

MA in Education Module 1

Portfolio of Professional Development

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I am looking at this part of my portfolio in terms of my entire career rather than just my current role. I am doing this because I believe that my past has shaped my present and will continue to influence my future as an educator. I am at a stage where I am ready to take on significant responsibility as an educator leader. I want to be able to influence a larger number of people including students, other educators, parents and perhaps policy makers.

I have loved the 'professional upbringing' that my career has offered me to date. My professional career has spanned 10 years and has been varied and interesting. I have had experience in the following areas:

- A primary classroom teacher in New Zealand
- An education consultant working for a computer company
- A facilitator working for a New Zealand Ministry of Education ICT professional development project
- A writer for national publications and a contributor to a book
- An independent consultant working for other school systems in Papua New Guinea
- An primary classroom teacher working within the American international education system in London
- A non-teaching role of Independent Learning Coordinator at a large inner London comprehensive school, which involves teaching learning-related skills to students aged 11-18.

Together these experiences have given me a broad range of skills and knowledge to draw from and are positioning me to make a significant contribution to education.

Current Role

My current role is as the Independent Learning Coordinator at Holland Park School in London. I was appointed in November 2002 and have been in post since February 2003. This role is designed to have a school wide impact on independent learning for students and is a non-teaching position. It is a fairly senior role within the school and has four Management Units attached to it.

Independent learning has previously been undefined in the school and so a key part to this role is to define it and lead in sharing and developing ownership of this definition across the school. For more information about how I have undertaken this please refer to the documents in my Professional Portfolio CD ROM:

Letter to Community

Letter to Library Staff

Independent Learning Presentation

Getting Support from the Independent Learning Coordinator

The role is situated in the main library in the centre of the school. The main responsibilities of the Independent Learning Coordinator include:

- To **implement and monitor the homework policy**. To provide guidance for staff

on good practice and improve the quality of homework set.

- Implement a **highly developed school intranet and provide independent learning opportunities for students such as homework online, tasks and activities.**
- **To develop independent learning opportunities for all students and staff, including provision of attractive displays, guides and publicity materials.**
- **To support student learning in the school libraries and Sixth Form Study Centre and to deliver and co-ordinate study skills seminars, after school clubs and other opportunities.**

For a more detailed description, please **refer to the Independent Learning Coordinator Job Description.**

The library has undergone the most dramatic changes over the last two years. It has been transformed from a rather bleak, unwelcoming place into an open, clean and spacious area. The design is very much in favour of wide-open spaces and clear walls. Most of the storage/office spaces have been turned into computer rooms for students, all free standing shelving thrown away and new shelving and a central office space installed. These changes were not greeted positively by existing staff who were very resistant to change. This put them at odds with the leadership group of the school and they subsequently left. Part of my challenge has been to recruit new staff, which we are still attempting to do.

About the school

Holland Park School is a very well known school in the UK. It was the first comprehensive school and has had a number of prominent people send their children to it such as Tony Benn. It is a comprehensive of approximately 1500 students aged 11-18.

The school has undergone major changes with a recent change of leadership. The focus has shifted from a rather 'laissez-faire' approach to teaching and learning to a much more corporate vision of a school. Increased accountability, target setting and action planning with close linkages to the School Development Plan are strongly encouraged. This has meant quite a lot of political upheaval. The school is frequently the focus of articles in various newspapers and publications. The leadership is trying hard to rectify the situation and is having some success in this process. The leadership is striving to develop a modern learning environment.

My Perceived Strengths

I believe my strengths are as a creative person who can communicate effectively with others. I am not afraid to take risks in either my learning or my professional role, as evidenced by taking on a range of newly created jobs throughout my career to date. I have specialist skills and am able to teach all age groups, specific ICT skills and learning skills. I enjoy teaching and seeing people develop as a result of my input and believe I have special talents in helping adults to learn- especially teachers. I am able to design learning situations and conditions that help people to reflect closely on their work so they can make improvements to this.

