

Importance of teaching styles in classrooms



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All people learn in different ways, it is therefore essential that teachers try to incorporate as many different teaching styles as possible into the delivery of what they are teaching. Marshal (Marzano 1992) suggests that the concept of learning has to include positive attitudes, the ability to acquire knowledge, allowing learners to extent their own knowledge and then applying their knowledge to everyday life. Marshal (Marzano 1992) also believes that a teacher must develop these concepts in order to help learners develop, and make learners learn independently, so they may continue to develop and gather knowledge for the rest of their lives.

There are many different approaches and theories on teaching styles. Most agree that for all pupils to have an equal experience in education, teachers must adapt their teaching styles so that everyone benefits within the classroom. Marzano (1992) suggests that lower ability pupils should be taught through ' closed' tasks. A ' closed' task has a specific structure and set of instructions to give pupils a clear idea of how a task should be approached and completed. Marzano (1992) then suggests that higher ability pupils should experience more ' open-ended' tasks, allowing pupils to develop their thinking skills. This style of teaching is very much learner centred as the teacher must adapt their style of teaching to suit the needs of pupils in their class.

Mishra (2007) has a different theory of teaching styles. Mirsha (2007) argues that there are three styles of teaching; discipline centred, instructor centred and student centred, although there are many more different teaching styles and theories suggested by different authors. The discipline centred style of teaching is very structured, not allowing for flexibility for what is taught and

when it is taught. This style of teaching may be completely centred around the national curriculum, without deviating from it. This style of teaching is as ineffective as it is unpractical, as teaching must allow for flexibility to ensure that all pupils are learning and achieving in schools. Instructor centred style of teaching focuses on the teacher as being the main source of knowledge for pupils. Everything that pupils learn may come from the teacher, without obtaining knowledge and information from other sources. Much like the discipline centred style of teaching, the instructor centred style is very limited and does not help learners develop, as pupils do not have to seek ways of finding out information themselves, but simply ask the teacher. It is also very limited as the teacher can not be expected to be able to answer all of the questions the pupils may have, and may have limited knowledge in certain areas of the curriculum. The third teaching style suggested by Mishra (2007) is the student centred style of teaching. This style is much more learner centred and is very much focused on the cognitive development of students. Through this teaching style, pupils are encouraged to learn through enquiry, and develop their own thinking skills obtain knowledge and solve problems. Unlike the other two styles suggested by Mirsha (2007), the student centred style of teaching also focuses more on the needs of individual learners. This style of teaching allows for pupils to learn in different ways as the teacher adapts their teaching style to suite all learners, of all abilities.

However, the three teaching styles suggested by Mirsha (2007) are limited as they do not consider the variations between different classrooms and schools. There are many different teaching styles, all of which must be

focused on what best suites the learner (Association of Teachers and Lecturers 2011). Perhaps therefore, it is more important to focus on how pupils learn rather than just focusing on teaching styles, as no style will suite all learners.

One of the most accepted models of learning styles is Fleming's Visual Auditory Kinaesthetic (VAK) model which has been further developed by Grinder. The first types are the visual learners. Visual learners learn by seeing different types of information such as pictures, diagrams and models. They may also prefer to read a piece of text for themselves, rather than have someone read it to them. Visual learners often remember information by picturing it (Cheminais 2008). To help visual learners, teachers must adapt their teaching style to incorporate as much visual elements into their lessons. An example of this could be to making sure the structure of the lesson is indicated on the whiteboard so that pupils can see what the lesson will focus on. It is also important that the teacher writes down key information from the lesson so that the learner can memorise the information visually.

Secondly there are auditory learners. These learners may prefer to listen to information such as being read a story, rather than read it themselves. They may also benefit more from group discussions as often, auditory learners remember information by remembering what they have heard (Cheminais 2008). To hep auditory learners, teachers can incorporate group discussion, audio activities such as listening to music and reading a book out loud so that auditory learners can remember information that they have heard.

Thirdly there are kinaesthetic learners. These types of learners prefer to be engaged physically with the work by means of touching and doing.

