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Determining your teaching style

David Wall

Introduction

This chapter is in two parts. We start with an account of why we set out to study teaching styles, how we carried out and analysed a questionnaire survey, the results we got and the implications from our work allowing us to construct a tool to enable teaching style to be determined. The second part contains the Staffordshire Evaluation of Teaching Styles (SETS) tool itself so that you can find out your own preferred learning style.

One of our initial aims was to help to cultivate flexibility in novice teachers. Then, help them to understand that they may have to work on improving their least preferred teaching styles in order to be a more flexible learner-centred teacher, and adapt their teaching style to their audience of learners.

Using factor analysis (which is explained in greater depth, with the description of our work, in the Appendix at the end of this book), we found that various professional groups clustered around different factors. This means that it is possible to detect differences in teaching styles that seem to vary with professional groups. This might reflect previous teaching in certain professional groups that moulds both the actions of teachers and also their expectations of what constitutes an effective teaching style.

This chapter includes a brief outline of each of the six teaching styles we have described. These will be expanded in further chapters, where we will give much more detailed descriptions and lots of helpful suggestions on how to be really effective in a preferred style, and how to improve a least preferred style.

Part I

Why we did the study

We wondered if people's teaching styles were distinct and could be measured. We know that there is much work in the educational literature on learning styles. This includes the work of Kolb with his four step learning cycle, using

the four roles of converger, diverger, assimilator and accommodator.¹ Honey and Mumford took this further as the four corresponding styles of activist, reflector, theorist and pragmatist.² Many of you will have already done this questionnaire on one or more occasions. In addition there are many other concepts in relation to learning styles, including the work of Pask on serialist and holist thinkers,³ the work of Fleming on the VARK styles (visual, aural, read/write and kinaesthetic)⁴ and the work on multiple intelligences by Gardner.⁵

However, this may not be the whole picture. The teacher, the organisations in which we work, society and others are key stakeholders in the business of teaching and learning. Bleakley has suggested that no single theory about learners has enough explanatory power to inform and explain the complex range of practices found in medicine.⁶ Bleakley held that the activity theory model⁷ with rules, stakeholders and division of labour may be a helpful model in which to conceptualise a medical education model, rather than just looking at the learners. The model, represented in Figure 2.1 shows how all six of the areas connect and are influenced by the other areas.

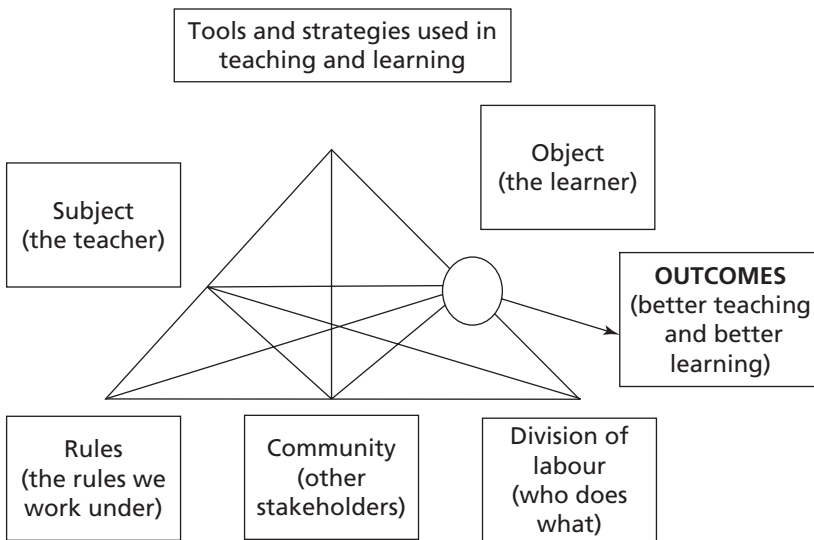


Figure 2.1 The activity theory model applied to medical education.

We wanted to find a way to identify and analyse teaching styles, and to help novice teachers develop their teaching strategies. We wished to help them find out about their preferred styles and other styles they were less comfortable with using. We wanted to help them think about dysfunctional situations where a mismatch of teaching and learning styles may be the problem, and to be able to analyse their actions and reactions using significant event analysis.

Our work enabled us to test out a large series of aspects of teaching that we had initially derived from a study of the educational literature. We analysed

them looking for patterns and associations. Our exploratory factor analysis (see Appendix page 117) showed six themes, which were clearly identifiable with different teaching styles. We developed these six themes into our six teaching styles using free text descriptors from the four key items that most strongly linked to each of the themes. This also turned out to have high face validity.

