Exploring My Learning Style

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One of the first days in sixth grade I can remember so clearly: head down, sketching away, listening to the teacher drone on about Social Studies. My hands were busy, my mind was engaged as I listened intently to every word. My hands translated the teachers words into beautiful colors, bold letters and graphic connotations of the brave new world Columbus stumbled upon. The bell rang and the teacher called me to her desk. She had a bone to pick with me about not paying attention. She claimed it was rude and unproductive that I did not look up as she was talking about our book assignment from the night before. “But I heard everyth…” I attempted to interject with a defense, my doodles reflected the key points she mentioned, just in pictures instead of words. She scolded me and threatened if I were to be caught doodling through class again, there would be a call to home to report my poor classroom behaviors. I was a good student and a call to home was the last thing I wanted. I always did very well at tests, I interacted in class when it was required, completed my homework on time and got good grades. But this year, it was going to be different.

Looking back on that day, I wish I would have been able to articulate, and further, have the teacher believe, that this was how I learned. I am a creative individual so it should be no surprise that my learning style is creative as well and these doodles were my notes; nevermind that it was not until the end of 8th grade that we finally found out that my eyesight was horrible and I could not see to read the board. My grades, once mostly A’s, now slumped into C’s as I was no longer able to doodle during class. For the first time that I could remember, I had anxiety over tests because I legitimately did not know the material like I expected I should. I wonder what that teacher’s response would have been if she could have read the results of my VAK Assessment that I took this week.

Almost complete with List A of Assessing Your Learning Style (Kolb, 1984), I have only checked 2 boxes. Beginning to feel a little worried that I was doing this wrong, I continued on, trying not to think too deeply into the statements. Flipping the page over and moving on to List B. Check, check, check, I tick off most of the items. “You are always drawing little pictures on the edges of your papers, or doodling on scratch paper” (Kolb, 1984), big, fat, check! Anxious, I move my focus to the bottom of the page, eager to learn something new about myself - “If list B is much higher, it indicates that you might be a visual learner” (Kolb, 1984). “Duh! Might be?” I uttered to myself, sarcastically.

As I worked through the Multiple Intelligences assessment, I scored highest in Spatial Reasoning (Armstrong, n.d.). This result also made a lot of sense to me, but I guess I would not have directly related this to my learning style. I have always excelled in math, and geometry was one of my favorite subjects - I always found myself mesmerized by a good Escher tessellation. In my career, I am methodical when I create a design for print or on the web, once being told that good design is measured design.

I have understood for many years that I am most effective in learning when I can do something myself, playing “follow the leader,” mimicking what I see. Talk to me until you are blue in your face, explaining elaborate workings or directions and I will understand *what* you are saying, but I will not comprehend *how* you are saying it should be done, and furthermore, I will not retain the process. To me, understanding my learning style, or in other words, how I comprehend most effectively, is a great asset, not only in education, but in the working world. Knowing my strength has allowed me the confidence to ask more precise questions to obtain the answers in a way I can be most efficient at my job.

Of the options available for these tests, the results I received were not a surprise to me in the least. From an early age, I drew everything I could see. My dad grew up in a family that constructed their own homes, so an engineering mind was passed down to me as he taught me the basics of drafting, measuring and manipulating numbers. I spent countless hours honing my artistic skills, focusing on photorealism. Spatial understanding, geometry and colors are a second language to me and my results only further confirm that I learn best when I can relate my learning to these properties in our world.

For many years after sixth grade, I struggled to find a substitution to my doodles. The further my education progressed, the faster the information came at me. I began to take quick notes in outline format to help me remember the relevance of subjects - creating my own handwritten typefaces or alternating colors as a way to highlight important points of a lecture or meeting. My notes were a tamer version of the fancy pages I once created, but it was enough to keep my hands busy and allow the knowledge to flow freely to my brain. Often times I wonder, if I had been allowed to continue doodling, if I would have ended up an illustrator bringing words to life instead of a web designer meticulously programming code.

References

Armstrong, T. (n.d.). *Multiple Intelligences For Adult Literacy and Education.* Retrieved from https://www.literacynet.org/mi/assessment/findyourstrengths.html.

Kolb, David (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.