Values and Beliefs

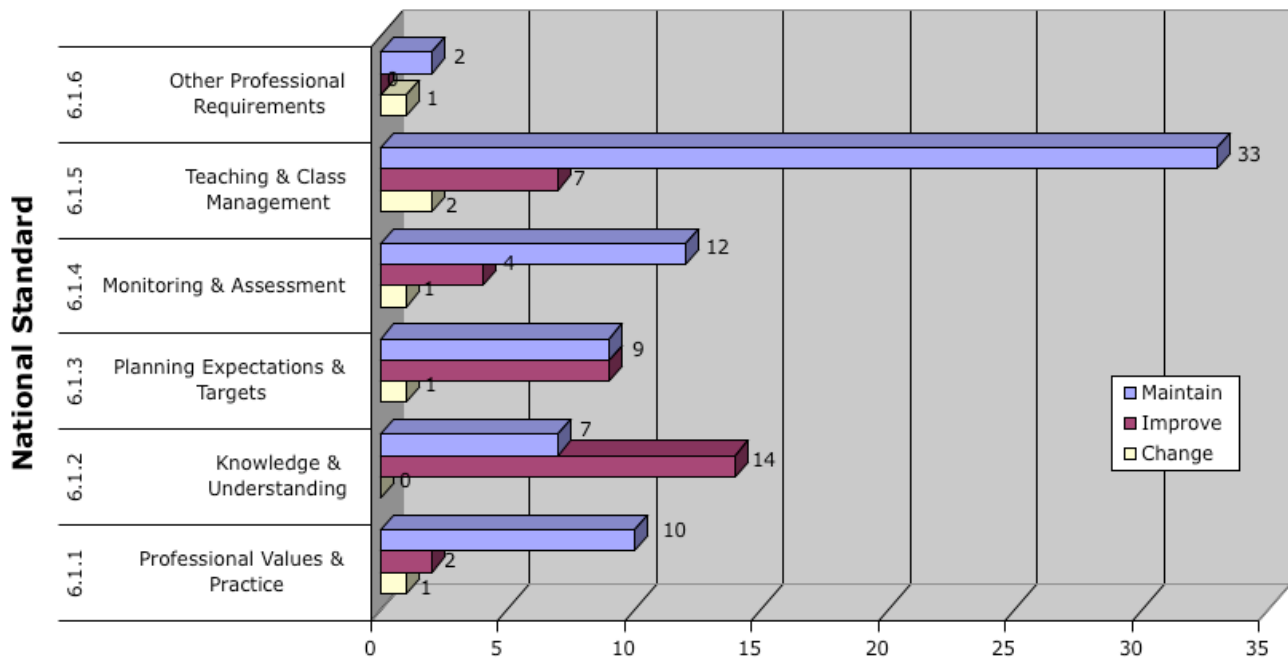
There have been many people who have had a huge impact on my values and beliefs about learning and education and I feel it appropriate to mention them here. I worked with Dr Julia Atkin in 1998 and she helped me to start the process of clarifying my core values and beliefs. She is also a close friend and colleague of mine. Julia has had an enormous influence on my thinking and helped me to clarify my core values, beliefs and practices about education and learning. She uses an 'onion skin' model which identifies these aspects of oneself as an educator. Another of my key mentors are Geoffrey and Renate Caine, who helped me to extend and deepen my knowledge of how the brain learns and relate this to the notion of creating authentic relationships (www.cainelearning.com).

My most fundamental value in education and learning is that of trusting and authentic relationships. I believe that this is foundational to quality learning in every sense. Without trust and openness people will not learn, or be able to encourage learning to happen. Please view the document Rob Clarke Values and Beliefs about Learning for a detailed description of this.