These six teaching styles are described in much greater detail in the following chapters in this book but short descriptions of each are as follows:

- 1 The all-round flexible and adaptable teacher.** This teacher can use lots of different skills, can teach both peers and juniors, and is very aware of the whole environment in relation to teaching and the learners
- 2 The student-centred, sensitive teacher.** This teacher is very student-centred, teaches in small groups, with emotions to the fore, using role play and drama, and is not comfortable doing straight presentations
- 3 The official curriculum teacher.** This teacher is very well prepared as a teacher, accredited, aware of and teaches to the formal curriculum and follows external targets for teaching
- 4 The straight facts no nonsense teacher.** This teacher likes to teach the clear facts, with straight talking, concentrating on specific skills, and much prefers not to be involved with multi-professional teaching and learning
- 5 The big conference teacher.** This teacher likes nothing better than to stand up in front of a big audience but not sitting in groups or one to one teaching
- 6 The one-off teacher.** This teacher likes to deliver small self contained bits of teaching, on a one to one basis, with no props to help and no follow up.

The outcome of our research was the development of a self evaluation questionnaire, which appears as part two of this chapter. There is also a scoring sheet. Together these allow teachers to derive a personal score for each style and ascertain their strongest preferences. You can visualise the combination of your teaching style as the Staffordshire Hexagon, see page 21.

As an illustration, we have plotted two examples of the Staffordshire Hexagon in Figures 2.2 and 2.3.

In Figure 2.2 the teacher shows a preference to be an all-round adaptable and flexible teacher, in contrast to the pattern of the teacher in Figure 2.3, where the pattern is quite different, with a predominance to be a big conference teacher, with higher scores for the one-off teacher as well as the straight facts no nonsense teacher.

Conclusions

This chapter, with more detail in the Appendix to the book, tells the story of how we developed the teaching styles project, from the original literature, the questionnaire to determine the preferred teaching styles, how we achieved six styles and their descriptors, and then how we developed the self evaluation

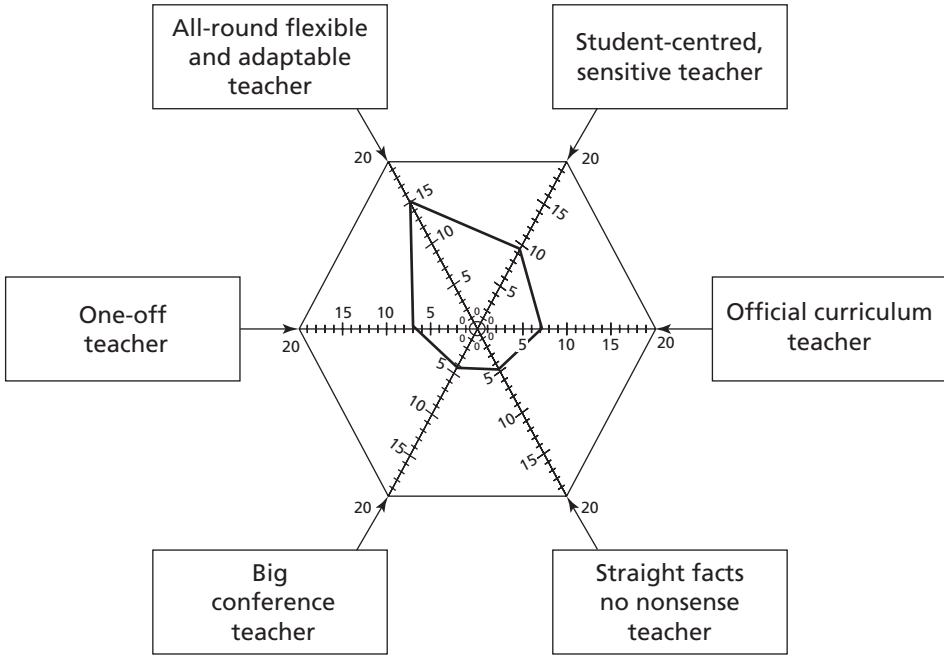


Figure 2.2 The Staffordshire Hexagon with one style pattern.

