Learning Style Preferences

It is important to first validate a student’s dominant means of learning if we hope to challenge them to work in a style in which they feel less competent.

-Mary Ellen McClanaghan
What are Learning Styles?

- A distinctive and habitual manner of acquiring knowledge, skills, or attitudes through study or experience
  - Neil Fleming, VARK Questionnaire

- An individual’s characteristic and preferred ways of gathering, interpreting, organizing, and thinking about information
  - Barbara Gross Davis, Tools for Teaching
Benefits of Understanding Learning Styles/Preferences

**Learner Perspective**
- Develop your natural approaches to learning
- Develop the capacity to learn in ways that may require more effort

**Instructor Perspective**
- Understand and account for differences you notice in your students
- Develop a range of teaching strategies to engage individual strengths
- Help your students expand their learning strategies

• McClanaghan, Mary Ellen. *A Strategy for Helping Students Learn How to Learn*. in Education 120:3 pp. 479-486.

What do you know about the process of learning?

- Imagine that a new academic achievement standard is set that all students must learn how to throw the perfect spiral football pass. Because you were too busy reading textbooks on the theory of teaching to pay much attention to sports when you were in college, you now must learn how to execute the pass before you can teach it to your students.

- What are the steps you might take as you learn this new skill?

- Please come up with some representation of your learning process.
What We Know About How We All Learn

- The healthy human brain contains a trillion brain cells, including 100 billion active nerve cells or neurons.
- What’s important are the connections between neurons. Young children are “pruning” as they go.
- Neural pathways are stabilized through repetition. Use it or lose it!
Edgar Dale’s “Cone of Experience”

- You may have heard of this as the “Cone of Learning”

Image retrieved 1/9/08 from:
http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/agexed/sae/ppt1/sld012.htm
Edgar Dale’s “Cone of Experience”

- The percentages are **BOGUS** (or at least, they do not belong to Dale)

David Kolb’s Learning Cycle

- The learning cycle is rooted in the work of Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget.
David Kolb’s Learning Cycle

- Your learning style is determined by where you prefer to enter the learning cycle
- **Note:** all of the stages of the cycle need to be completed, your style preference refers only to your preferred point of entrance
How do we determine learning style preferences?

- Informal
  - Class discussion/student reflection
  - Instructor observations
- Formal inventories
  - Kolb Learning Style Inventory (information processing)
  - Meyers-Briggs Type Inventory (personality and information processing)
  - Grasha-Reichman Student Learning Style Scales (social interaction and instructional preferences)
  - VARK (Information processing and instructional preferences)
Cautions When Using Formal Assessments

- Preferences are not the same as strengths
- It is imperative that the assessment be completed honestly and without empathy
- Participants should not see the assessment as a diagnostic tool, but a catalyst for reflection
- TEACHERS: your learning style may not reflect your teaching style