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K. Abdul Gafoor
Reader, Department of Education,
University of Calicut.

&

Haskar Babu U.
Research Scholar,
Department of Education,
University of Calicut.

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Teaching Style: A Conceptual Overview

Abdul Gafoor. K., & Haskar Babu U.,

Abstract

The notion of style refers to a person's preferred way of using his/her abilities. Style, Ebel argued, was "what one is". Teaching is a performing art. Excellent teachers use their voices, gestures and movements to elicit and maintain attention and to stimulate student's emotions. Like other performers, teachers must convey a strong sense of practice, of highly focused energy. Our teaching style represents those enduring personal qualities and behaviors that appear in how we conduct our classes. While many people have argued that style is important in teaching, identifying the elements of our styles as teachers has proved to be difficult. According to Trowbridge and Bybee (1996), the assumption underlying teaching style is that it is the most effective and efficient means of presenting the material as long as the style is appropriate for the subject and the students. Teaching styles develop understanding, skills, and values relative to the subject. This paper has two aims. The first is to make familiar with the concept teaching style as an important construct in intellectual styles. The second is to differentiate between teaching styles and learning styles, thinking styles, and cognitive styles, and to identify the unique features of teaching style .

Introduction

The notion of style refers to a person's preferred way of using his/her abilities (and in this way differs from ability), and is a very important factor in trying to account for the marked individual differences in performance shown by people as they think, learn, teach, or carry out various tasks (Messick, 1984; Riding & Cheema, 1991; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 1997; Tennant, 1988;

Witkin, Oltman, Raskin, & Karp, 1971). Since the 1950s, psychologists have been investigating the nature of various types of styles, such as cognitive, thinking, teaching and learning styles, and their effects on performance in both academic and non-academic settings (Goldstein & Blackman, 1978; Kogan & Saarni, 1990; Rayner & Riding, 1997; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 1997; Witkin & Goodenough, 1981). The term teaching styles appeared around the 1970s (Biggs, 2001) when interest began to focus on the role of styles in teaching and learning.

Definitions

1. Teaching styles refer to “a teacher’s preferred way of solving problems, carrying out tasks, and making decisions in the process of teaching, and, besides differing from individual to individual, may sometimes differ between different groups, for example schools” (Sternberg, 1997).
2. “Teaching styles are supposed to define the behaviors that teachers exhibit as they interact with learners” (Fischer & Fischer, 1979).
3. A teaching style is an identifiable set of classroom behaviors associated with and carried out by the instructor. The chosen teaching style "is the operational behavior of the teacher's educational philosophy" (Conti & Welborn, 1986, p. 20).
4. Teaching style is defined as “an identifiable set of classroom behaviors associated with and carried out by the instructor” (Galbraith & Sanders, 1987 p.169)
5. “Teaching style is “a teacher’s personal behaviors” (Gregorc, 1979)
6. A teaching style is defined as “a mode of expression in which the teacher achieves the balance between developing a guiding vision that informs our teaching and responding flexibility to different content”. (Brookfield, 1990 p.4)
7. Teaching style “includes the implementation of philosophy; it contains evidence of beliefs about, values related to, and attitudes

towards all the elements of teaching –learning exchange”(Hiemlich,1990

8. “Teaching styles depends on teachers own needs, professional goals and personal convictions” (Gayle,1994)

According to Trowbridge and Bybee (1996), the assumption underlying teaching style is that it is the most effective and efficient means of presenting the material as long as the style is appropriate for the subject and the students. Teaching styles develop understanding, skills, and values relative to the subject. In other words, teaching style describes the manner in which a teacher manages instruction and the classroom environment.

Teaching Style: A Comparison with other ‘Styles’

Teaching is a performing art. Excellent teachers use their voices, gestures and movements to elicit and maintain attention and to stimulate student’s emotions. Like other performers, teachers must convey a strong sense of presence, of highly focused energy. The teaching style represents those enduring personal qualities and behaviors that appear in how conduct the classes. Teaching style, even though an important construct in the educational system, its commonness and differences with other constructs such as cognitive style, learning style, and thinking style have to be examined to make clear the unique features of teaching style.

