

Creating a Visual Representation of a Cohorts Individual Assessments

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Introduction/need for innovation or idea

Although learning styles, or what is referred to as ‘learning styles’, have broadened over the years the general purpose has remained the same. A ‘learning style’ describes how an individual approaches a range of tasks, and what mode of instruction is most effective for their learning (Pashler et al, 2008). Over time more discoveries have been identified with a wider variety of learning styles. These discoveries assist in teaching by including a variety of instructional methods and assessments for different personalities and learning traits of individuals. Proponents believe, teachers who focus on ‘learning styles’ when planning for lessons, can better plan instruction to meet the learning needs of their students. ‘Learning styles’ focused planning for teachers has gained great influence in education but, researchers have concluded that there is no adequate evidence to justify utilizing, or matching ‘learning styles’ when teaching (Pasler et al, 2008). Although many small-scale studies have reported some positive impacts, generally about differentiating instruction for all students, they were found most successful in creating meaningful learning for students. Additionally, those who developed what some consider learning styles, (multiple intelligences), have concerns about basing teaching decisions solely on one measure of student learning (Gardner, 2013). Gardner (2013) emphasized a student may have a stronger type of intelligence or learn better from a certain style. Every learner experiences phenomenon in numerous ways.

This innovative idea was developed to help pre-service teachers and extension agents remember the learning styles, multiple intelligences, and personality assessments of their peers throughout their final semesters of on-campus coursework. In the final semester these students are required to teach their peers numerous lessons using different instructional techniques. By remembering the learning styles of their peers, they could effectively plan lessons based on the needs of their peers and explore the different options related to ‘learning styles’.

How it works/methodology/program phases/steps

1. Identify the “personality” and “learner” assessments you want students to examine. In the first year of implementation 4 different assessments were utilized: Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic assessment, 16 Personalities, Multiple Intelligences, and True Colors. During the second year, Kolb’s learning styles assessment was added.
2. Create posters in the appropriate size and design for your space which can contain the students’ representative token and hang them in your classroom.
3. Have each student choose their representative tokens. In our implementation, each student chose a clipart Owl, as they were all on the teacher certification track in Agricultural Education. This allowed the students to be creative and express themselves in choosing which owl best fit their personality.
4. Briefly introduce the concept of learning styles and personality assessments, then allow students time to complete assessments for homework.
5. On cardstock print one large version of each students’ token, and 5 smaller tokens for the students to place onto the posters to allow their peers to see how they learn best.
6. Cut out (or have students cut out) each token. Place the large tokens on a wall or door surrounding the graduation date. This identifies the cohort as a group.
7. When they return to class with all the assessments complete, discuss all their results and have them place their smaller tokens on the posters in the appropriate locations. We used blue painters’ tape to do this because it will help you maintain the posters for future use.

8. Once they see the results of all of the assessments of their peers and themselves discuss the pros and cons of basing teaching on different 'Learning Styles'.
9. As they complete their peer teachings, presentations, or other assignments over the course of the semester (or 2) have them refer to these visual representations and discuss their thoughts.

Additional Information:

- This innovation has been used twice at [Program & University]. The first year it was utilized in the senior Teaching Methods course for one semester. The second time it was implemented over the course of a full calendar year being set up during their Classroom Management course and then continued in the Teaching Methods Course.
- All [Program] faculty also chose tokens and participated in the activity by posting their tokens and participating in the discussions. Some even incorporated the discussion into their own classes.

Results to date/implications

Through both iterations of this innovative idea, the students indicated the visualization of classroom data helped them to think about the broad range of students in their classrooms, and how they could better plan their lessons to accommodate everyone's learning needs. It also assisted when reflecting on their teaching and lessons, as they edit their lesson plans following their teaching experiences. For example, one student teacher shared "I couldn't figure out why my peers couldn't follow my directions, and then I realized the ones who were lost were the ones who were in the Visual box. I hadn't given them written directions only verbal. That is definitely something I would change for next time I teach this lesson". Another reflected "I wish I had split up that loud group, but I don't know how I could have known...ummm...oh I guess now that I look at the poster, those students are more extraverted in their personalities. Huh, I wish I had thought of that before." Overall, this activity seems to provide a constant reminder of the diversity of students in their class, and how that should influence their teaching practices.

One unintended implication is that students have used it as an example of positive classroom decorations which incorporates student learning into the classroom and facilities management. It has also provided a unifying moment for the cohort and the younger students who are seeing it as a 'right of passage' in the program. Something they will get to do once they reach the same point.

Future plans/advice to others

This is an activity the [Program] plans to continue with through future cohorts. Giving them guidelines when choosing their tokens is important. It should be something that binds them together, while still allowing for individuality.

Costs/resources needed

Very few costs are associated – It is just the assessments and color printing of the posters and clip art owls.

References

Gardner, H. (2013). Multiple Intelligences are not Learning Styles. The Washington Post, October 6th, 2013. Retrieved from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2013/10/16/howard-gardner-multiple-intelligences-are-not-learning-styles/?utm_term=.3ef6fe375e66

Pasheler, H., McDaniel, M., Rohrer, D. & Bjork, R. (2008) Learning Styles: concepts and evidence. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 9(3), 105-119.