores information
- ◉ Visual: learner prefers images (30%)
- ◉ Auditory: learner prefers words (25%)
- ◉ Tactile/Kinesthetic: learner prefers doing, touching, physical manipulation of objects (15%)
- ◉ Mixed modalities (30%)



FOUR MODALITIES

- ◉ Faculty should try to match their instructional approach to the learning task and if possible use multiple approaches (ex: learning tennis by listening to a lecture is not a good match—no pun intended!)
- ◉ Multimodality instruction \neq modality matching for individual students

FOUR MODALITIES

- ◉ Matching can help lower-ability students temporarily; mismatching can help higher-ability students (because the system already ‘works’ for them)
- ◉ using only modality matching eventually puts all students at a disadvantage because they need to be able to use a variety of modalities (but it can help a student who gets stuck and needs another way to perceive the information)
- ◉ Multimodality teaching = incorporating a variety of approaches that eventually connect with all styles

2. COGNITIVE STYLE: FIELD SENSITIVITY

- ◉ Field sensitivity refers to the extent to which an individual uses context in order to understand and make sense of new information
- ◉ Field sensitivity is a facet of personality that is relatively stable over time
- ◉ this topic has been extensively researched and shown to have validity regarding its impact on learning

FIELD INDEPENDENT VS. SENSITIVE

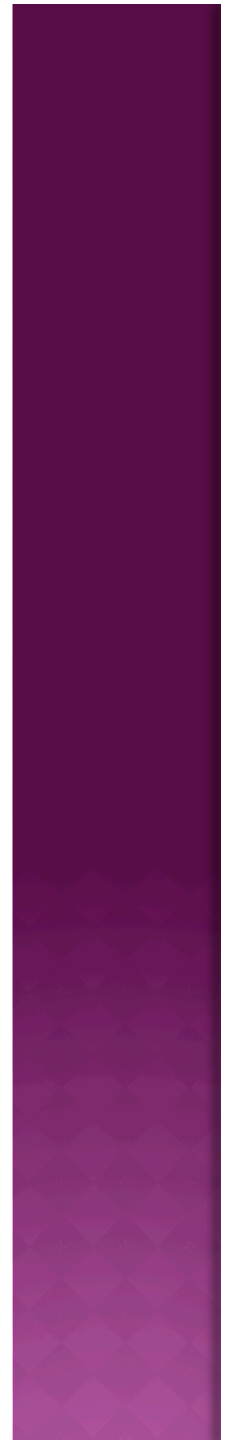
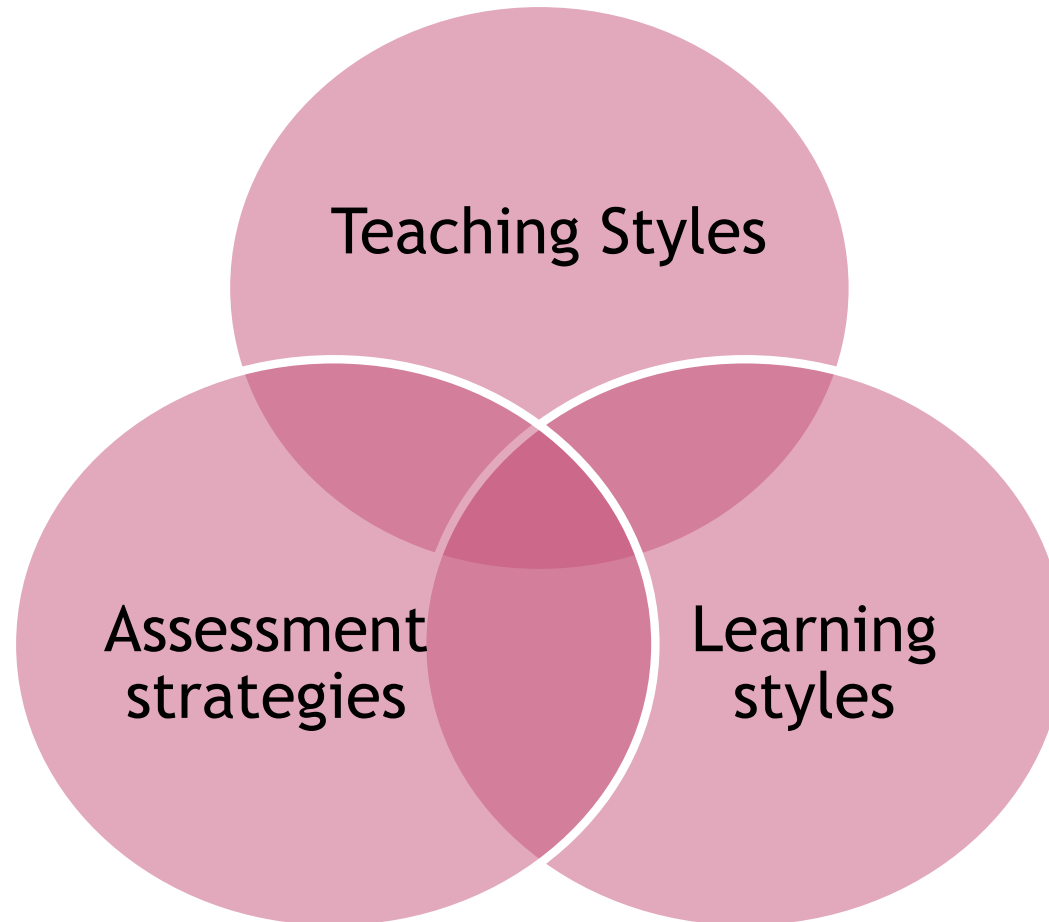
- ◉ Autonomous learners, task-oriented, internally motivated
- ◉ Deal well with discrete items of information
- ◉ Not affected by context; impose their own structure on content
- ◉ Can perform well in large classes and on open-ended tests
- ◉ Enjoy competition
- ◉ Socialized learners, relationship-oriented, externally motivated
- ◉ Deal well with information related to 'the big picture' and/or personally meaningful
- ◉ Affected by context; require structure
- ◉ Can perform well in small, structured classes and on objective tests
- ◉ Enjoy collaboration