Kinaesthetic learners achieve best when lessons incorporate 'hands on activities' that allows learners to be actively involved with the lesson (Grinder 1991). It is argued that the best teaching style is to use a multi sensory approach. This will incorporate all learners of different abilities as it helps learners retain knowledge and information in a way that best suites them. Studies from the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development have suggested that this style of teaching greatly benefits children who have dyslexia. A dyslexic child may experience problems with reading and writing, because they have problems seeing and then processing words. However, if a multi sensory style of teaching is used, it benefits dyslexic pupils greatly as they are able to use other senses such as touch (kinaesthetic). This style of teaching has been proven to help dyslexic children in particular as it builds up kinaesthetic memory to complicate visual and auditory ones (Bradford 2008).

A different model explaining how pupils learn is Piaget's Theory/ Model of Cognitive Development. Piaget's model is a Constructivist model, meaning that pupils continually build upon previous knowledge, this is also called schema (Carrell 1984). Whilst studying the way pupils learn, Piaget focused on Assimilation and Accommodation. According to Piaget, assimilation is the process whereby pupils receive new information and experiences from their learning environment. Accommodation is the follow on effect from assimilation as the pupil adapts their mental views because of the new information and knowledge they have acquired (Atherton 2010). From his

studies, Piaget concluded that as pupils matured, so they were able to understand and absorb more knowledge. Piaget believed pupils were not able to carry out certain tasks until they were mature enough to be able to do so (Atherton 2010). From his findings, Piaget created a four stage Model of Cognitive Development. The first stage is the Sensory Motor Stage and lasts roughly from birth to two years old. At this stage, the child begins to differentiate themselves from other objects in their environment as they begin to develop their senses. Also at this stage, the child is deemed ego-centric, as they are unable to consider others needs. They may also recognise that they need to do something, in order to make something else happen e. g. they need to push a toy car in order to make it move (Jardine 2006). The second stage is the Pre-operations Stage and lasts roughly from two to seven years old. During this stage the child begins to develop language and vocabulary. They then associate language with objects and words (Atherton 2010). The child will usually classify objects together because of one common factor such as different shapes being classed together because they are the same colour, despite their differences in size and shape. Piaget argues that children in this stage are still ego-centric, but are beginning to decentre their view of the world and other people. Piaget also argues that children in this stage have a certain amount of animism as children believe that non living objects such as cars, share the same feelings as them (Jardine 2006). Stage three is the Concrete Operations Stage and lasts approximately from seven to eleven years old. During this stage of development, the child becomes more mature and animism and egocentric way of thinking begins to disappear in most people. Also during this stage, children begin to see objects in different ways (Jardine 2006). For example,

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before this stage, children may see a spilt pint of milk as being more than a pint of milk in a bottle. However, during the Concrete Operations Stage, children develop 'reversibility', or that things remain the same after they have changed. For example, children learn that the spilt pint of milk is actually the same as the milk in the bottle even though it appears different. The final stage is the Formal Operations Stage and lasts from eleven to sixteen years old. During this stage, the pupil develops to think like an adult. If the pupil is faced with a problem, they may search for all the possibilities to solve it. Pupils are also able to evaluate different ideas without having to relate them back to something that already exists in the real world (Bybee et al 1982). From a teaching perspective, it is important to take into Piaget's Theory/ Model of Cognitive Development when planning or teaching children. As Piaget suggests, children develop different skills and qualities and different stages of their life. It is their fore unfair to set a task that is suitable for a child in the Concrete Operations Stage when they are still in the Pre-operations Stage. Taking account Piaget's model, it is important for teachers to adapt their style in order to suit the pupils they are