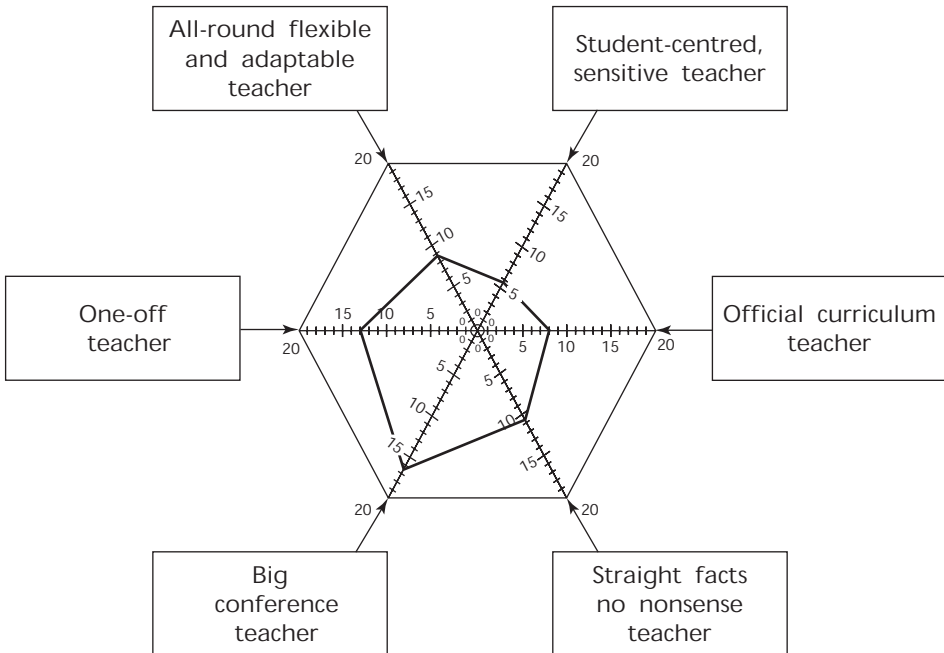


Figure 2.3 The Staffordshire Hexagon with another style pattern.

questionnaire to score these styles for individual teachers. Further work is in progress to develop and delineate these areas of teaching styles.

The following chapters describe each of the six teaching styles in much greater detail, including tips and advice on how to maximise your preferred teaching style, using educational concepts, maps and models and theoretical frameworks, and also how to improve your least preferred styles. Hopefully you will be able to use the self evaluation questionnaire to see what your own preferred styles are. We hope that as well as concentrating on your preferred styles, you will also take some time to try to develop your other, least preferred styles as well, to help you become more flexible in your approach to teaching.

Part 2

The self evaluation tool: the Staffordshire Evaluation of Teaching Styles (SETS). ©Reproduced with permission of Kay Mohanna, Ruth Chambers, David Wall, Staffordshire University 2007; r.chambers@staffs.ac.uk

This short questionnaire, the SETS, will help you to find out about your preferred teaching styles.

Please rate how much you agree with each of the statements below on the five point scale. Remember that 1 is not agreeing at all through to 5 which is very strongly agree. So the more you agree, the higher the score. Once you have scored yourself, then you will be able to map out your preferred teaching styles using the scoring grid that follows on page 19 and put these scores into the six teaching styles diagram (see Figure 2.4).

		not agree at all			strongly agree	
		←			→	
Q1	I vary my approach depending on my audience	1	2	3	4	5
Q2	I am less comfortable giving straight presentations than teaching through games and exercises	1	2	3	4	5
Q3	I prefer to teach through games to relay learning	1	2	3	4	5
Q4	I like having external targets to determine the course of learning	1	2	3	4	5
Q5	I prefer teaching sessions that are self-contained with no follow-up	1	2	3	4	5
Q6	Props often detract from a talk	1	2	3	4	5
Q7	I am comfortable addressing large audiences	1	2	3	4	5
Q8	Preparation for my teaching focuses on me and my role	1	2	3	4	5

Q9	I am usually standing up when I teach	1	2	3	4	5
Q10	The best teaching sessions convey straight facts in a clear way	1	2	3	4	5
Q11	I avoid being distracted from running sessions the way I plan to run them	1	2	3	4	5
Q12	I am happy teaching general skills	1	2	3	4	5
Q13	I put no value on being formally employed as a teacher	1	2	3	4	5
Q14	I dislike one to one teaching	1	2	3	4	5
Q15	I am consistent in delivery of a topic, whatever the audience	1	2	3	4	5
Q16	I like to give students opportunity to explore how to learn	1	2	3	4	5
Q17	I have developed my own style as a teacher	1	2	3	4	5
Q18	I prefer one to one teaching	1	2	3	4	5
Q19	Eliciting emotions through role play or drama is a valuable aspect of teaching	1	2	3	4	5
Q20	I am comfortable using humour in my teaching	1	2	3	4	5
Q21	I rarely sit down when with students	1	2	3	4	5
Q22	It is important to me that my teaching is accredited by an official body	1	2	3	4	5
Q23	I am uncomfortable when I have multi-professional groups of learners to teach	1	2	3	4	5
Q24	I am at my best when organising my teaching to fit an external curriculum or organisational structure	1	2	3	4	5