Self Audit Against National Standards

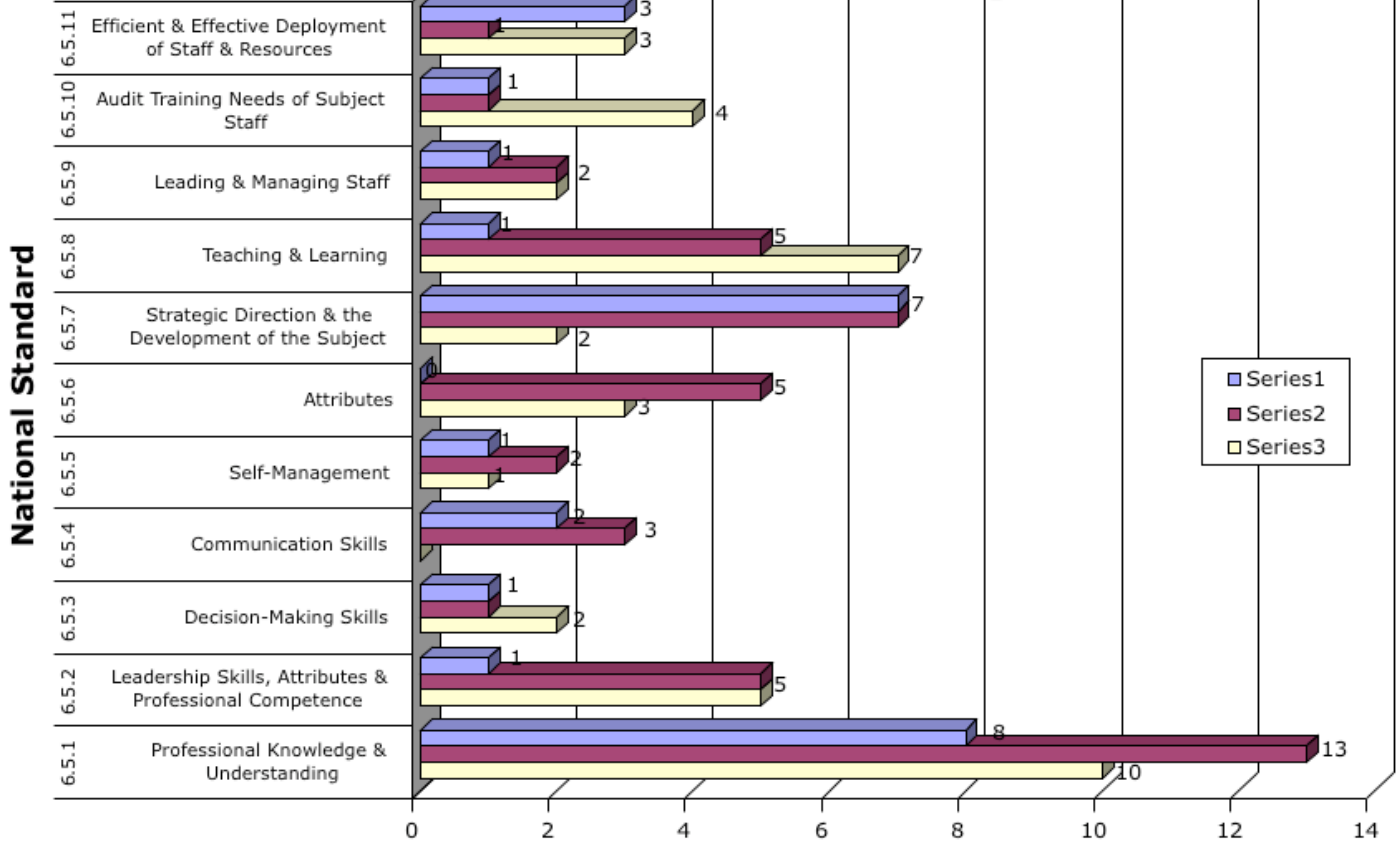
This self-audit is a questionnaire which is designed to specify the various attributes which make up a teacher, SENCO, subject leader or head teacher in the United Kingdom. For the purposes of this essay I have completed this questionnaire and have tried to deepen my understanding of my own professional attributes through getting a second opinion from my current line manager. Because a significant part of my current role involves teaching as well as improving teaching and learning, I have also completed the Classroom Teacher Self Analysis. Following are the charts developed from these questionnaires:

Classroom Teacher Self Analysis



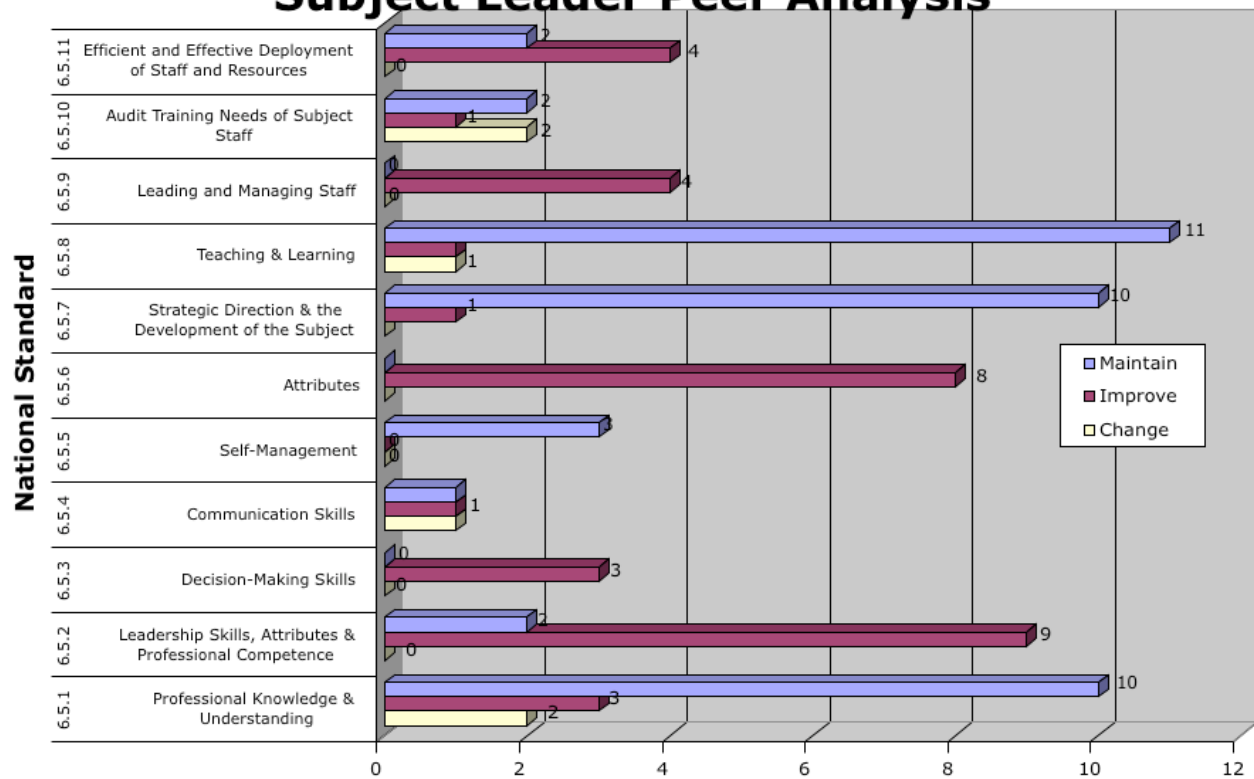
From this chart, my strengths are my teaching and class management, monitoring and assessment and my values and practice. I have identified my **knowledge and understanding** as the area in which I wish to improve the most.

Subject Leader Self Analysis



I struggled to complete the Subject Leader Analysis due to the flux I am experiencing in my role at present. I have been able to identify a range of aspects that I know I need to improve, but at the same time I also identified many aspects that I feel unable to change. Strengths include: professional knowledge and understanding, strategic direction and the development of the subject. As mentioned earlier the steps I am taking to rectify the situation are starting to help me. For the purposes of comparison it is very useful to have the information provided by my line manager:

Subject Leader Peer Analysis



Overall my line manager's evaluation of my performance is much more positive than my own. He has not identified the range of aspects that I felt I could not change. Strengths identified by my line manager include: teaching and learning, strategic direction and development of the subject as well as professional knowledge and understanding. He feels I need to improve are my professional competence and my attributes. For more detailed descriptions of these please refer to the questionnaires themselves.

I wonder if these surveys are attempting to 'over mechanise' the profession? I agree that we must have professional standards and these need to be measured and reported (or perhaps celebrated) in some way; yet I am unsure about quantifying some of these attributes because some of the qualities of great teachers are not easily 'measurable' using current thinking. There is nowhere in the instruments to account for spontaneity or flexibility in taking advantage of the 'teachable moment'. How do we measure these qualities in a teacher, a SENCO, subject leader or head teacher?

There are many crossovers within these surveys and I wonder if there are attributes within the Head Teacher survey that could equally be put into the other surveys. For example, nowhere in the Subject Leader survey does it mention the ability to establish strategic partnerships that benefit the subject and the school. Although a full critique of these self-audit questionnaires is out of the scope of this discussion, it would be interesting to cross reference them with ones from other education systems around the world. I do believe these questionnaires need to be taken with a grain of salt- they are too simplistic and traditional in my view.

Professional Learning and Development

The range, level and depth of professional learning in my current role are quite different to that of my past roles. A large part of my career has been in designing and implementing professional learning for other educators, which has also enriched my own learning as part of this process. I have chosen to change the term from 'professional development' to 'professional learning and development' because I feel it provides a richer picture of learning.

The difference that I notice in terms of the professional learning opportunities in my current role is partly due to being in a different cultural environment and also because of being in a newly established role in this environment. Much of the professional learning I am undertaking is on the job and 'as is-where is' learning. Here is a brief description of the perceived opportunities and barriers to my professional learning and development and also a discussion of my own professional learning style. I have cross-referenced my own professional learning style with an assessment of my preferred thinking style to provide a richer description (for an interesting discussion about looking at a professional learning system rather than a professional development programme refer to Hoban, 2002). Following are a discussion of the aspects I would like to develop as well as the opportunities and barriers I perceive for my professional learning.