Teaching Style and Learning Style

Learning and teaching are the two sides of the same coin; one side involving the learner, the other side involving the teacher. The most effective teachers are those who used their students preferred learning styles as the basis for instruction. A learning style is an individual's preferred way of learning. When an instructor's style matches with a student's learning style, that student typically experiences greater satisfaction and a more positive attitude toward the course. The similarities between teaching style and learning style are : both considers preferred attitudes and behaviors, both involves application of cognitive styles, both are measurable variable and both are styles rather than

abilities.i.e. an ability refers to what we can do and a style refers to our preferred ways of using the abilities that we have. The main difference between learning style and teaching styles are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Differences between Teaching Style & Learning Style

Learning Style	Teaching Style
1. Learning style consider how learner learns.i.e the learning bahaviour	1. Teaching style consider how teacher teaches.i.e the teaching behavior.
2. Learning style describes the manner in which the learner manages the learning	2. Teaching style describes the manner in which a teacher manages instruction and classroom environment.
3. Learning style consists of an internalized cognitive process.	3. The learning style and cognitive style affects one's teaching style.
4. Learning style is a general tendency to adopt similar set of learning strategies	4. A teaching style is an identifiable set of classroom behaviors.
5. Learning style is the way each individual collects, organizes and collects, organizes, and transforms informations into useful knowledge	5. Teaching style is the preferred way of solving problems, carrying out tasks, and making decisions in the process of teaching.

Teaching Style and Cognitive Style

Cognitive styles are broad, systematic characteristics that influence peoples' responses in different situations. Cognitive style was described by Messick (1984) as characteristic modes of perceiving, remembering and problem solving, reflective of information-processing regularities that develop in congenial ways around underlying personality trends. Witkin *et al.* (1977) describe cognitive style as individual differences in the way people perceive, think, solve problems, learn and relate to others. According to Riding (2002) a teacher's natural teaching style will be the reflection of his/her own cognitive style. The similarities between teaching style and cognitive style are: both styles

emphasizes cognitive processes, both are measurable variables and both involves cognitive tasks such as problem solving and thinking. The main difference between cognitive style and teaching styles are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Differences between Teaching Style & Cognitive Style

Cognitive Style	Teaching Style
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cognitive style is largely based on cognitive aspects of the individual. 2. Cognitive style is a consistent pattern of behavior within a range of individual variability 3. It is the way individuals organize information and experiences. 4. Cognitive style is an aspect of overall personality and cognitive processes. 5. Cognitive style is “a hypothetical construct that has been developed to explain the process of mediation between stimuli and responses. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A teaching style emphasizes cognitive, affective and conative aspects of the teacher. 2. A teaching style is an identifiable set of classroom behaviors. 3. Teaching style describes the manner in which a teacher manages instruction and classroom environment. 4. Teaching style is a component of class room interaction. 5. The focus of teaching style is primarily on the configuration teacher behavior carried out in the classroom, including all aspects of self-expression.

Teaching Style & Thinking Style

In current cognitive psychology, research mainly focuses on cognitive differences such as thinking styles. In recent years, increasing attention has been given to thinking styles. Researchers have found that thinking styles have implications for teaching and learning (Grigorenko & Sternberg, 1997; Sternberg, 1997; Zhang & Sternberg, 2001).

