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## Curriculum design in online open education, does it take into account learning styles and contribute to inclusion

### Student Dissertation

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## MON: Curriculum design in online open education, does it take into account learning styles and contribute to inclusion (John Sumpter)

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[Dr Simon Ball](#)

2 February 2014

Methods of access to learning have been increasing in the past few years, but the content that is being provided by these methods has changed little in format and context during this time (citations needed to back up this statement). In this conference session, I hope to open a debate, and ask if learning styles are being considered in the new wave of online delivery methods, and ask what benefits can be made by ensuring online learning is inclusive.

During my conference presentation, I intend to utilise a number of web-based tools. The main presentation delivery format will be Prezi, with pre and post conference tweets via Twitter.

Key elements of my session include;

Curriculum Design: The practice of educational design

Open Education: A collective term to describe practices that broaden access to the learning

Learning Styles: An individual's natural or habitual pattern of acquiring and processing information

Delivery Methods: Access to learning by different methods (Distance, Blended, Face to Face)

In addition to my own research I have utilised three sources of research into the subject, to guide and inform the debate. This research covers the three main learning delivery methods (Distance, Blended, Face to Face) and looks at different learning style scenarios and individually assesses the impact of learning styles in each. The sources that inform my research are;

'The Influence of Learning Style Preferences on Student Success in Online Versus Face-to-Face Environments'. Published in the American Journal of Distance Education in 2002.

'A Study of Student's Perceptions in a blended learning environment based on different learning styles'. Published in the Journal of Educational Technology & Society in 2008.

'The impact of learning styles on student achievement in a web-based versus an equivalent face-to-face course'. Published in the College Student Journal, 2010, by Buket and Meryem.

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OU H818 'The Networked Practitioner' online conference 2014

## Implications & Lessons

I will look at the implications raised from the combined research, and discuss how these can inform future best practice advice, helping to ensure learning experiences are inclusive and informed by research.

### Get Involved!

You can get involved in the discussion before the conference session. Simply answer a few simple questions about your learning style online. Visit the following URL

<http://goo.gl/EPN3Wp>

And don't forget to follow the debate on Twitter #h818inclusivelearning where the debate will continue after the event and provide access to best practice resources developed.

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**Discussion (7)**

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[Debbie Grieve](#)

11:47am 11 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Hi John,

It was helpful to get an idea as to how you had approached your ppt when we practised last week. Given that I am a course designer and online teacher, I am interested to learn more about what you have discovered and how it might inform my own practice.

Good luck!

Deb

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[Ian Hoffman](#)

1:30pm 18 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Hi John

Was interested in your presentation last night given that there has been some attention over the last few years to debunking learning styles or more accurately to trying to teach to them. Was wondering what your take is on that?



[Dr Simon Ball](#)

9:13pm 18 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Following the live presentations, we asked each speaker to respond to questions posed by audience members. In the short time available, it was not possible to put all of the questions submitted to the speaker for a response. We asked all speakers if they would respond to the unanswered questions here on Cloudworks. Here are all of the questions asked during the session:

- ▶ What was the sample size for the survey?
- ▶ The experience of learning online has made me appreciate some live interaction a bit more
- ▶ Or should learning design help students to learn well through a variety of modes?
- ▶ I wonder, if someone who believes they are a visual learner is challenged and therefore, as a result of the effort required, learns more, not less from say being given an auditory approach say?
- ▶ Am doing a MOOC with a local f2f study group - best MOOC experience so far
- ▶ I wonder whether it is feasible to design for all learning styles - students may well need compromise on this at some level Including us, of course!
- ▶ don't we use different approaches and styles in different contexts (just like the 'voice' we use in different contexts?)
- ▶ Is it really possible to make a course which accounts for all learner types, or do you end up with a course where only 1/3 of it is of interest to any one student.
- ▶ Try a history MA, 1000 pages a week to read, over 2 years, a lot of essays. No room for the kinesthetic and visual is an indulgence. Law probably the same. Whereas a first year medic is dissecting a cadavre.
- ▶ Do you think the variety is due to adaptation of learning - especially in the H818 group?
- ▶ Most of text-based material/courses more formal - so implications there if different, blended learning - including these sessions
- ▶ Do you think the TGF replaces face-to-face interaction?



[John Sumpter](#)

8:11pm 19 February 2014 (Edited 8:15pm 19 February 2014) [Permalink](#)

Hi Ian,

Thank you for your comment.