Gardner offers a different theory of learning. Over the last half century, suggestions have been made that people have different types of intelligences. One of the most well known is Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory (Ginnis 2008). Gardner argued against past theories that people were born intelligent, and instead suggested that all people are intelligent, but in different ways. In 1983, Gardner developed seven different types of intelligence (Ginnis 2008). More recently, Gardner has suggested that there are eight different types; linguistic, logical (mathematical), spatial, musical,

kinaesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalistic. In 1999 Gardner claimed " I now conceptualise an intelligence as a biopsychological potential to process information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in a culture" (Ginnis 2008). Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory benefits both teacher and pupils. Gardner claims that everyone is intelligent, just in different ways. This can help build pupil's self esteem and confidence as they may struggle in some subjects but thrive in others. His theory also allows a more prestigious status for certain tasks in the classroom, which in the past may not have been deemed as showing intelligence in a child. Gardner's theory is also very beneficial to teachers and the style they use as it allows teachers to have higher expectations of every child (Ginnis 2008) and therefore push each child further. Gardner's theory also helps teachers differentiate their lesson planning to include all pupils equally. In the past, pupils may have been grouped by ability only in certain subjects. However, using Gardner's theory, the teacher is able to see which pupils progress better in which subjects, and can therefore plan and group pupils together according to their ability in a range of different subjects. This does however depend on the overall style of the teacher as they may deem mixed ability groups more appropriate for certain tasks. Teachers may also use Gardner's theory to identify which subjects or task pupils feel less comfortable carrying out, and then try to support them more when participating in these.

Professor Anthony Gregorc again offers a different approach to learning styles. Gregorc suggests that people perceive (acquire) and order (organise/store mentall) information in different ways. From this, Gregorc developed

different scales for both Perceiving and Ordering. On the perception scale, Gregorc argues that there are Concrete learners at one end of the scale and Abstract learners at the other (Ginnis 2008). According to Gregorc, Concrete learners need the physical aspect of learning, they are kinaesthetic learners and need to be actively involved with a task in order for them to benefit from it. Gregorc then argues that at the other end of the perception scale there are Abstract learners. These types of people use experiences to help them memorise information. They also look for patterns in work and how things are similar or different (Jonassen et al 1993). It is important to highlight that the majority of people fall somewhere in between the two ends of the perception scale. On the Ordering scale, Gregorc argues that there are Sequential people at one end, and Random people at the other. Sequential people are very logical, focused and are able to memorise facts easily. When carrying out a task they follow a step by step plan in order for them to complete the task effectively. Random people, Gregorc argues, are not so focused and find it hard to memorise facts. Random people may be able to answer a complex question, but not be able to say how they came to their answer (Jonassen et al 1993). Like the Perception scale, most people fall between the two ends of the scale.

From his research, Gregorc argues that there are four types of learners; Concrete Sequential, Abstract Sequential, Concrete Random and Abstract Random. With regard to teaching style, it is important for a teacher to realise what learning style/ styles pupils may be, in order to set tasks that will be most beneficial to them. Concrete Sequential learners need structured, practical activities. These types of learners need to be told exactly what to

do and may require a checklist, such as a success criteria, in order to complete a task. They also require regular feedback to make sure they are correctly carrying out the task. Abstract Sequential learners prefer to do their own research, but the research must be structured for them, for example a worksheet where pupils have to fill in the gaps. These types of learners also like to evaluate work and like different ideas and theories. Concrete Random learners prefer to work with a certain amount of freedom without having to worry about deadlines. These types of learners do not like working with others, unless they chose who they work with. They are curious learners and like challenging work such as researching ideas for themselves. Finally, Abstract Random learners are very creative, and like to work in groups. They learn best through discussion, either in small groups or with the entire class. They are very flexible learners, who don't mind making mistakes. They also learn best when humour is used when teaching information (Ginnis 2008).

Teachers can use Gregorc's work to help them plan and adapt their style of teaching to suit all learners. Although it is not possible to teach in a style that will benefit all learners in every lesson, it is important to try and incorporate all learning styles over a series of lessons (Jonassen et al 1993). Teacher's can also use Gregorc's work to approach teaching with a more personal style. For example, a Concrete Sequential learner may prefer a task broken down into small stages, so the teacher can use this knowledge of learning style to plan effectively for them. Also, an Abstract Sequential learner prefers to work in groups, so the teacher can make sure that a lesson involves group work, or discussion of some kind (Ginnis 2008).