Aspects in Need of Development

Following are my perceived professional learning needs. For more specific information about this please refer to my self-audit against national standards as well as my learning and thinking styles analysis. In terms of my own professional practice I perceive there to be many aspects in need of development. Some of these needs are technical and others are managerial and leadership-type learning needs. Following is a brief description of the opportunities and barriers that I perceive I have to my professional learning.

Opportunities

There is a huge range of opportunities in my own professional learning and development. Many of these are as yet undiscovered as I chart unknown territory in terms of my current role. Examples of some of these include becoming a UFA trainer in the near future for the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, developing my expertise in online learning and ICT through work with the MirandaNet fellowship (based out of the Institute of Education at the University of London) and developing strategic partnerships with organisations and companies to facilitate my current role, as well as my personal skills in web design and development.

Barriers

As well as a huge range of opportunities for my own professional learning, there is equally a wide range of barriers to it. The systemic barriers within my school are, in my view, enormous and pervasive. I am not in control of any budget that allows me to go on courses or attend conferences which is a major obstacle. This means that I need to spend time convincing people that certain things are going to be beneficial to both my learning and the school. The slow and rather 'top-down' process for making decisions at my school impacts on the speed of change with which I can develop and grow, which slows the implementation of my role. With this in mind, following is a brief discussion of the major aspects in which I feel I need to develop as a professional educator.

Maintaining a work-personal life balance and dealing more effectively with stress

I believe that I don't always achieve a balance between my professional life and my personal life. This is partly due to the nature of how I think and learn as discussed in a later section, and also partly due to the fact that I continually seem to be involved in re-creating myself as a professional

in some new, exciting and challenging role. Establishing new roles is always demanding and requires additional time commitment because systems and processes need to be designed and put in place. This invariably leads the people leading this sort of initiatives to sacrifice aspects of their personal life or well-being. My key strategies for overcoming this are to exercise and practice tai chi, which I really enjoy.

Developing myself as a learning-leader...

I have broken this aspect into two main areas: communicating and sharing/developing my vision with others as well as building my circle of influence. These aspects are very personal and are linked closely to who we are as people and how we interact with others.

I feel that in my current role it is crucial to communicate and share my vision. This is because I have found myself to be in a very challenging political situation in my current school. The establishment of my current role has meant a lot of mistrust amongst staff that is something I haven't previously encountered to this degree before in my career. It is fair to say that I have at times struggled with this. It is important to build my circle of influence so that I can gain increased support from the leadership of the school as well as the staff. This will enable me to help inspire and support change.

My strategies for changing both these aspects are to have a series of key meetings designed to work through the support/logistical issues with the deputy head of the school; to find and work closely with a mentor; to work much more closely with my line manager while continuing to build trusting relationships with teaching staff. All these strategies are in progress and are making a difference to the role at the moment.

Technical skills learning...

I have a very strong desire to continually learn new technical skills, particularly relating to information and communication technologies (ICT). I am not satisfied with just being able to make a web site or intranet- I want to make it personalised to individuals so that they can interact with it. This means that I need to learn new skills such as database connectivity to web sites, java scripting and other web technologies.

The monitoring and analysis aspects of my role demand the gathering and manipulation of large amounts of data through online homework surveys, spreadsheets and databases. This is complex work that involves analysis and data manipulation. My strategies for enabling this are to work with a consultant and to teach myself. To date I haven't been able to employ a consultant to work alongside myself when developing these aspects of my role, as I have not yet been successful in my bids to pay for this, so I rely on teaching myself.

Career Aspirations

I want to have a massive impact on both learning and the wider education system. I believe this because I know that education must change and I feel that it needs to change much more quickly. To illustrate this point the following analogy is useful: if we took teachers from 50 years ago they would, in many cases, still recognise and be perfectly able to operate in a classroom that we see today. In contrast, if we took a doctor from 50 years ago and transported them into a modern doctors surgery the chances are they wouldn't recognise or be able to function in this working environment.

I believe I am an agent of change and want to position myself to grow and develop into an educator whose practices, beliefs and visions are valued and used to guide both the people who make decisions in education as well as classroom practitioners. I need to align myself with the sorts of people and organisations that can support me in this growth. I am not sure where this will be but know that I need to decide this soon because I feel that I am nearing a 'consolidation phase' of my career where I may stay in one situation for a number of years so I can enable maximum lasting change. This is partly due to personal changes impacting on my life at present.

