

# EL Gazette June 2013

## Find the right style

### Wayne Trotman on identifying learner preferences

#### **Spotlight on learning styles: teacher strategies for learner success**

Marjorie Rosenburg, Delta teacher development series;  
978-1-9050-8571-2

When it comes to identifying and teaching according to learner preferences, teachers tend to fall into two distinct camps. Firstly, those who think it's re-inventing the wheel; after all, learners picked up enough English before the VAK bandwagon rolled into town in the 1970s with its acronyms and analytical checklists. Secondly, those who believe it's quite possible and absolutely vital to locate styles and preferences and design activities to suit them, however odd they might appear to the uninitiated. I won't broadcast which camp I'm situated in – perhaps you can work that one out yourself – but it was with a good deal of curiosity that I began working my way through this intriguing title.

Getting to grips with the above-mentioned acronyms is almost a rite of passage on the way to comprehending resource books on learning styles, so here goes. This title is written around VAK: visual, auditory and kinaesthetic, which are what the author describes as 'sensory channels' or 'perceptual filters' used to analyse how learners learn. No, don't go away yet; there's more, much more. Learners are apparently global or analytic, or, like VAK, a combination. Since I last delved into this area kinaesthetic seems to have been divided into emotional and motoric. Add to the equation the 'mind organisation model', which helps identify why someone needs a particular method. Now you're up to speed with learning styles, we may proceed. If you think you need to know more about these matters, though, then part A certainly provides that in sufficient depth.

Who doesn't love a checklist? Chapter one consists solely of these, with which you and your learners can identify firstly where you stand on VAK, along with answer keys and relevant, typical learner strategies. For example, I worked out I'm a predominantly visual learner so, according to descriptors given, my strategies include using colours and highlighters (true). On the global-analytic continuum I'm inclined to be more of the latter, so recording my progress is important (also true). When it comes to mind organisation I notice I'm more of a power planner who works best to schedules (once more, true). So, now the teacher knows all that about me – assuming it's correct, they can proceed to the dozens of activities that make up chapter two with which to personalise my learning.

To give you a flavour of the activities in chapter two, here is one: Visual learners should be enthused by 'What have we changed?' (page 40), which involves learners removing themselves from the classroom while their friends alter the furniture; on returning they have to spot the changes. If they return, that is! Interestingly, just in case learners are tinged with bits of other styles, then, hey presto, they can also be accommodated since, to quote the spectrum style notes that appear at the end of each task, 'Seeing the room holistically is global' and 'Finding details is analytic'. Chapters three and four continue with activities apparently designed for all other learning styles, but each of which appear to take into account murky areas that overlap. So if, like me, you're pretty much a visual, analytical power planner, then come and join me on page 91 while I take advantage of 'Researching an excursion on the internet', though learners designated as 'flexible friends' and 'radical reformers' should also enjoy the task. Have fun!