Although there are many different approaches and theories regarding teaching and learning styles, all suggest that there is a relationship between the two. It is impossible for a teacher to have a strict teaching style, as it will not benefit all pupils within their class. Instead, a teacher must identify what different learning styles pupils within their class may have, and then use this information to adapt their teaching style so that all pupils benefit from their teaching.

My school experience placement took place in a Church of Wales school in a small town in central Powys. The school has eight full time teachers and eighteen teaching assistants, some specialising in supporting special needs children. The school is a dual stream co-educational primary school and between Infants and Juniors there were one hundred and eighty pupils. In my class (year six) there were seventeen pupils aged either ten or eleven years old. The class had one teaching assistant who was a full time assistant to a pupil with Autism. The school is organised into eight classes, three in the foundation phase and three in Key Stage Two, with years four and five combined. These classes are taught through the medium of English. The other two classes are taught through the medium of Welsh and range from reception to year six. Pupils are able to attend the Welsh medium classes, irrespective of home language. Even though the Welsh medium classes are separate from the rest of the school, the whole school comes together for assemblies, break and lunch times and after school clubs. In 2008, the school received a positive ESTYN inspective report. In Autumn 2010, the school was re-awarded the Basic Skills Quality for Maths and Language. The

school is also a Green Flag Eco-School and a Healthy School for its good work in Education for Sustainable Development (eco-schoolswales. org). .

The school followed the National Curriculum of Wales. Core subjects the non-core subjects of History, Geography, Art, Design Technology, Music, Physical Education and Religious Education are taught. As the school is a Church of Wales school, Religious Education is taught in accordance with the Church of Wales syllabus, which look at all religions and compares them to a child's own beliefs. Collective Christian worship takes place on a daily bases.

Whilst on school experience I witnessed many different styles of teaching in the non-core subjects. The teaching style were different not only in each subject, but depending on what task was being carried out, and what the teacher felt was most suitable for the pupils in the class.

In art, the whole class made wire men, which were later covered with mod-rock and painted. To explain the task to the children, the teacher firstly demonstrated what they had to do. This helped visual learners, as they were able to see exactly what they had to do in order to complete the task successfully. When the pupils actually carried out the task themselves, it was very hands on, and the children were actively involved. This type of learning supports Grinder's kinaesthetic learner, were using senses such as touch and sight while carrying out the task. Throughout the lesson the teacher continuously gave feedback to pupils. By giving constant feedback the teacher was supporting Gregorc's Concrete Sequential learners. In art, it is easier than most subjects to use a multi sensory teaching style, as the subject itself presents very practical work, suited to the kinaesthetic learner.

History also presents a teacher with the ability to use different teaching styles. On school experience, the class covered the Second World War in History. The teacher and I used different objects from the war such as a helmet and air raid siren, to help pupils learning. This style of teaching helped both visual and kinaesthetic learners as they could see and touch the different objects to aid their knowledge and understanding of the War (Grinder 1991). Also while studying this area of history, there were group and class discussions. This style of teaching would aid Gregorc's Abstract Random learners (Ginnis 2008) and also auditory learners as pupils would learn by discussing and listen to information about the War.

There are many different methods and style of teaching music in Key Stage Two. Music is a subject that allows pupils to express themselves more than they may normally do in other subjects. Also, Gardner suggests music as one of his eight intelligences (Ginnis 2008). It is important for a teacher to realise a pupil's capability in music in order to teach them effectively and help them advance. Music is a very multi sensory subject as it benefits visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learners through reading music or lyrics, listening to different types of music and physically playing different instruments. While on school placement, the class composed a song in Welsh, to the tune of "What shall we do with a drunken sailor". Instead of just letting the pupils write any lyrics they wanted, the teacher showed them a clear structure that they had to follow. The pupils then worked in groups to help compose lyrics to the song and then performing it. This teaching style benefitted a range of different learning styles. Firstly, Concrete Sequential learners benefited as they were provided with a clear structure of what they had to do to compose

the song. Secondly, Abstract Random learners benefited from the group work and the creativity to compose song lyrics. During this lesson, the teacher had purposefully adapted their teaching style so that different learning styles would benefit from the lesson.

