Learning for Professional Practice

Personalising your learning

It may seem odd but many of us never look at how we learn. We go to school, college, university, on staff development course and events, we buy books to help us but do we ask ourselves "How do I learn best?" Many of us will have experienced different styles of teaching, learning and assessment from chalk and talk through to interactive online learning, some may have created learning materials for others to use but have you really asked yourself how you learn best?

There have been a number of key papers and documents in education looking at personalisation for schools[1,2,3], personalisation and digital technologies[4] and learning more generally. Interestingly what is difficult in a group or class situation even for the most experienced of teachers can have great benefits in how we support our own learning. As we are responsible for our own learning, through personal development planning (PDP) and continuing professional development (CPD), we should be making sure that we choose learning experiences that make the best of how we like to learn.

If you think of a learning need you may have "I need to learn how to use layers in Photoshop" there are a number of ways you can go about fulfilling that learning need.

1. Go to a workshop.
2. Buy a "teach yourself" book and try the techniques on your own.
3. Try techniques recommended in magazines and journals including video demonstrations on CDs.
4. Download exercises from the Adobe web site http://tv.adobe.com/ or other online videocasts
5. Working with and learning from peers.

If you are happy learning on your own 2, 3 and 4 might suit you. If you prefer the support of a tutor or hands-on help 1 and 5 might be better. It is important to remember that there is no right way or wrong way to address your learning needs. Also, how fast you achieve this is not the point but whether you have met your personal learning needs.

Task 1: Which learning activities do you enjoy?

Make a list of as many different learning activities as possible. (include those you don't enjoy). Give each a score from 1 to 5; 1 = most boring through to 5 = most enjoyable.

Learning activities	Boring				Enjoyable
Online tutorials Reading	1	2	3	4	5
Visiting Exhibitions/ Trade Fairs					

To give you a start some have been added to the table above but try to think of your own. For ideas have a look at the different learning activities suggested by the Health Professions Council in their guide to Continuing Professional Development and your registration[5], Appendix 1 examples of CPD activities. What you are really doing is thinking about how you like to learn or what is called your learning style. There are quite a few ways to examine your learning style using online tests or paper based versions but like lots of personality tests they don't do anything unless you think about the implications for you and your learning. All online tests do is give you an overview of your learning style, the next step has to be to see what your preferred learning style(s) mean, and how you should go about supporting your learning i.e. how to personalise your learning. For an overview look at the The Personal Development Planning Handbook by Stella Cottrell[6].

Task 2: Try out one of the online learning styles assessments
VARK http://www.vark-learn.com/english/index.asp

This site analyses your learning in terms of whether you are a Visual, Auditory, Read or Kinaesthetic learner or more likely a combination of one or more styles, (Figure 1).
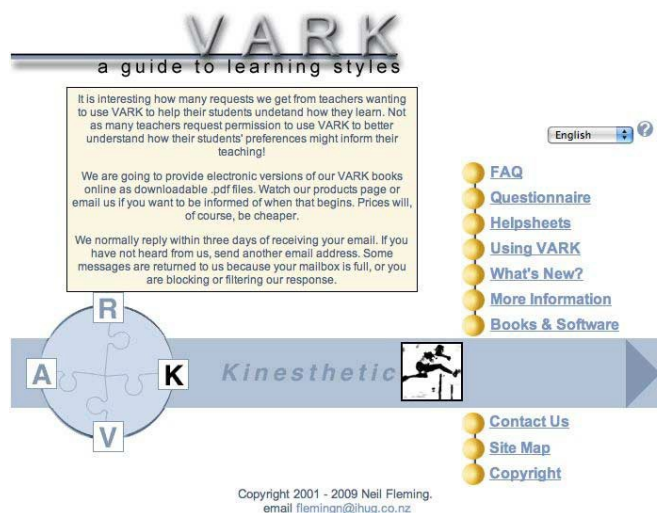

Figure 1. VARK website http://www.vark-learn.com/ english/index.asp.

Memletic Learning Styles Inventory http://www.learning-styles-online.com/

This site is not dissimilar from VARK but it creates a graphical interpretation of your personal learning style, (Figure 2), and includes whether you like to work in groups or on your own. The styles include; visual (spatial), aural (auditory-musical), verbal (linguistic), physical (kinesthetic), logical (mathematical), social (interpersonal), solitary (intrapersonal).
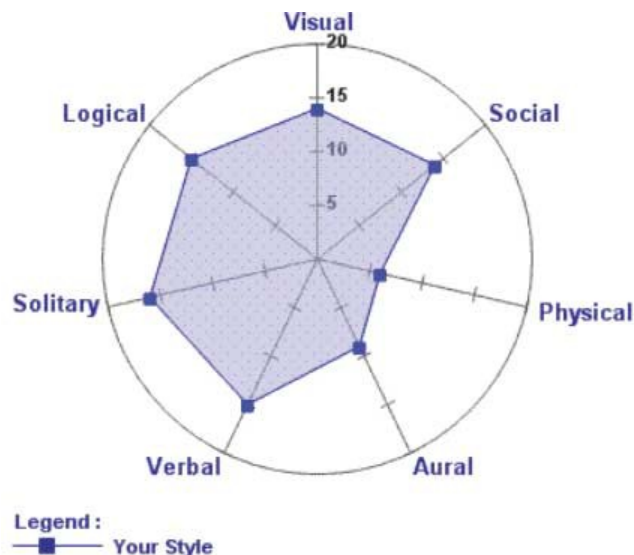
Figure 2. Graphical interpretation of your learning styles http://www.learning- styles-online.com/.

Myers Briggs http://www.myersbriggs.org/

This site links in to sites using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. This is more about your personality but can support how you look at yourself and your learning.

Don't forget your organisation may already have access through a subscription to these or similar sites enabling you to get more detailed feedback. The sites are free to access but further services are subscription based.

Task 3: Planning your learning activities to take account of your preferred way to learn.

Looking at your list of activities, from Task 1, that you enjoy and your learning styles, do they match? It is more likely that the types of learning activities you enjoy are those that best help you learn.

Task 4: Revise your personal development plan to suit your learning style

This stage is to update your personal development plan to make use of the learning opportunities which best help you learn. Reflect on how you can use your knowledge of your learning style to plan to achieve your personal learning needs, not forgetting to look more deeply at the explanations on the learning styles websites.

References

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6. Cottrell, S. (2003) The Personal Development Planning Handbook. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.