

# Facilitating Professional Learning

*Change takes root when grown from local seeds planted by those who know the soil, the sky and the prevailing winds.*

Jamie McKenzie (1999)

## Understanding adult learners

Working with adults can be quite different to working with children. To ensure the success of professional learning activities, keep in mind the principles of adult learning as outlined in the following six points.

### Adults prefer learning situations which:

Are practical and problem centred, so...

- ❖ Give overviews, summaries, examples, and use stories
- ❖ Plan for direct application of the new information
- ❖ Include collaborative, problem-solving activities
- ❖ Anticipate problems applying the new ideas, offer suggested uses
- ❖ Guard against becoming too theoretical.



Promote their positive self esteem, so...

- ❖ Provide low-risk activities in small group settings
- ❖ Plan for building success in stages
- ❖ Help them become more effective and competent
- ❖ Remember readiness to learn depends on self-esteem.

Integrate new ideas with existing knowledge, so...

- ❖ Help them recall what they already know
- ❖ Share your agenda and assumptions and ask for input on them
- ❖ Ask what they would like to know about the topic
- ❖ Build in options within your plan so you can easily shift if needed
- ❖ Suggest follow up ideas and next steps for after the session
- ❖ Match the degree of choice to their level of development.



Show respect for the individual learner, so...

- ❖ Provide for their needs through breaks, snacks, coffee, comfort
- ❖ Provide a quality, well organised experience that uses time effectively
- ❖ Avoid jargon and don't 'talk down' to participants
- ❖ Validate and affirm their knowledge, contributions and successes
- ❖ Ask for feedback on your work or ideas, provide input opportunities
- ❖ Watch your choice of words to avoid negative perceptions.

Capitalise on their experience, so...

- ❖ Don't ignore what they know, it's a resource for you
- ❖ Plan alternate activities so you can adjust to fit their experience level
- ❖ Create activities that use their experience and knowledge
- ❖ Listen before, during and after the event
- ❖ Provide for the possibility of a need to unlearn old habits.



1. Allow choice and self-direction, so...

- ❖ Build your plans around their needs
- ❖ Share your agenda and assumptions and ask for input on them
- ❖ Ask what they know about the topic
- ❖ Ask what they would like to know about the topic
- ❖ Build in options within your plan so you can easily shift if needed
- ❖ Suggest follow up ideas and next steps for after the session
- ❖ Match the degree of choice to their level of development.



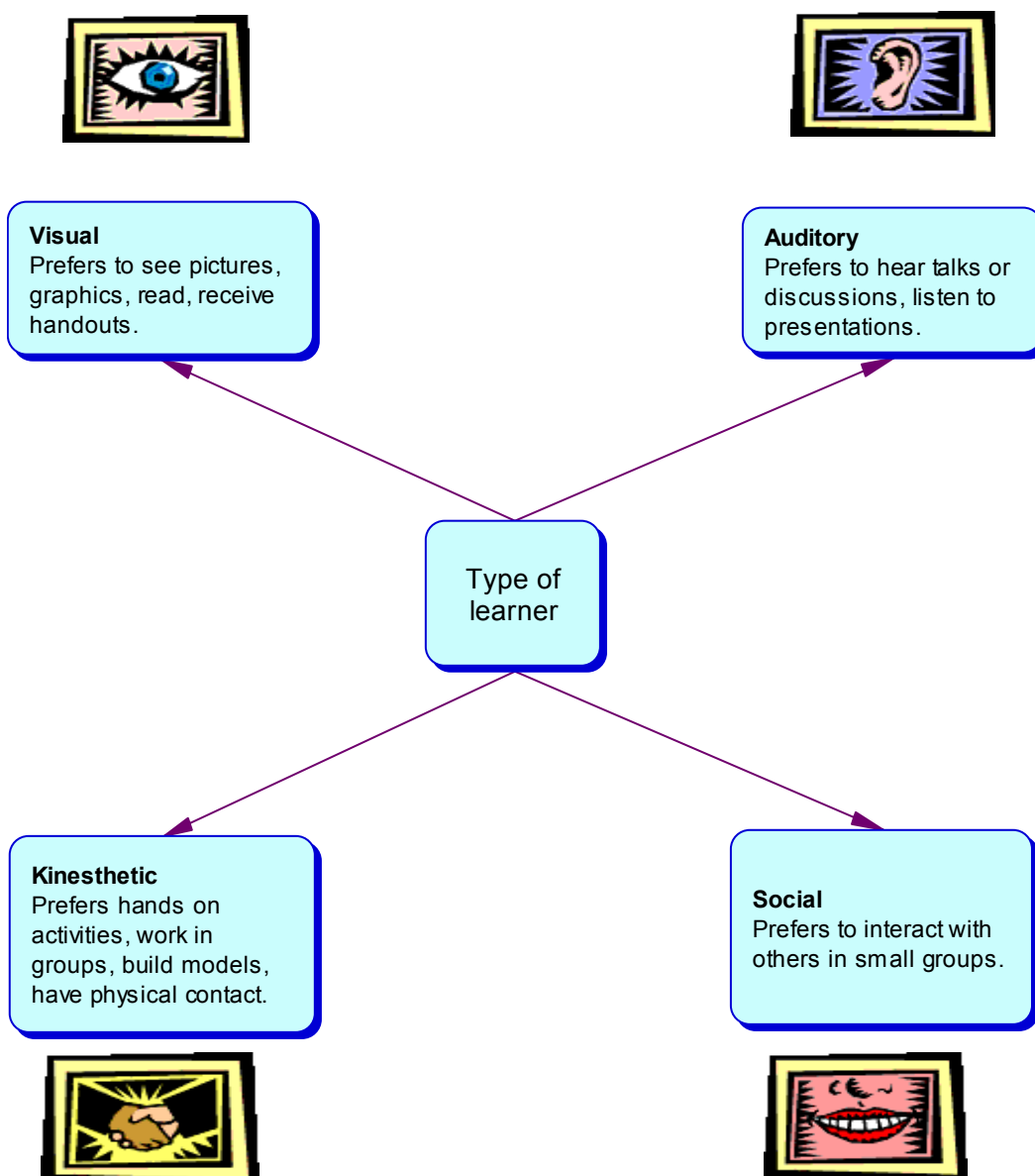
Adapted from Sweeney, B. Best Practice Resources (no date)  
<http://www.teachermentors.com/index.html>