I will always be involved with teachers and students and I will go back to the classroom from time to time in my career. I believe that I must always be closely linked with classroom practice in order to be able to support change and influence decision-making on a broader level of education. I need to understand the parts as well as the whole and be able to operate and influence at any level. These aspirations are closely tied to my values and beliefs about education and learning. Following are my short, medium and long-term professional goals:

Short Term

My short-term goal is to be happy in my role as an educator and as an agent of change. I need to have the more emotional and 'soft thinking' aspects of my being as an educator satisfied in order to be able to be creative and create change. This is partly why I am undertaking this MA in Education.

I want to re-establish myself in a different environment where my skills are more broadly recognised, utilised and shared. Whether this happens in a school or elsewhere I am unsure. I am always striving to grow and develop into areas and relish any new challenge that comes my way.

It is very important that I raise the academic level of my qualifications both for personal learning and also in terms of being able to move into higher levels of educational leadership. The qualifications I gain from further study must be flexible and allow me to extend myself personally and professionally, while also giving me the freedom to design my own future.

More specifically my academic interests are:

- Brain theory
- Systems thinking
- The design of professional learning systems
- Spirituality in learning and education
- Change management
- Futures thinking
- ICT in learning
- Leadership
- Quality

Another one of my short term goals are to do more consulting to keep my hand in as a person who can add value to schools and LEAs and support their process of change and improvement.

Medium Term

I would like to publish a book about teacher professional learning and the conditions necessary to support this. I believe I have a wealth of experience in this area that is at this point largely untapped. I am interested in spirituality in education and am keen to explore these ideas further because I think this type of thinking about education and learning is more humane and natural in terms of how we approach schooling. I believe in the future there will be a growing recognition of the power of spirituality in learning around the world. I am also interested in mixing these ideas with current thinking about brain theory and how humans learn best with ICT

Long Term

I would like to be involved in advising a government as to the structure and processes of their education system. I would also like to establish a new place of learning that is different from traditional schools. Newly created schools that I have worked in or seen are created according to past experience and traditional ideas about constructing learning environments. I want this new school to be created by educators and people who have a less 'westernised' or mechanistic concept of what a school should be, and a more spiritual and holistic notion of what learning can be.

Learning and Thinking style

I believe that learning styles theory is limited and simplistic. Because of this I have decided to match the learning styles inventory with a thinking styles tool I have used in professional learning as part of a former role as the Facilitator for the Christchurch ICT Cluster. This tool is called the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI). I will focus first on my learning styles inventory and then compare this to my thinking styles analysis to attempt to develop a richer picture of myself as a learner.

My learning styles kite shows my preferences thus:

- 19 Active Experimentation
- 17 Abstract Conceptualisation
- 16 Concrete Experience
- 10 Reflective Observation

From the learning styles analysis, my overall 'learning kite' appears to be fairly balanced in the AE-AC-CE domains and my weakest preference is in the *Reflective Observation (RO)* domain. This can be shown graphically in the learning styles kite attached. Following is a brief discussion of my learning styles preferences as identified by this instrument.

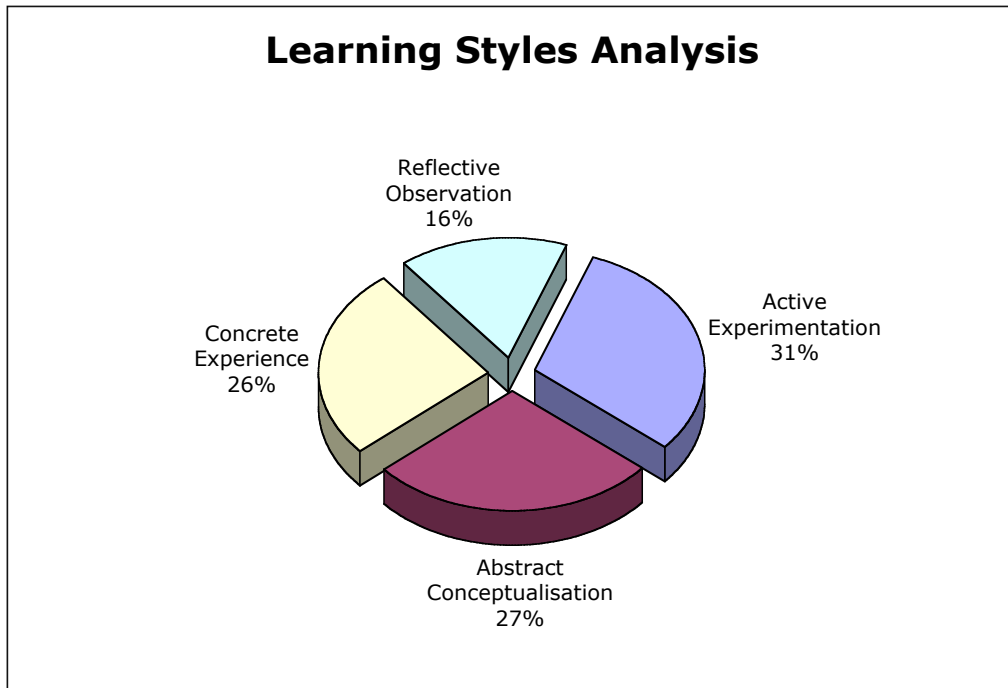
I am not surprised that my strongest preference is in the *Active Experimentation (AE)* domain because I see one of my purposes as an educator as influencing people and changing the world for the better. I see educators as the people who enable and support the development of change in other peoples' lives. I have been involved in one major change initiative in education to date which was as the Facilitator of the Christchurch ICT Cluster, part of a key national education strategy. I do not agree with how the AE domain is described as having an emphasis on practical applications as opposed to reflective understanding because I believe that reflective understanding is one of the beginnings towards practical applications and that you can't always see evidence of reflective understanding prior to practical applications.