Sternberg (1997) proposed his theory of “mental self-government” to introduce the concept of thinking style. Using government as a metaphor,

Sternberg (1988, 1997) contended that just as there are many ways of governing a society, there are many ways of governing or managing one’s activities, including teaching and learning. These different ways of managing our activities can be understood as our thinking styles. The similarities between teaching style and thinking style are : both are styles rather than abilities, both are measurable variable and both styles are value-free. One of the important features of thinking styles, according to Sternberg, is that they are at least partially socialized, suggesting that thinking styles can be cultivated and modified. Sternberg suggests that thinking styles vary inter-culturally, across times, and across situations. The main difference between cognitive style and teaching styles are given in Table 3

Table 3. Differences between Teaching Style & Thinking Style

Thinking Style	Teaching Style
<p>1. Thinking styles are defined as preferred ways of using the abilities that we have.</p> <p>2. The theoretical background of thinking style is based on Sternberg’s Theory of Mental Self-government.</p> <p>3. Sternberg (1994) defines thinking style as “a personality attribute (although not a fixed one) for the utilization of abilities”.</p> <p>4. Culture,gender,age,parenting style and, schooling and occupation are some of the variables which are likely to affect the development of thinking styles.</p>	<p>1. Teaching styles refer to a teacher’s preferred way of solving problems, carrying out tasks, and making decisions in the process of teaching</p> <p>2. In the teaching style there is no single acceptable theory to define the concept.</p> <p>3. Teaching style is teachers’ classroom as well as personal behavior.</p> <p>4. Teaching style is a composite measure of teachers’ style of teaching including instructional planning, teaching methods teaching characteristics, and teaching environments.</p>

By analyzing different constructs in the style literature such as learning style, cognitive style , thinking style and teaching style, it is very helpful to understand

the unique features of teaching style or how it differ from other styles. The unique features of teaching style are listed in Table 4.

Table 4. Unique Features of Teaching Style

<u>Unique Features of Teaching Style</u>	
1.	Teachers preferred way of solving problems.
2.	Teachers' classroom behavior.
3.	Teachers' personal behavior.
4.	Teachers' mode of expression.
5.	Management of instruction and classroom environment.
6.	Teaching styles differ from individual to individual, differ between groups.
7.	Teaching styles depends on teachers' own needs, professional goals and personal convictions.
8.	Teaching styles are related to instructional methods.

Types of Teaching Styles

Grasha (1996) argued that there are five main teaching styles that are linked to different outcomes in childhood. They are *Expert*, *Formal Authority*, *Personal Model*, *Facilitator*, and *Delegator*. The *expert* possesses the information, knowledge and skills that students need; however, if this knowledge is over-used in the classroom, it may lead to students becoming intimidated by the teacher's fruitful base of knowledge (Grasha, 1996). The *formal authority* teacher focuses on a clear and methodical way of conducting class paired with firm expectations (Grasha, 1996). However, an over-investment in this style can lead to rigid, standardized and less flexible way of managing students and student concerns (Grasha, 1996).

A teacher who teaches by personal example and who encourages students to observe and emulate the teacher's approach is said to utilize a *personal model* (Grasha, 1996). In this model, emphasis is placed on observation and following the teacher as a role model (Grasha, 1996). Teachers who utilize this approach tend to feel that their approach is the most effective as a means for instruction. Grasha (1996) reports that this may lead to feelings of inadequacy if the students cannot live up to such expectations and standards.

The *facilitator* style is characterized by a focus on the personal nature of the student–teacher interaction (Grasha, 1996). Teachers who exhibit this style would offer a great deal of flexibility in their teaching and be more prone to a ‘student-centered’ approach, paired with a willingness to explore alternate ways of completing tasks (Grasha, 1996). However, this approach, if not executed in a positive and affirming manner, may lead to students feeling uncomfortable in the classroom due to general uncomfortable feelings in response to the open and expressive atmosphere (Grasha, 1996).

Finally, Grasha (1996) states that the *delegator* style does much to emphasize the student as an independent learner, but the style can be time consuming and may result in misreading of students’ readiness to take on independent work. Grasha (1996) cautions that the *delegator* may contribute to student anxiety as the student may be given too much autonomy before they are ready to take it on. Therefore, it would seem from Grasha’s findings that various teaching styles can either aid or hinder the learning process.

