Learning Styles: Literature Review

In scholarly literature, there is an abundance of written material about learning styles (Pashler et al, 2008). Coffield et al. (2004) outlined 71 different learning styles, some more popular than others. The principle behind learning styles is that individuals can be divided into one or more styles of learning (ie. Auditory, converger, theorist) and that individuals learn best when they are matched to their learning style (Dekker et al., 2012). One of the favoured learning styles is developed in the 1920s VAK model which divides individuals into visual, auditory and kinesthetic learners (Gholami & Bagheri, 2013). VAK model advocates that visual learners absorb knowledge via visual stimulation, auditory learners learn best via listening and discussion and kinesthetic learners absorb information via physical interaction with their environment (Sousa, 2006). Kolb (1984) believed that individuals' ability to learn is determined by that person's genes and their personal life experiences. Based on that believe Kolb argued that there are four explicit learning styles: diverging, assimilating, converging and accommodating. Honey and Mumford build upon Kolb's model and outlined their four unique learning styles which are: activist, theorist, pragmatist and reflector. Honey and Mumford stipulated that every individual is naturally attracted to one preferred learning style. In order to maximise the learning potential, an individual should understand their learning style and embrace it by exploring every opportunity to learn (Honey & Mumford, 1986).

Despite the wide popularity of learning styles, there is no factual evidence that will support its validity (Pashler et al., (2008); Rohrer & Pashler, (2012)). Due to the absence of empirical evidence, many theorists have dismissed learning styles as fiction (Geake, (2008); Riener & Willingham, (2010); Pasquinelli, (2012); Rato et al., (2013); Howard-Jones, (2014)). Furthermore, many writers dispute that learning styles theory can be harmful to learners because segregating individuals according to their presumed learning style may prevent them from learning subjects that don't match their apparent learning style, or learners can become overconfident in subjects that are matched with their learning style (Pashler et al., (2008); Riener & Willingham, (2010); Dekker et al., (2012); Rohrer & Pashler, (2012); Dandy & Bendersky, (2014); Willingham et al., (2015)).

To test my own learning style, I have completed VAK and Honey & Mumford questionnaires in a classroom setting. According to VAK, I am a mainly visual learner with auditory learning tendencies (Figure 1). Honey & Mumford questionnaire classified me almost equally as a reflector, theorist and pragmatist (Figure 2). Concluding from my own results I agree with writers that every individual learn in a different way however I am more inclined to believe that learners preferred learning style depends on what subject their being thought, what material is being used and how it is delivered (Hara, 2009). Above all, I wholeheartedly agree with Kang (2016) that spaced repetition combined with the use of tests and quizzes is the most effective method of learning.