The Scoring Grid for the SETS Tool

Once you have filled in your own scores for all of the 24 questions on the SETS questionnaire, you will need to transfer the score for each question into the six teaching styles on page 20. The questions on the SETS have been randomly allocated on the questionnaire, so it is important that you allocate the marks correctly to each teaching style.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Style One</i>	<i>Style Two</i>	<i>Style Three</i>	<i>Style Four</i>	<i>Style Five</i>	<i>Style Six</i>
Q1	Q1 =					
Q2		Q2 =				
Q3		Q3 =				
Q4			Q4 =			
Q5						Q5 =
Q6						Q6 =
Q7					Q7 =	
Q8			Q8 =			
Q9					Q9 =	
Q10				Q10 =		
Q11				Q11 =		
Q12	Q12 =					
Q13						Q13 =
Q14					Q14 =	
Q15				Q15 =		
Q16		Q16 =				
Q17	Q17 =					
Q18						Q18 =
Q19		Q19 =				
Q20	Q20 =					
Q21					Q21 =	
Q22			Q22 =			
Q23				Q23 =		
Q24			Q24 =			
TOTALS						

Please fill in your score for each of the questions in the correct boxes on page 19, then add the columns up to obtain your score for each of the six teaching styles (out of a maximum of 20 marks).

Next, please fill in your scores obtained from the chart totals above, into the six boxes against each of the teaching styles below.

Style One: The all-round flexible and adaptable teacher

This teacher can use lots of different skills, can teach both peers and juniors, and is very aware of the whole environment both in teaching and of the learners.

Style Two: The student-centred, sensitive teacher

This teacher is very student-centred, teaches in small groups, with emotions to the fore, using role play and drama, and is not comfortable doing straight presentations.

Style Three: The official curriculum teacher

This teacher is very well prepared as a teacher, accredited, is very aware of and teaches to the formal curriculum and follows external targets for teaching.

Style Four: The straight facts no nonsense teacher

This teacher likes to teach the clear facts, with straight talking, concentrating on specific skills, and much prefers not to be involved with multi-disciplinary teaching and learning.

Style Five: The big conference teacher

This teacher likes nothing better than to stand up in front of a big audience. This teacher does not like sitting in groups or one to one teaching.

Style Six: The one-off teacher

This teacher likes to deliver small self-contained bits of teaching, on a one to one basis, with no props to help and no follow up.

So now you have the scores out of 20 for your own self evaluation of your preferred teaching styles. Now please go on to Figure 2.4, the Staffordshire Hexagon: a diagrammatic representation of your preferred teaching styles.

Please take the marks from the six boxes and put a cross along each of the six axes to represent your score in each of the six teaching styles. You may wish to join up the crosses to produce a shape of your own combination of styles.

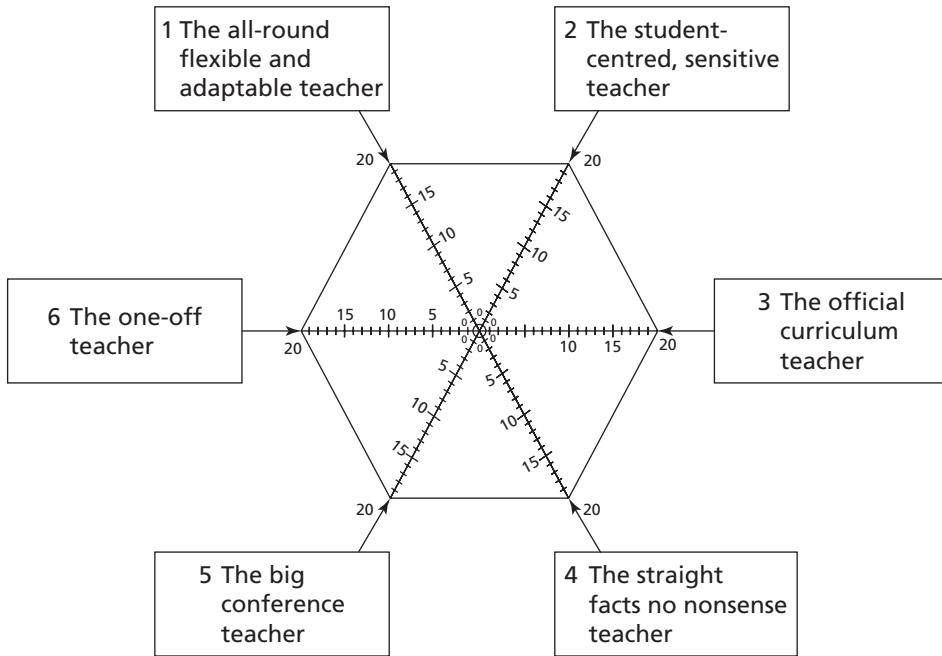


Figure 2.4 The Staffordshire Hexagon.

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