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What are your learning styles and strategies?

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Some days ago I read an article by two faculty of North Carolina State University. Their names were Richard M. Felder and Barbara A. Soloman. It was an article about learning styles and strategies. I thought it was pretty interesting, so I've decided to share it with you. Here we go!

You might have heard about individual learning styles before. This concept originated in the 1970s, when it was discovered that most people have particular methods to process information. Most individuals have a particular method of learning which seems to allow him or her to learn best.

The authors of the article I read talked about four different categories of learners, each consisting of a dichotomy. There are active and reflective learners, sensing and intuitive learners, visual and verbal learners, and sequential and global learners. Let's see what all this is about!

Are you an active or a reflective learner? Active learners retain information by discussing, applying, or explaining it to others. They enjoy working in groups, but they don't like taking notes and sitting through lectures. On the other hand, reflective learners like to think quietly about the information given before trying it out. They prefer working alone.

And what about being a sensing or an intuitive learner? Sensing learners like learning and memorizing facts, are patient with details, and like hands-on work. They enjoy solving problems by well-established methods (no surprises allowed!). They are practical and careful. Sensors don't like courses that don't have any connection with the real world.

Intuitors, on the other hand, like establishing relationships among facts. They enjoy discovering relationships and they like innovation. They are good at grasping new concepts, abstractions, and mathematical formulations. They don't like courses that involve repetition, memorization, and routine calculations.

According to the authors of the text, everybody is active sometimes and reflective sometimes, and everybody is sensing sometimes and intuitive sometimes. Your preference for one or the other category can be strong, moderate, or mild. They say that a balance of action and reflection is desirable, and that to be an effective learner and problem solver, you need to function both sensitively and intuitively.

Now, are you a visual or a verbal learner? Visual learners remember best when they see pictures, diagrams, flow charts, time lines, films, and demonstrations. They like listing points, enclosing them in boxes, and drawing lines to show connections. They enjoy colour-coding their notes. On the other hand, verbal learners get more out of words, of written and spoken explanations. They like writing summaries or outlines of course material in their own words.

The article says that most people are visual learners, although everyone learns more when information is presented both visually and verbally. Good learners can process information presented either visually or verbally.

And to end up with, are you a sequential or a global learner? Sequential learners understand little by little, in linear steps, each step following logically from the previous one. So, they follow logical paths when finding solutions. Although they may not understand all the material, they can do something with it, as the pieces they have grasped are connected logically. On the other hand, global learners learn in jumps, absorbing material randomly. They might solve a complex problem quickly once they have grasped the big picture, but they may have difficulties explaining how they did it or seeing the details.

But learning styles are not only important for learners. The article also recommended that teachers assess the learning styles of their students, and then adapt their methods to best fit each student's learning style. What do you think?