COGNITIVE STYLE

- Higher education tends to favor:
 - field independent learners over *field sensitive* learners
 - Academic knowledge over *experiential*
 - Verbal communication over *visual*
 - information organized in linear fashion and discrete point presentations over information presented *holistically*
- Students who tend to be field independent learners are white European-American and Asian males; students who tend to be field sensitive include females, Native Americans, Afro-Americans and Latinos (obviously with individual differences)

THE EFFECTIVE TEACHER INCLUDES A VARIETY OF:



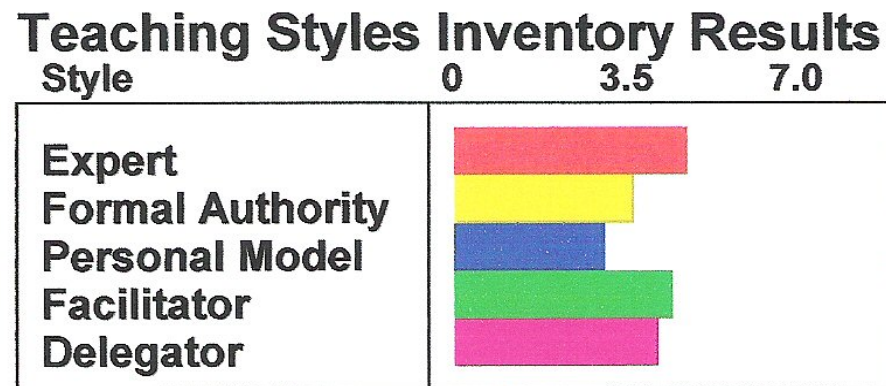
TEACHING STYLES

- ◉ Since every individual has a **preferred learning style**, the teacher who depends exclusively on one **preferred teaching style** puts up to 75% of his/her students at a disadvantage
- ◉ Students learn better when we select **content**, **activities** and **assessments** with a variety of learners in mind

FOUR COMMON TEACHING STYLES :

- ◉ **expert/formal authority:** imparts information, concerned with correct way of doing things
- ◉ **personal model:** encourages students to observe then emulate instructor's approach
- ◉ **Facilitator:** emphasizes personal interaction with students; guides and directs students by asking questions, prompts, etc.
- ◉ **Delegator:** resource person; develops students as independent learners

BARB'S TEACHING STYLE INVENTORY:



For my Latin American Civ/Lit course, I had these scores:

Expert = 4.8

Formal authority = 3.7

Personal model = 3.1

Facilitator = 4.5

Delegator = 4.2

= the “delegator/facilitator/expert” cluster puts the burden of learning on the students by emphasizing independent learning activities for groups and individuals

THE EFFECTIVE TEACHER:

- ◉ uses a variety of modalities to deliver content
- ◉ uses a variety of instructional approaches, matching the approach to the learning task
- ◉ encourages students to be aware of their preferred learning styles and to develop flexibility (a variety of learning strategies)
- ◉ Offers a variety of assessment measures so that all students can work from their strengths at various points during the course

FOR FURTHER READING:

- For identifying your preferred learning style:
<http://www.vark-learn.com/english/page.asp?p=questionnaire>
- Take the Teaching Styles Inventory
<http://fcrcweb.ftr.indstate.edu/tstyles3.html>

