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VARK: Linking Teaching Strategies to Preferred Learning Styles
Michelle Van Der Wege, MSN, APRN & Shauna Keil, MSN, RN-BC

Abstract
Nursing education is constantly changing in order to meet the ever-changing needs of the nursing profession. Long gone are the days of lengthy lectures and rote memorization. In order to adequately meet the demands of the profession, new and innovative teaching strategies are imperative. Students must be engaged, interested, and motivated. Unfortunately, not all teaching styles work for all students. Hallin (2014) asserts that students are more motivated and engaged when lessons are consistent with their learning style.

VARK refers to Visual, Aural, Read/Write and Kinesthetic preferred learning styles. Those who are visual learners do best with graphs, charts, and diagrams. Aural learners do best with discussion, stories, guest lectures and similar activities. Read/write learners prefer lists, charts and taking notes. Finally, kinesthetic learners are those who prefer hands-on methods in order to grasp content (“VARK,” n.d.). The goal of this study was to examine how different teaching strategies appealed to different kinds of learners.

Introduction
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Methods
Nursing students at a small Midwestern university were surveyed regarding various teaching strategies used by faculty within the program. Demographic data were collected, and students were asked to self-report their learning style as determined by the VARK questionnaire. Students were then asked to rate a variety of different teaching strategies and activities on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Data analysis was completed using SPSS software.

Results
A total of 94 of nursing students responded. The majority of those were female, with 89% (n=84). The vast majority of respondents report being multi-modal (n=63, 67%). Each learning style was keyed as yes or no to account for those who were multimodal. Visual accounted for 60% of students, 19% were aural, 39% were read/write and 52% were kinesthetic.

Top scoring activities
- Simulation
- Classroom lecture
- Practice NCLEX-style questions
- Collaborative quizzes

Lowest scoring activities
- Student presentations
- Making and presenting posters in class
- Online lectures

Discussion
While some activities scored higher than others, all activities on the survey received at least one “5” rating. This suggests that all activities are beneficial to some students. As faculty, the challenge is to choose those activities that appeal the most to the most students. Those activities include simulation, classroom lecture, practice questions, and collaborative quizzes.

Students tend rate peer presentations the lowest. This could be for a variety of reasons, including the desire to avoid presenting themselves. Another consideration is that students do not entirely trust peers to present accurate information and prefer to learn from faculty.

Conclusion
Nursing faculty face the challenge of meeting the individual learning needs of all students. This presentation will review research designed to link teaching strategies to learning styles. This information will help faculty to identify those methods that are most helpful to students. Different strategies can be utilized to ensure all learning styles are being addressed. Furthermore, those strategies that appeal to more than one learning style can be emphasized.

References

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