Dressel and Marcus (1982) and Woods (1995), categorized teaching styles as discipline-centered, teacher-centered, and student-centered. In discipline-centered model, the course has a fixed structure. In teacher-centered model, the teacher is considered as an authoritative expert, the main source of knowledge, and the focal point of all activity. In this teaching model, students are passive recipients of the information. According to Lackey (1997), lecture obviously reflects teacher-centered style and requires a passive role for students. In student-centered model, on the other hand, instruction focuses on the student and his/her cognitive development. The teacher’s goal is to help students grasp the development of knowledge as a process rather than a product.

Flanders (1970) used different terminology and named teacher-centered teaching as direct style, student-centered teaching as indirect style and discipline-centered teaching as eclectic style. Weinberg (1983) also did some work on teaching styles and identified the following four teaching styles: direct teaching, peer teaching, problem solving, and group approach. First, in direct teaching style, the teacher makes all of the decisions. S/he describes and demonstrates what is to be learned, evaluates it and gives feedback. This style needs very little cognitive or affective involvement on the student’s part.

Second, peer teaching style pairs two students of differing ability levels with one another. The teacher describes and demonstrates the desired response. The students evaluate each other using criteria presented by the teacher. Third, in problem solving style, the teacher sets a problem and the students respond it in most appropriate ways for them. Models come from student creativity and other students' responses. And last, group approach style is used to foster social skills as well as promote acceptance among different ability levels.

Briefly, it looks meaningful to summarize that teacher-centered style is traditional and requires lecture. In discipline-centered style, however, teachers appear to place subject matter knowledge as the central focus of their beliefs and actions instead of placing teaching or students at the center. Programmed learning materials, printed study guides, prepared curricular materials, and research papers can be used (Lackey, 1997).

Discipline-centered teaching strategies tend to be teacher-centered, but also include hands on activities, laboratories, demonstrations, group work and discussion. Therefore, this technique creates students with positive learning environment to clarify their understanding and present their ideas (Patricia, et.al., 1999). In short, discipline-centered teaching style has characteristics of both teacher-centered style and student-centered style. Hence, using discipline-centered style as transitional style may be acceptable.

In student-centered style, activities such as group discussions and group or individual reports are used (Lackey, 1997). This style is individualized to provide accommodation to students' cognitive, affective, behavioral and physical needs during the teaching and learning process (Shreves, 1998). It seems from these two statements that student-centered style refers to individualized teaching approach.

Berger (1974), in addition, determined three kind of teaching behaviors as teacher oriented, student oriented, and student-teacher cooperation oriented. Lenz (1982) identified two teaching styles: proactive and reactive. Robinson (1979) categorized teaching styles into five classes ranging from "highly content centered" to "highly people centered". Alexlord (1970) identified five teaching styles a) drill master b) content-centered c) instructor-centered d) intellect centered and e) person centered.

Sternberg's seven Teaching styles

In light of the theory of Mental Self-Government, Sternberg (1997) proposed seven teaching styles consisting of only Type I and Type II styles, and operationalised them through the Thinking Styles in Teaching Inventory (TSTI; Grigorenko & Sternberg, 1993). This inventory deals with just three of the five dimensions of thinking styles (function, level, and leaning). The seven styles in teaching are: (1) the legislative style, whose central characteristic is creative; (2) the executive style, whose central characteristic is conforming; (3) the judicial style, whose central characteristic is analytical; (4) the local style, whose central characteristic is focusing on concrete ideas or details; (5) the global style, whose central characteristic is focusing on abstract thinking or general problems; (6) the liberal style, whose central characteristic is employing new ways to deal with tasks (the liberal style differs from the legislative style in that the creativity or new ideas used by the liberal person do not have to be the individual's own); and (7) the conservative style, whose central characteristic is employing traditional ways to deal with tasks (unlike the executive style, an individual with a conservative style may like to come up with his/her own ideas, but these ideas are based on existing and accepted customs).

