



by Margaret
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'Looking Forward'

The Learning Journey – Learning Styles

'You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink.'

IT seems to me that there is a lot of hysteria at the moment about how much 'learning' our children have missed out on during lockdown. It is as though they have all been sitting in a vacuum for twelve weeks and can only 'recover' when they return to school.

I think this line of thinking is insulting on a number of levels. Firstly, most schools have done their best at very short notice to provide access to online learning, families have generally worked hard to support their youngsters at home in a variety of ways, and finally and most importantly, learning is a continual process. It doesn't begin at the start of the school day and finish at home time.

In general we all learn in different ways and in our own good time. The big question is are there some situations where we learn better than others? The answer is a resounding 'Yes!'

I have always been interested in learning styles and the Kolb Learning Styles Questionnaire (www.burnbury.wa.gov.au) can now be downloaded free.

This completed questionnaire is designed to reveal the preferred learning style/s of adults.

Kolb states that over years we generally develop preferred learning habits that help us to benefit the most in a range of situations. He suggests that our learning styles fall within four main groups:

Activists enjoy practical tasks with very little theory. They learn best where they focus on the present with a lot of action and a central focus on team problem solving.

Theorists want handouts, something to take away and study. They learn best from activities where they are intellectually stretched and there is an obvious purpose to their activity.

Reflectors want time to research and discuss. They learn best from activities where there are opportunities to observe and they need time to think before having to act or contribute.

Pragmatists want short cuts and tips. They learn best from activities where there are opportunities to apply what they have learnt.

Understanding your learning style is an important part of being 'self aware' and self-confident.

I remember using this questionnaire (in a much fancier format) with a group of new teachers some time ago. At the end of our training session one of the participants came up to me, grinning from ear to ear. She said what she had just found out about herself was life changing. "I am a reflector", she said. "I have always felt guilty about generally staying quiet in staff meetings. It's not that I don't care, it's just that I need time to think carefully about things before I say my piece. Now I know this, I am going to go back to school and tell them I am normal, I'm a reflector and you need me!"

For some people, knowing their preferred learning style is interesting. For many people, because of the work they do, this 'self-knowledge' is essential.

Teaching for example! If you have no idea what your preferred learning style is then my guess is that, by default, you will teach in this style. Take me for example. I now tend to work across all four styles with a slight preference for Pragmatist. It wasn't always like this. As a young teacher my preferences were Activist/Pragmatist and my classroom was full of excitement. We built a massive model of the space shuttle and then a model of a castle that you could walk in and out of. How wonderfully busy and exciting but maybe not quite so much if you were a reflective youngster.

Of course, nothing is that simple but this is about awareness. Not just about yourself but about others too. How much better would it be, in a work situation, to organise a project group or even a team to ensure you had members with a blend of learning styles? Imagine the quality of decision-making in a group of Activists. Or at the other extreme would a group of Reflectors ever



make a decision? I am jesting but I do believe this is useful to know. And once you know about this you can never 'un-know' it!

To finish as I started, I came across this phrase a while ago and it resonates every time I read it:

we will meet our students where they are (as we always do) and we will move them forwards.

THAT IS OUR WORK, THAT IS WHAT WE DO.

Inspiring compassionate learners and change-makers.

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I do not want to see one more article about how 'behind' our kids will be when they start school again. We are teachers –