I do enjoy getting things accomplished and am willing to take risks in order to achieve my objectives. I place a high value being able to influence my environment and enjoy seeing the results. Colleagues of mine can see this when I get frustrated by not being able to 'cause' or 'affect' change. This is also illustrated in looking back at the last few years of my career in which I have undertaken a range of newly created positions and roles in quite different areas of education.

My weakest preference was for the *Reflective Observation (RO)* domain, which emphasises understanding the meaning of ideas and situations by carefully observing and impartially describing them. It also emphasizes understanding as opposed to practical application, a concern with why or how things happen as opposed to what will work and an emphasis on reflection as opposed to action. I do not agree with this last assertion however, because I believe that action and reflection are intertwined and are part of the same process. This is backed up by many writers in the field of reflection, particularly Donald Schon's notion of reflection-in-action (1983).

The next two domains, *Abstract Conceptualisation (AC)* and *Concrete Experience (CE)* appear somewhat contradictory to me because they are framed as opposites, yet my preferences are nearly equal in both. This may point to either a weakness in the instrument, a richer picture of myself as a learner or incorrect use of the instrument. I would like to triangulate this with a number of people who know me extremely well in order to gain some clarity in this. On closer observation of the description of each domain, however, it is clear to me that I do have preferences that are equally strong in both. For example: I do enjoy using logic, ideas and concepts, yet I enjoy engaging in thinking AS WELL AS feeling. I do not believe that you can necessarily separate thinking and feeling- isn't feeling a way or manner of thinking? I am concerned with dealing with immediate human situations in a personal way- as evidenced in my abilities as a facilitator and professional developer. Therefore this shows that I can deal with problems and situations in both an artistic and a systematic manner. These contradictions may also point to this instrument being rather crude and simplistic, which is why I have matched it to the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI) in the next section.

I wonder if it is more useful to view these as a percentage of a whole, because we are essentially talking about a person who is a 'whole learner' as opposed to a 'type of learner' (this observation again will be re-visited during my discussion of my HBDI thinking). Examining myself as a 'type of learner' is perhaps dangerous as it puts one into a box and therefore limits the possibilities, this is a natural human tendency as it ties in closely with our search for meaning and to create order out of an essentially chaotic universe (for an excellent book relating to this, see Margaret Wheatley's *Leadership and the New Science*, 1992). The following chart illustrates my learning styles preferences expressed as a percentage of a whole:



This chart could easily be used to identify goals and targets for future professional growth in terms of traits rather than in terms of the attributes such as those identified in the Self-Audit against National Standards which I question as being possibly too mechanistic an instrument of real learning.

According to the Learning Styles Grid I am a 'type 4' learner who is labeled as a 'Dynamic Learner'. People who are classified as Dynamic Learners:

- Integrate experience and application
- Seek hidden possibilities and excitement
- Need to know what can be done with things
- Learn by trial and error
- Perceive information concretely and processes it actively
- Are adaptable to, and relish change
- Excel in situations calling for flexibility
- Tend to take risks
- Often reaches accurate conclusions in the absence of logical evidence
- Function by acting and testing experience

I would agree with all of these attributes and qualities and have found that they tie in with both my career experiences and with my HBDI analysis.