## Learning styles and multiple intelligences

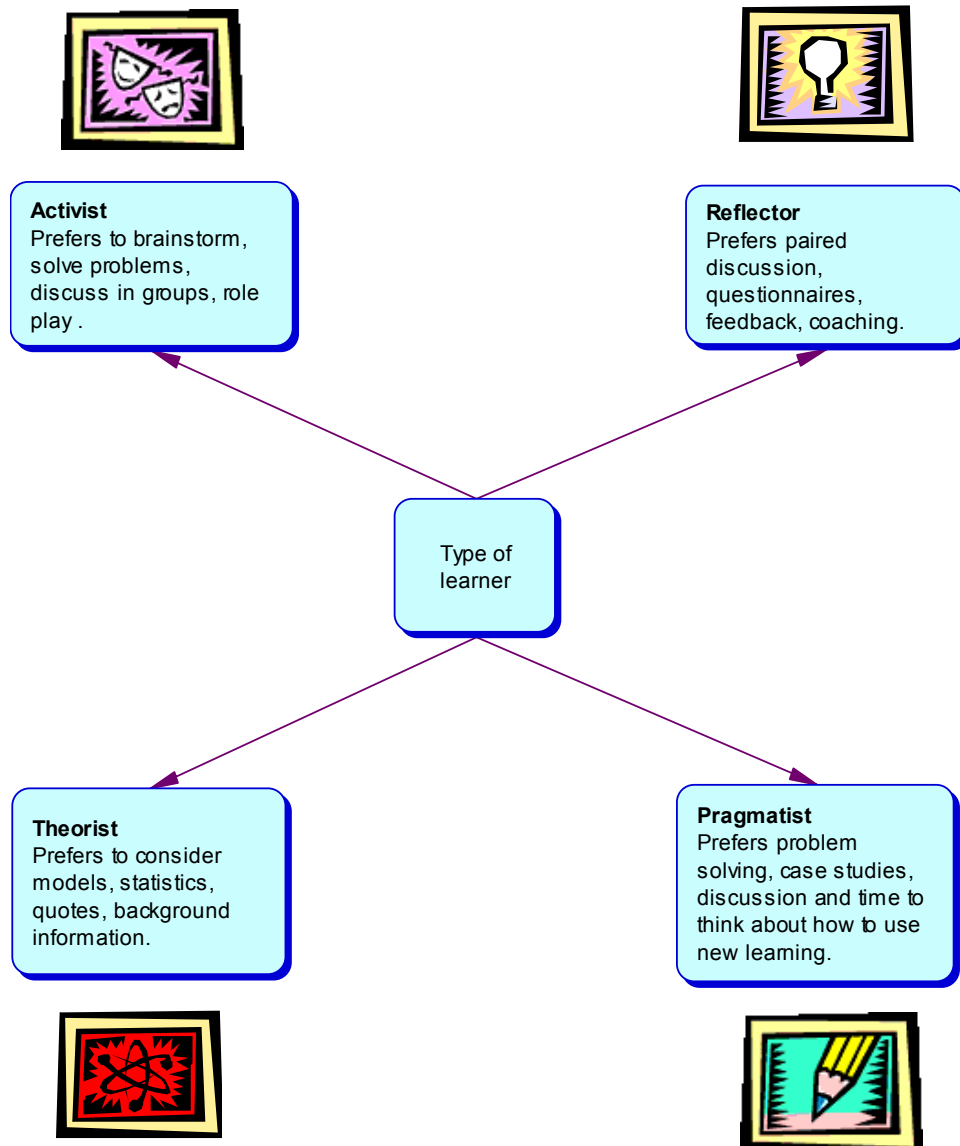
Much has been written about learning styles and multiple intelligences and the implications for the classroom. There are also implications for working with adult learners. When facilitating professional learning, especially with a large group, be aware that not all participants learn in the same way.