Yes, as you say there has been a lot of debunking of learning styles in the last few years, but I think it's very interesting that from a quick and simple survey during my presentation, it was clear that not everyone is the same, and they selected a number of different learning style preferences. This alone shows that people feel they have different styles, so, why should these different styles be ignored?

I do feel that some of the issue is due to the pressure for teachers to move to online delivery, and the initial extra pressure this gives the teacher, if you add to the mix trying to cater for different styles of learning as well.....So it's an easy one to just ignore, and go with the normal approach. A bit cynical, but I do feel that's a part of it.

Do you agree? Or am I being too simplistic. Your thoughts very welcome.

Well done with your presentation by the way, very good.

Regards

John



[John Sumpter](#)

8:54pm 19 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Hi All,

Below are my responses to questions posted during my presentation.

**What was the sample size for the survey?**

7

**The experience of learning online has made me appreciate some live interaction a bit more**

Yes, I agree it can. You have a different approach / view of f2f sessions.

**Or should learning design help students to learn well through a variety of modes?**

I feel they should, we are all different and learn in different ways, so why should there be just one or two ways of delivering content and learning. I appreciate not every style can be catered for, but I hope to learn lessons / best practice to provide advice and guidance to learning developers, to ensure styles are catered for as much as possible.

**I wonder, if someone who believes they are a visual learner is challenged and therefore, as a result of the effort required, learns more, not less from say being given an auditory approach say?**

From my research I have found that learners who believe they have a different learning style do feel more challenged, and so do have to try harder to learn a subject that others find easy. Would a visual learner learn more or less from an audio lesson is a question I would like to answer.

**Am doing a MOOC with a local f2f study group - best MOOC experience so far**

Very interesting. Most people would immediately perceive a MOOC to have people far to dispersed to be able to engage in a f2f study group. But a great idea, and i would suggest making the experience (as you have said) more rewarding.

**I wonder whether it is feasible to design for all learning styles - students may well need compromise on this at some level Including us, of course!**

Agreed. You can't cater for all, but more options / flexibility is needed I believe. Maybe more access to coping strategies is needed, thus helping some learners adapt to 'standard' ways of learning?

**don't we use different approaches and styles in different contexts (just like the 'voice' we use in different contexts?)**

Absolutely, what we may say to an audience maybe slightly different from what we say to one person.

**Is it really possible to make a course which accounts for all learner types, or do you end up with a course where only 1/3 of it is of interest to any one student.**

No, its not possible to make a course that fits all learners, but we can make a course that is more compatible / flexible for 'other' learners, and not just one type. As we make more and more online learning available, we are accessing more and more learners, and with a wide range of styles. Why should we be developing for just one style?

**Try a history MA, 1000 pages a week to read, over 2 years, a lot of essays. No rooms for the kineasthetic and visual is an indulgence. Law probably the same. Whereas a first year medic is dissecting a cadavre.**

Again, I agree, it's not possible, and very hard in some cases. But I refer to my answer above.

**Do you think the variety is udue to adaptation of learning - especially in the H818 group?**

Yes, for some learning online is a new and very different concept and environment. These newbees will adapt a style / behaviour of learning to complete the task of leaning.

**Most of text-based material/courses more formal - so implications there if different, blended learning - including these sessions**

Pass..as i don't fully understand the question.

**Do you think the TGF replaces face -to - face interaction?**

No. Personally I feel the blended methods is best, as it get the best of both online and face to face experiences. TGF's do have advantages e.g those that don't like to speak out in a f2f class may be more willing to put their point across in a TGF.

Regards

John



[Ian Hoffman](#)

10:26am 20 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Hi John

Agree completely that learners (especially adult learners) feel they have a preferred style for learning and know that I have my own strong preferences :-). Think the issue is however that research seems to be saying that there is little or no benefit to be had in trying to teach to different learning style preferences. For online teaching, my feeling is that rather than a focus on designing learning for different learning preferences, that tried and tested models of learning online are developed – for example (not that I'm endorsing!) Salmon's 5 stage model. I would hope that effective online models would – like good f2f teaching – incorporate a variety of approaches and methods so that there is learner inclusion rather than exclusion by preference. Great to have this discussion on the back of your presentation. Thanks John.



[John Sumpter](#)

8:02pm 20 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Hi Ian,

Interestingly the existing learning models you relate to often do not highlight or take into account learning styles in any real depth. Not that I'm saying that what they do is not right, but knowing that many have been created before MOOC's (for example) were ever even created, it seems only fair these model will not consider a wider audience.

Much to consider here, that's for sure.

Thanks for your comments.

John

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