

The development and evaluation of preferred learning styles assessments within the action research programme

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During the first year of the programme, a traditional questionnaire format was used for the assessment of students' preferred learning styles. The assessment tool comprised 18 statements, to which pupils were asked to respond with 'Yes' (applicable to them) and 'No' (not applicable). Of the 18 statements, six each related to visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning.

Although the assessments produced a range of useful data, evaluations undertaken within the programme schools and by the consultants indicated the need for a number of modifications:

- the appearance of the assessment tool as a test may have led some students to anticipate what their teachers wanted them to put
- increasing the number of statements might provide a greater range of variation and accuracy in the results
- the format might not have been sufficiently accessible to the wide age range of students in the programme schools
- the process of completing the assessments did not take different learning styles into account
- some pupils with literacy difficulties may have found the questionnaire too challenging, even when given assistance with the reading
- the implementation of the assessments may not have been consistent across classes and schools

As a result of these observations, a new format was introduced during the second year of the programme. The main changes were:

- increasing the number of statements from 18 to 36
- printing the statements on stickers, that students had to peel off and stick on a sheet as applicable
- producing more detailed guidance notes for the conduct of the assessments

These materials have been successfully used with students (from year 2 to year 11) and staff, and have been translated into a number of community languages by colleagues at Islington Arts & Media School.

Guidance notes for the assessment

The purpose of the assessment is to help students to become more aware of how they learn and how they can help themselves to learn more effectively through this awareness.

Give students a pack comprising:

- Two A4 sheets of stickers
- One A3 sheet with a picture of a brain on it
- One A3 sheet with a picture of a bin on it

These can be found in the back of this resource, and are also available to download from the Creative Partnerships website. You should use a photocopier to enlarge the Brain and Bin sheets to A3. There are two versions of the stickers, available in a standard Avery L7160 format. One version uses ear, hand and eye symbols to indicate visual, auditory or kinaesthetic preference. The other uses coloured circles and can be used as an alternative if students become too familiar with the meaning of the symbols.

Instruct students to stick their name sticker onto the brain sheet and write their name on it, and stick their tutor group sticker onto the brain sheet and write their tutor group on it.

Read each statement to the class. Students must decide if the statement applies to them. If it does they stick it on the brain sheet, if not they stick it on the bin sheet. They must only do the statements at the speed set by the teacher, and should not discuss them with their friends.

When all stickers have been completed, students need to count how many eyes, ears or hands they have on the brain sheet, and write the totals on the appropriate sticker.

You should then ask each student for their visual (eyes), auditory (ears) and kinaesthetic (hands) totals. This data could be entered on to each student's record.



Explain to the students what each symbol means:

- ear is someone who has an auditory preference for learning
- hand is someone who has a kinaesthetic preference for learning
- eye is someone who has a visual preference for learning

How to use the assessment data

Tell the students this is only a rough guide, and it is possible for people to learn using more than one style and that styles can change.

Go through the top tips to help you study (found on page 63) with the students, and explain some of the tips may only be appropriate to use at home.

Begin a discussion with students on how knowing how they learn can change the way they work in class. Display the brain sheets in the students' form room, if possible, as a point of reference for students and to keep them aware of learning styles. Include in this display the top tips to help you study sheets.

Each student will have three scores, for their visual, auditory and kinaesthetic statements. As students were given the option of putting statements in the bin, it is likely that the totals of these scores will all be different. For example, in the table below student A put 20 statements in the bin, but student B only put five in the bin. The numbers have no value in the scoring system, they just show a student's preference.

Example of assessment scores

Student	Visual	Auditory	Kinaesthetic
A	5	6	5
B	10	11	10
C	11	3	7
D	3	11	7

Students A and B have the same learning style preferences. A higher selection of statements (student B) across does not mean they have a greater personal preference than the student with lower statement selection (student A). The relationships between the numbers for the individual are the key.

Student C has a more developed visual preference. For student D the exact opposite is true. However, we can also see that both students enjoy being actively engaged in activities to help them learn as both their kinaesthetic scores are quite high.

This data can help you and the student to make decisions about the approach they take to learning, and to understand how they can best revise and reinforce their knowledge.

Do bear in mind that people can develop their weaker learning styles and use their stronger learning styles to support them further.