

## Who am I? How do I learn?

VK

The ILO for this journal:

- 1. Locate yourself in your discipline, your department, your University and wide national and international contexts.**
- 2. Explore the relationship between research, scholarship, related professional activities and teaching and learning as relevant to your own teaching practice.**

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Answering the question of “Who am I?” in a 500 word journal seems like quite a challenging philosophical problem so I will most certainly omit certain details.

I have recently discovered that I fall into a category of individuals called “third culture kids” [5]. This is linked to the fact that I spent my childhood in a variety of countries and subsequently cultures (different to my parents’). I always consider myself extremely lucky to have had such an upbringing which exposed me to a variety of teaching styles, cultures and philosophies. For example I experienced corporal punishment. This is something that most people of my generation from the United Kingdom would not have experienced. On a less extreme note I did learn in a variety of different situations which I think is beneficial. Obviously this could also be understood to have a negative affect as I did not go through a homogeneous education system.

In an education context I would hope that the answer to the “Who am I?” question is that I’m an open minded individual eager to try and learn different styles of learning and teaching. This is of course based on a subjective self assessment and so I will now discuss results from a variety of tests that further enable me to identify the sort of learner and teacher that I am. I completely understand that these tests come with a health warning and should not be taken at face value. I anticipated to look at all test scores with a critical mindset (in all honesty I thought they wouldn’t mean much at all but was pleasantly surprised when they seemed to either confirm certain preconception about myself I had and or when I thought about them a bit more I realised that there was perhaps something in them).

The first set of results is related to the Rezler test [6]. This test aims to reflect the environment in which I as a student like to learn. My scores reflect that I am much more “student structured” than “teacher structured”. I very much think this confirms what I would have suggested prior to the test. I’ve always liked to think of a teacher as someone who opens doors but as myself as the person going through them. This relates well to another test which aims to indicate my “Academic Locus of Control” [1]. This I understand to imply where I place responsibility for failure in learning. I score very highly on the “Internal” locus implying that I feel that I take responsibility for my learning. I again think that this seems to match what I recall from my student days. I’ve always blamed myself if I didn’t get a high enough score on an exam and never enjoyed getting into conversations with others blaming a Lecturer for not being good

enough. For example one of my favorite modules was one in which the Lecturer was perhaps not the best at conveying information and I had to go learn a lot by myself. The achievement of success felt so much better and I also believe to have learnt a lot more on that module than on any other. I suppose that taking this to the extreme I might ask: "why do I need a teacher?". I'm happy enough to answer that question immediately by referring to my earlier analogy: a teacher opens a door that a student must go through. I can perhaps also expand on that: sometimes the light goes out and the teacher needs to turn it back on and/or yell directions from the doorway.

Another test we undertook was the Assist test [8]. This test identifies learning styles and I seem to have a strategic style of learning (there seemed to have been an error with my scores and no information was given as to my proficiency for "depth" learning). This strategic style apparently points towards an "Intention to excel". This does seem to fit my personality, I would always tell my peers that unless they could guarantee 100% on an exam they should not leave early. I never left an exam early.

The final two tests are meant to be assessments on how I view teachers [2,9]. These all seem to confirm prior remarks relating to the fact that I seem to have an internal locus of control. A few interesting things appear however. I score quite highly as a motivator and carer. When I first read that my initial thoughts were simply that this test was obviously wrong as I don't have a reputation for "putting my arm around someones shoulder". Having thought a bit more I think it makes sense as I do care about the success and learning of students.

Finally it would seem that my trainer type is that of a Coach and a Director. Interestingly this places me on the Active Experimentation and Reflective Observation phases of the Kolb cycle. In particular to mathematics [3] this in turn implies that I am an Analyzer and a Synthesizer. This apparently says that I desire logical explanations and algorithms and am also capable of creating new individual ideas. This doesn't seem to alien but does imply that I am neither an Allegorizer or an Integrator which are students who like to consider new ideas by reformulating and/or comparing to known ones.

Another thing worth considering is the fact that I am a very visual learner. For example in the class my mentor reviewed me in I was using graphical software packages to show visualisations of theorems and I also used a fair bit of video. For mathematics I think this places me well as more often than not mathematics is taught in a rather "dry" manner and without much visualisation. In a sense for mathematics I think that it's "easy"/"more natural" to cater to none visual learners (you have to write mathematics and you have to do mathematics by design). So in a sense my tendency for "visual" teaching is probably a good thing as I will "by design" be anchored by the non visual aspects of mathematics (it is how I was taught). I also really enjoy role games and things like that which once again are not "classic" teaching methods so I think that is a good thing. Having said that another thing I suppose I need to consider is the fact that students of mathematics will have been taught in a classic way for a long time so perhaps they have "adapted their learning styles". For the course I'm currently teaching I have for two weeks now run little lab sessions that enable the students to further pursue ideas with a computer package. I guess this caters to the "Synthesizers" and visual learners. At the end of one of the

sessions I asked the students: "What do you want to do next week - another lab session or a classic pen and paper exercise session?". I was surprised by the answer: about 70% of the students wanted the classic pen and paper session. I asked them if they did not find the labs useful but then about 95% all said "no I found the lab sessions very useful". I suggested to the students that we'd have a lab session (i.e. everyone would be physically in the lab) but it would not be compulsory to do the lab sheet in other words that the students could choose to just do pen and paper exercises (the same tutors who would help with the computer package, could help with the pen and paper stuff). Everyone seems quite happy with that suggestion. On reflection I think it's a very good idea as firstly it will cater to both student types. Secondly the "point" of using the computer package is to help them learn so by perhaps placing them in front of the tool they might use it "because they need it" and not "because I've told them to use it". This is a basic "concrete" example of what I'll be doing in my lessons but I completely agree that in general I must not assume that everyone learns (or should learn) like I do. Paul (my mentor) read an earlier draft of this journal and commented that he felt very similar, he wondered if this was perhaps true of most mathematics lecturers. I suppose in a way it would be, we were mostly "good students" who "got it" so I think we probably often assume that others should "get it". Perhaps that's why mathematics is often taught in a dry manner...

On reflection all of the above seems to confirm that I am an individual learner, perhaps this is further confirmed by my relatively stochastic upbringing where it is conceivable to imagine that a big reliance on a teacher would have resulted in failure as teachers were constantly changing as I moved? In my next journal I will look into the ramification of being a student centred teacher as far as lesson planning is concerned following up some of the ideas presented in [7].

As an individual learner I must make sure that I am not an individual teacher. I look forward to further looking into learning styles and teaching techniques that will ensure that I don't leave every student at the doorway. Perhaps some will need me to walk through the door with them.

**Word Count:1568**

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