

MADISON PREP: ALTERNATIVE TO TEENAGE DISASTER

An alternative school in New York City makes successful use of individual learning styles.

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After years of moderate success but much frustration in working with difficult students in the New York City public schools, Helene Hodges asked her principal to give her the twenty "worst" youngsters at Junior High School 22 and a teaching area outside the school building. The Community Board agreed to rent basement space in an apartment complex nearby and assigned a teaching aide and a social worker.

Hodges supplemented a meager budget with \$600 of her own money to buy paint and materials. Responding positively to "Hodgie's" caring, her students cleaned and painted what had been a dark, dungeon-like basement. Two students designed a mural that included Madison Prep in its theme, while others helped custodians install lights, an old refrigerator, and donated furniture. The school is now colorfully divided by book shelves, desks, tables, filing cabinets, plane and rocket models, and supporting pillars. Students have their own file folders for reading, math, science, social studies, and English. They move cheerfully and purposefully through their self-created environment.

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Although for fiscal reasons, "Madison Prep" has been reassigned to the main junior high school building in the Delancey Street area of New York City, the concept lives on.



The first educational task completed by the youngsters was a diagnosis of each student's individual learning style. Students responded to a series of questions dealing with 18 aspects of how they learn best. The questions considered environmental factors (sound, light, temperature, and design); emotional factors (motivation, persistence, responsibility) and structure; sociological factors (working alone, with peers, with an adult, or in a variety of patterns); and physical factors (perceptual strengths, time of day, need for intake, and mobility).

After results of the questionnaire were discussed with the students, each one's working preferences were charted carefully on a learning style profile card. Assignments were prescribed based on individual student characteristics. For example, Amos was kinesthetic; he needed mobility and wanted to work by himself within a required structure. Annette needed to work with a friend and loved to sit quietly and read. She functioned best in the afternoon and would follow through on anything the teacher asked her to do if she were allowed to do it on her own self-designed schedule.



model planes and parts; English, creative writing ("When I landed on the moon I found. . ."), and so on.


Success

Hodges' 20 junior high students had problems ranging from chronic absenteeism, drug and alcohol abuse, criminal activities, and violent, aggressive behavior to academic non-achievement or severe underachievement. Their academic progress has been astonishing, with some students gaining from two to four years in reading and mathematics in a ten-month period. Of equal importance is their change in attitude. An esprit de corps has developed. Students attend regularly and no one has dropped out.

Hodges and the students have achieved this remarkable cohesiveness and positive outlook through mutual caring, achievement, "ownership" of the school, and a variety of self-image builders not uncommon in the best secondary schools. These include:

- *Madison Press*, a student newspaper
- Open House attended by families
- Interested visitors—state senators, assemblypersons, educators, the chancellor of New York City schools, and reporters
- Field trips to City Hall and the mayor, to museums, and to the Federal Aviation Administration in Washington, D.C.
- Awards—first place for three years in the Aerospace Fly-In Competition
- Environment designed, planned, organized, and used by the students
- Identification—Madison Prep T-shirts, photos, stories, guidance of visitors, self-exploration, group sessions, planning, and understanding individual learning styles.

Helene Hodges has succeeded beyond even her own optimistic expectations and so have her students. They help each other to overcome negative or criminal behavior and stand together as a group whose last chance to "make it in life" is the school they helped create. Their navy blue and white Madison Prep T-shirts are a source of pride that represent a sense of community and cohesion in the only organized and sensible world some of them have ever known. ■



As the profiles were developed, Hodges designed a variety of contract activity packages, multisensory instructional packages, programmed learning sequences, and other learning materials designed to respond to individual learning style differences.

Based on their interests and Hodges' experience, students and staff chose the integrating theme of aerospace as the curriculum base for almost all learning. Weekly conferences were arranged for each student; at times, planning and progress review was arranged daily or even hourly as an informal process to facilitate learning. Learning materials were prescribed according to each student's learning style and ability.

For example, contract activity package #3 is entitled "Parts of an Airplane and Function of the Controls." It includes a diagnostic test, 13 high-level objectives (such as "Name the control surfaces that cause an airplane to rotate around its vertical axis"), resource alternatives, diagrams, reporting alternatives, activity sheets, games, puzzles, and a post-test.

This individualized approach is used for social studies, English, science, math, and reading. Literature includes the study of myths about flight; science, the structure of birds and planes, meteorology, and space exploration; math, problems dealing with measurement after a long flight between two cities or the cost of

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