Learning styles are described in several different ways.

One model refers to visual, auditory, kinaesthetic and social learners:



A second model describes learners as activists, reflectors, theorists and pragmatists:



### The 4-Mat System

Bernice McCarthy (2001), describes four types of learners:

**Type 1 Learners** – take in newness with their senses and feelings and process reflectively.  
Favourite question: **Why?**


**Type 2 Learners** – take in newness with their intellect and process reflectively.  
Favourite question: **What?**

**Type 3 Learners** – take in newness with their intellect and process actively.  
Favourite question: **How?**

**Type 4 Learners** – take in newness with their senses/feelings and process actively.  
Favourite question: **If?**

## Gardner's Multiple Intelligence types – implications for learning

A person with this type of intelligence...	Learns best by...
<b>Musical intelligence</b>	rhythm, melody and music.
<b>Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence</b>	touching, moving, interacting with space and processing knowledge through bodily sensations.
<b>Logical-Mathematical intelligence</b>	categorising, classifying and working with abstract patterns/relationships.
<b>Linguistic intelligence</b>	saying, hearing and seeing words.
<b>Spatial intelligence</b>	visualising, dreaming, using the mind's eye and working with colours/pictures.
<b>Interpersonal intelligence</b>	sharing, comparing, relating, cooperating and interviewing.
<b>Intrapersonal intelligence</b>	working alone, individualised projects, self-paced instruction and having own space.
<b>Naturalist intelligence</b>	interacting with the natural environment, sorting things and placing them in hierarchies, exploring environmental issues.

	<p><b>Learning Styles</b> an online learning style self assessment  <a href="http://www.engr.ncsu.edu/learningstyles/ilsweb.html">http://www.engr.ncsu.edu/learningstyles/ilsweb.html</a></p> <p><b>The 4-Mat System</b> explores 4 types of learners  <a href="http://www.aboutlearning.com/4mat_system.htm">http://www.aboutlearning.com/4mat_system.htm</a></p> <p><b>Funderstanding</b> theories about learning, curriculum, emotional intelligence and more can be found here  <a href="http://www.funderstanding.com/about_learning.cfm">http://www.funderstanding.com/about_learning.cfm</a></p>
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## Indigenous perspectives

In the Indigenous kinship system there is a strong bond of respect that reflects the behavioural pattern of certain people in relationship to each other. In a workshop group, there may be avoidance relationships, which mean that some Indigenous staff might be unable to talk to each other. Check this and the need for any other cultural considerations, with someone who knows.

Take care with introductory activities and seating arrangements. If the group includes a number of Indigenous staff it may be necessary to help others build and awareness of cross-cultural manners. People need to realise that quite often listening is more important than talking.

Encourage group members to:

- ❖ Listen to what others are saying, considering what their meaning even if they are finding it hard to say
- ❖ Relax and learn to listen to silence
- ❖ Let people answer for themselves. If people know the answer they will respond when they are ready

If they don't know the answer:

- ❖ Someone else could rephrase the question
- ❖ The question could be answered after smaller group discussion, or
- ❖ Perhaps the question should never have been asked

People who like talking and are over anxious to contribute may need to:

- ❖ Be reminded that most people discover what they mean themselves as they try to put thoughts into words, so everyone in the group needs the chance to talk
- ❖ Be reminded to avoid complicated language
- ❖ Learn how to explain as they talk