

A Learning Experience

Learning once meant a classroom with a blackboard and chalk, a teacher at the top and pupils in neat rows, but this idea is changing



Hobbies & Interests



Skills and Abilities



Questionnaire

THESE DAYS, THERE is much greater recognition of the fact that different people have different learning needs, and that anyone teaching a class should adapt how they teach to include the various methods that work best for learners. National Learning Network has been at the forefront in developing methods to help both learners and teachers in this area, and Suzanne McCarthy, Educational Psychologist with National Learning Network's Learning and Assessment Service, tells us more.

"Teaching and learning are changing all the time, with new methods and new technologies in daily use. People have a much greater understanding of what they need or want to learn, and students and their families have much higher expectations. One thing that we know can help people to identify how they learn best, and which can in turn help teachers to play to their students' strengths, is using what is called a 'learner profiler tool'.

"A learner profiler tool is effectively a detailed questionnaire that people fill in, which helps them to identify the

way they learn best, and what the least effective methods are for them.

"This can be used by an individual, for their own learning and study, or by a teacher with a large group. Teachers can then use the information to modify the kinds of methods they use – group work, pictures, examples, more aural work, different kinds of tests, etc. – to benefit the group as a whole, and individual students.

"A huge amount of international research has been done in this area, and this suggests that as much as

The National Learning Network's Learning and Assessment Service is based in the Institute of Technology in Blanchardstown, Dublin. It has acquired the Irish rights to distribute and license the "Learner Profiler Tool". It can be used quickly, easily and cost-effectively with large groups of learners, to help individuals discover the way they learn best, and to help teachers to adapt their teaching to suit the group.



Suzanne McCarthy, Educational Psychologist, National Learning Network's Learning and Assessment Services.

10 per cent of the population may have a specific learning difficulty that impacts on their potential to learn. The traditional diagnostic tools that identify this kind of difficulty are very time-consuming and can be used effectively only by trained practitioners. This tool provides a real alternative for many people. It can be used by any education provider, can benefit the whole class, and is suitable for learners on any kind of course."

National Learning Network's Learning and Assessment Services

Sample of Online Learner Profile Test

You will be shown a series of statements, and will be given a choice of four possible responses for each one: "Very like me", "A bit like me", "Not really like me" and "Not like me at all". For each statement please click on the response that is most like you.

- I have to re-read pages or paragraphs that I have just read to understand them.
- When writing, I avoid using some words because I cannot spell them.
- I get confused or muddled when given several instructions at once.
- I have difficulty packing a suitcase to go away.

team in Blanchardstown, Dublin has been working closely with Professor Amanda Kirby at the Dyscovery Centre in Cardiff University for a number of years to pilot the profiling tool in various educational locations, such as the Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown. The tool was developed by Professor Kirby to profile groups of learners and identify strengths and weaknesses in four main areas of cognitive processing: reading and writing, social and communication, attention and concentration, and co-ordination and organisation.

"It's very simple to use. When someone completes the online questionnaire, they are given immediate feedback and advice based on the questions that they have answered. This is in the form of a PDF report, which the individual can print out or save to a memory device.

"There are different kinds of questionnaires available that the students and teachers can use as well, to highlight particular skills or strengths and weaknesses. For example, study skills, memory, and spelling and maths skills. Knowing more about how you learn or study best can really help a student who is preparing for an exam and finding the process of studying difficult. More questionnaires and tests are also currently under development."

The tool also offers valuable opportunities for research while it gathers and collates data as it's being used, all, of course, on an anonymous basis. Third-level institutions, youth groups and adult education groups in Ireland are currently the main users of the learner profiler. Some National Learning Network centres around the country have also started to use the learner profiler. It is envisaged that the Learning and Assessment Services will increase the use of this tool in Ireland in the future.

"We think it is of value to everyone involved in education or training, and we hope that as more and more people find out about it, everyone will have the opportunity to get access to this tool, to get the most from their learning," Suzanne concludes. ■

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