Table 4. Classification of different teaching styles

Classified by	Different types of teaching styles						
Flanders (1970)		Direct Teaching Style	Indirect Teaching style			Discipline Centered	
Alexload (1970)	Intellect centered	Instructor centered		Drill centered	Person centered	Content centered	
Berger(1974)		Teacher oriented	Student oriented			Student-teacher cooperation oriented	
Lenz (1982)		Proactive	Reactiv				
Drussel & Marcus (1982)		Teacher centered	Student centered			Discipline centered	
Weinberg (1983)		Direct teaching style	Peer Teaching style		Problem solving	Group Approach	
Jarvis (1985)	Socratic style	Didactic style	Facilitative style				
Robinson (1986)	Lecturing/Charismatic type	Teacher Centered type	Child Centered type				
Grasha (1996)	Expert	Formal Authority	Facilitator	Delegator	Personal		
Sternberg (1997)	Conservative style	Global style	Legislative style	Local style	Judicial style	Liberal style	Executive style

How different “Styles” are interrelated?

The way each of us perceives the world governs how we think, make judgments, and forms values about experiences and people. Our personal perspective is our window on the world. This unique aspect of our humanness is what we call style. Intellectual style is used as a general term that encompasses the meanings of all major “style” constructs postulated in the past few decades, such as cognitive style, conceptual tempo, decision making and problem-solving style, learning style, mind style, perceptual style, and thinking style. An intellectual style refers to one’s preferred way of processing

information and dealing with tasks. To varying degrees, an intellectual style is cognitive, affective, physiological, psychological, and sociological. It is cognitive because whatever styles one uses to process information, one must be engaged in some kind of cognitive process. It is affective because one's way of processing information and of dealing with a task i.e., employing an intellectual style is partially determined by how one feels about the task. The interrelationship between different styles can be diagrammatically represent in figure 1.

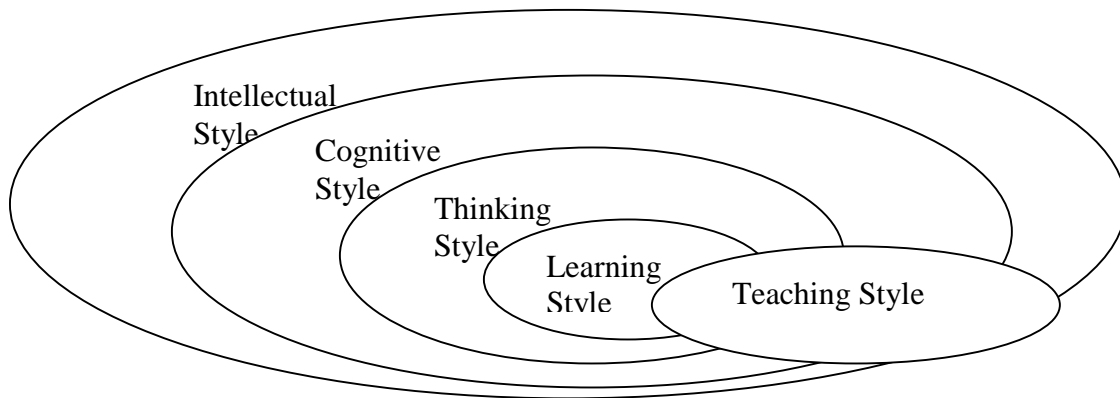


Figure 1. Interrelationship between different styles

Conclusion

This paper reveals that how the concept of teaching style differ from other styles. Furthermore, an attempt has made to organize different types of teaching styles in a logical manner. Teaching styles are very important for effective teaching and learning (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 1995, 2001), and a wide range of styles makes for more effective teaching (Joyce & Hodges, 1966). Also, different teaching styles have different optimal contexts (Sternberg, 1997), and a teacher with a more extensive and varied repertoire of style profiles has more choices in his/her teaching.

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