**LEARNING STYLES**

The way we learn things in general and the way we attack a problem is related to an area between personality and cognition; this link is referred to as cognitive style When cognitive styles are specifically related to an educational context, they are referred to as learning styles.

Learning styles might be thought of as **'cognitive, affective, and physiological traits that are relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment"** (Keefe, 1979, p. 4). Or more simply, Skehan (1991, p. 288) defined learning style as **"a general predisposition, voluntary or not, toward processing information in a particular way."**

Learning styles mediate between emotion and cognition, as you will soon discover. For example, a reflective style invariably grows out of a reflective personality or a reflective mood. An impulsive style, on the other hand, usually arises out of an impulsive emotional state. People's styles are determined by the way they internalize their total environment, and since that internalization process is not strictly cognitive, we find that physical, affective, and cognitive domains merge in learning styles.

Research in learning styles has started as early as 1968 and 1978 by Ausubel and Hill. So if we were to enumerate all the styles listed by researchers from that time, we we’ll come up with a long list. Therefore, we will be content with five styles for their relevance for language teaching.

**Field Independence**

Field independence is related to the ability to perceive a particular, relevant item or factor in a "field" of distracting items. In general psychological terms the field may be perceptual, or it may be more abstract and refer to a set of thoughts, ideas, or feelings from which your task is to perceive specific relevant subsets.

Field dependence is, conversely, the tendency to be "dependent" on the total field so that the parts embedded within the field are not easily perceived, although that total field is perceived more clearly as a unified whole. Field dependence is synonymous with field sensitivity, a term that may carry a more positive connotation. A field independent (FI) style enables you to distinguish parts from a whole, to concentrate on something (like reading a book in a noisy train station), or to analyze separate variables without the contamination of neighboring variables

On the other hand, too much Fl may result in cognitive "tunnel vision": you see only the parts and not their relationship to the whole. "You can't see the forest for the trees," as the saying goes. Seen in this light, development of a field dependent (FD) style has positive effects: you perceive the whole picture, the larger view, the general configuration of a problem or idea or event.

It is clear, then, that both FI and FD are necessary for most of the cognitive and affective problems we face.

It has been found in Western culture that males tend to be more FI, and that Fl is related to one of the three main factors traditionally used to define intelligence (the analytical factor), but not to the other two factors (verbal comprehension and attention concentration).

The extent of the development of a FID style as children mature is a factor of the type of society and home in which the child is raised. Authoritarian or agrarian societies, which are usually highly socialized and utilize strict education practices, tend to produce more FD Styles and Strategies. A democratic, industrialized, competitive society with freer raising norms tends to produce more Fl persons.

Affectively, persons who are more predominantly Fl tend to be generally more independent, competitive, and self-confident. FD persons tend to be more socialized, to derive their self identity from persons around them, and are usually more empathic and perceptive of the feelings and thoughts of others.

**How does all this relate to second language learning?** Two conflicting hypotheses have emerged. First, we could conclude that FI is closely related to classroom learning that involves analysis, attention to details, and mastering of exercises, drills, and other focused activities. FI performed better in deductive lessons, while those with FD styles were more successful with inductive lesson designs.

The second of the conflicting hypotheses proposes that a FD style will, by virtue of its association with empathy, social outreach, and perception of other people, yield successful learning of the communicative aspects of a second language. While no one denies the plausibility of this second hypothesis, little empirical evidence has been gathered to support it.

**Teaching Implications**: If the FID continuum is to be useful, perhaps classroom language teachers are better served by following their intuition concerning students' FID and acting to raise students' awareness of their styles and their strengths and weaknesses.

( Adapted from H,D. Brown (2000) Principles of Language Learning and Teaching)