Thinking Style Analysis

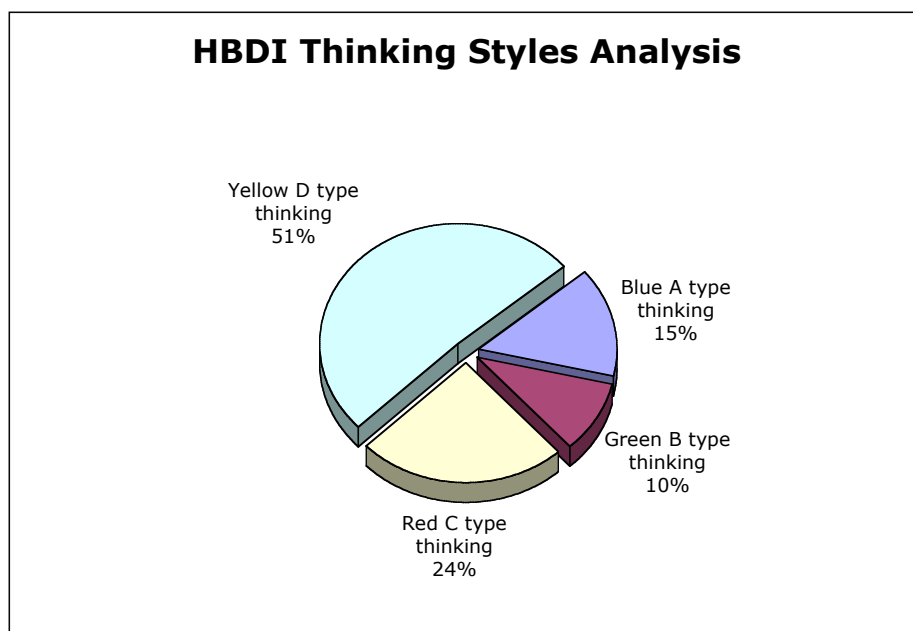
The Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI) is a diagnostic tool that is used in a wide range of situations for a great variety of purposes. I have used it to help teachers understand themselves and their children and as an open-ended tool for looking at learning design in schools.

Nedd Herrmann designed a tool that builds on the work of Roger Sperry and others who developed the left-right brain hemisphere approach to understanding how the brain works (1960). His approach takes both hemispheres of the brain and splits them into feeling (limbic) and thinking (cerebral) parts. This tool is extremely useful for a range of purposes. The

resulting profile generated by this tool gives a rich and diverse picture of a person's thinking preferences. It involves a survey with 120 questions, including adjective pairs that give us an indication as to how we operate when under pressure. Each quadrant in the HBDI is explained in more depth in my attached HBDI profile. My own thinking preferences are summarised in the following table:

Quadrant	Score	Descriptors selected (key descriptor underlined)
Blue A	44	Analytical
Green B	29	No descriptors identified in survey
Red C	72	Spiritual, intuitive
Yellow D	152	<u>Imaginative</u> , intuitive, holistic, synthesiser, simultaneous, spatial

My HBDI thinking preferences can be illustrated in the chart below:



As this chart shows, my preference is predominately right-quadrant, which shows that I enjoy new ideas and interpersonal involvement. This contradicts the *Abstract Conceptualisation (AC)* dimension of the learning styles analysis and reinforces the *Concrete Experience (CE)* dimension. As can be seen from this model of how the brain thinks, I have a strong preference toward risk, aesthetics, vision and exploration. My weakest preference is in detail, planning and being traditional, which are also reflected in the types of jobs I have chosen. The fact that I am critiquing both these models at the same time suggests my preference to D-quadrant thinking!

An interesting aspect of this model is how we tend to function when under pressure. This is determined by looking at the adjective pairs from the survey. After consultation with my friend and mentor Julia Atkin, she explained to me that when I am under stress I tend to become less creative (shown by a decrease in the D-quadrant) and more analytical (shown by an increase in the A-quadrant) and less planned (shown by a decrease in the B-quadrant). When under stress I tend to stay at the same level in the C-quadrant, which indicates my preference in dealing with emotions and people. One of the big learning's from this is that I need to try harder not to have an emotional response when under pressure at work! For a detailed description of how stress

can undermine learning, see Caine and Caine (*Making Connections: Teaching and the Human Brain*, 1991).

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Web Sites:

Herrmann International www.hbdi.com

Theory behind HBDI: www.herrmann.com.au/pdfs/articles/TheTheoryBehindHBDI.pdf

Learning by Design: www.learning-by-design.com

Roger Sperry: www.rogersperry.info