Design and Technology (D&T) again offers a teacher the opportunity to adapt their teaching style in order to benefit different learning styles. On school experience the D&T topic focused on healthy eating, and designing and making healthy pizzas. The class began the topic by discussing in groups and whole class discussions, different ideas about healthy eating and different types of pizza. The discussion benefited Abstract Random learners and also auditory learners (Jonassen et al 1993, Grinder 1991). Before pupils made pizza themselves, the teacher demonstrated how to make one, showing each step clearly. This would benefit visual and auditory learners and also Concrete Sequential learners (Ginnis 2008), as they could see clearly what they would have to do in order to make a pizza. Also as part of this topic, pupils had to create a recipe for making a pizza. Higher ability pupils in the class wrote the recipe without aid from examples. However, some lower ability pupils in the class were provided worksheet where they had to fill in the gaps (see appendix 1). This worksheet would not only benefit lower ability pupils, but also Abstract Sequential learners as they could fill in the gaps (Ginnis 2008).

Physical Education (PE) in general is very much suited for kinaesthetic learners as it is a very actively involved subject. However, depending on which teaching style the teacher uses, depends on how much other types of learners benefit from PE. On school experience, the pupils focused on dance

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during their PE lessons. Pupils were asked to work in pairs and groups to create different dance routines. This benefitted visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learners as they were able to see different dance routines, listen to them be explained, and then physically carry them out. Also, by physically doing the dance, the pupils were able to learn the routine very quickly. The partner and group discussion also benefitted Abstract Random Learners (Ginnis 2008).

In Geography on school experience, pupils looked at a comparison between their home town and a small village in Uganda. To introduce the topic, the teacher showed the pupils a video of the village in Uganda. This benefitted visual and auditory learners as they were able to see the village and hear different things about it from the people who lived there. The teacher also paused the video occasionally to ask questions and recap what the pupils had learnt so far. This was particularly effective as it made pupils concentrate on the video in case they were asked a question about it. The discussion following the video also benefitted Abstract Random learners (Ginnis 2008). The pupils were then given a “treasure” map of the village in Uganda. The aim of the activity was for the pupils to discover where they could buy milk, and to plot different locations on the map. The map consisted of different questions. The answer of the question gave a clue either to where the next location was on the map, or what the next question was. This activity suited a range of different learning styles. Pupils could see the different locations on the map, discuss them with their partner or group (Abstract Random Learners), and be actively involved in answering questions. The step by step instructions of how to complete the task also

benefited Concrete Sequential learners. This task was particularly enjoyable for the pupils and they learnt a lot of information about the village in Uganda from it. This shows that the teaching style used to provide information about this area was very successful.

In Religious Education, the class covered the nativity story. The teacher began the topic with a class discussion to produce a timeline of the order of events of the nativity story. This again benefited Abstract Random learners. After the class had completed the timeline, pupils given page book, chapter and verse references and were asked to locate the nativity story in different parts of the Bible. This benefited visual and kinaesthetic learners. Also, the research methods used in this lesson also benefited Abstract Sequential learners (Ginnis 2008). Once the pupils were more aware of the nativity story, the class looked at it as a drama activity. This activity greatly benefited kinaesthetic learners, as they were physically involved with the nativity story and therefore were able to learn the story far easier than simply reading, or being told about it.

It is important for teachers to adopt a range of different teaching styles when teaching different subjects. Teachers must find the most suitable style for the lesson content, but more importantly, a style which will suit all learners and allow them to benefit from the teaching. To be able to teach effectively, teachers must use approaches and theories such as Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory, Piaget's Theory/ Model of Cognitive Development, Grinder's VAK model and Gregorc's approach to learning styles, in order to discover what style of teaching would be most suitable and beneficial to their pupils. It is not possible for teachers to consider all of the different learning

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styles when planning each lesson. It is important however that a range of learning styles are covered over a series of lessons, so that all learners benefit from the teaching.

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