

## MIDDLE SCHOOLS AND JUNIOR HIGHS: THE BEST OF BOTH

In 1976 the Orange County, Florida, Public School System decided to study intermediate education and see where we were and how we could improve. We studied middle school concepts and heard such noted experts in middle-grade education as Paul George (November 1982), Al Orth, and Julia Thomason. After much inservice, we were able to take the middle school concepts that we could use and incorporate them in our junior high system.

Over the past three years, we have reorganized our teachers, classes, curriculum, and most of all, our attitudes. Orange County still has junior high schools, but our seventh and eighth graders are taught by interdisciplinary teams. As a result, teachers now know their students better than they did when students changed classes six periods each day. We still have our ninth grade, but they are housed together and are purposely not teamed. We want our ninth graders to be ready to be on their own when they reach our huge high schools.

Taking the best of both the intermediate school and the junior high has worked for us. We believe it is a good way for some systems to go, rather than arguing about which is better. Whatever works for your kids in your area to meet their special needs is what counts!

AMY STEELE  
Orlando, Florida

## LEARNING STYLES CONTROVERSIES

I have some concerns about the model by Bernice McCarthy presented in the October 1982 issue.

McCarthy took Kolb's cognitive model, added the Myers-Briggs personality characteristics, and threw in self-selected quotations about left and right brain-ness to develop the 4Mat System. In the process, she abandoned the integrity of both Kolb and Myers-Briggs and does not recommend using either instrument to identify the traits that each measures. In addition to seriously diminishing the effect of each instrument, McCarthy further muddies the issue by assuming there are only four learning styles to attend to.

The four "styles" described by McCarthy are not mutually exclusive characteristics; many of the contributing items appear in all types of people. In addition, anyone familiar with Gregorc's work or Hill's or the Dunns' or Hunt's knows that there are a multitude of styles (based on those aspects of learning style that are important to each person)—not just four.

Since McCarthy does not advocate the use of any instrument to identify each person's style, teachers cannot be certain that all four styles actually exist in every room. Thus, they either have to (a) guess that all four are in each class or (b) develop lesson plans for all four types whether or not they are present. For teachers to develop four different plans for each of McCarthy's types for every lesson might well turn out to be a waste of valuable time.

The most disturbing feature of 4Mat is that it advocates teaching to each of four styles one-fourth of each lesson—which defies the basic goals of the learning styles movement. Each child should learn correctly all the time—not part of the time! What will the other children do three-fourths of the time? What havoc will the disruptive children create three-fourths of their time?

Jerre Levy, perhaps the world's leading psychobiologist, wrote that all teaching reaches both sides of each

brain; that educators should not attempt to teach to only one side ever.<sup>1</sup> What McCarthy advocates contradicts the best advice of most experts in left-right brain research.

Finally, not a single published research report exists on McCarthy's model. With well-researched and fine theoretical constructs like the Dunns, Gregorc, Hill, Hunt, and Schmeck, *Educational Leadership* does a disservice to readers by equating 4Mat with a learning style model; it is not, and its efficacy in staff development is, to say the least, questionable.

<sup>1</sup>Levy, Jerre, "What Do Brain Scientists Know About Education?" *Learning Styles Network Newsletter* (Autumn 1982).

MASHA K. RUDMAN  
Amherst, Massachusetts

## Bernice McCarthy replies.

I should like to address each of Masha Rudman's statements in turn. Rudman states:

• that "the developmental base of 4Mat is questionable." Actually, the 4Mat learning style descriptions are composite findings of 18 researchers who have identified strikingly similar characteristics in learners. They are not "self-selected" descriptors.

• that "McCarthy does not recommend using the Myers-Briggs or Kolb inventories." This is not true. I recommend testing and continue to use it in my research.<sup>1</sup> My caveats about testing reflect my fear of labeling students as pure types: a fear Rudman seems to share when she speaks of "multitude of styles." We all know that once students are labeled, they tend to carry such labels throughout their school careers. I believe educators should approach testing with a cautious regard for human complexity.

● that "4Mat claims there are only four learning styles." This is not true. The 4Mat book<sup>2</sup> lists developmental, physiological, psychological, environmental, and situational variables that all affect learning styles.

● that "the 4Mat descriptors are not mutually exclusive." This is true. Researchers speak of strands of similarities that make up *initial* preferences for learning. To assume mutually exclusive characteristics would require, for example, that kinetic learners be instructed as if they were blind and deaf.

● that "teachers cannot be certain all four types are in each classroom." 4Mat calls for the use of one lesson plan for all students. That a plan is a sequence of learning and appeals to each of four learning styles in turn: from sensing/feeling to watching, to abstracting, to doing a la Kolb,<sup>3</sup> and alternates through right and left mode processing techniques. It is simply a way to teach learning, a way that is multiple styled, whole-brained, and manageable. Surely the learning style movement is not to be interpreted to mean that we teach students only segments of this process?

● that "4Mat does not teach students 'correctly all the time'." Does "correct" teaching mean that analytic learners are only to be given analytic tasks?—and students with a penchant for approaching learning with their right brains, only right brain tasks? 4Mat believes that correct teaching means affording opportunities for all learners to polish their gifts, while stretching and challenging them to assimilate and appreciate the complex diversity of human intelligence.

● that "4Mat contradicts the best advice of left/right brain research." Jerre Levy<sup>4</sup> states: "Both hemispheres are used in thinking, logic, and reasoning . . . the evidence strongly disputes the idea that students learn with only one

side of the brain, but we do have evidence that there are individual differences among people to the extent that one hemisphere is more differentially aroused than the other." The learning style/brain dominance evidence suggests a preferred approach to learning on the part of individuals, not an exclusive use of one side over the other. Joseph Bogen puts it this way: "If our society has overemphasized left hemisphere processing at the expense of right hemisphere processing, more is involved than the adjustment of difficulties of isolated individuals. It means that the entire student body is being educated lopsidedly."<sup>5</sup> What 4Mat is designed to do is help teachers understand and use both left and right mode processing techniques, to replace the current practice of schools to always approach learning from the left side, an injustice to all learners regardless of their preferences.

● that "not a single published research report exists on McCarthy's model." This is not true. Chapter Six of the 4Mat book explains the methodology. The research emphasis in 4Mat is the application of these findings to staff development, or how to assist teachers in using multiple methods of instruction for the enhancement of students' styles, while stretching them to be multiple styled and whole-brained. It appears to be successful. Much needs to be done. My hope is for the continued collaboration of all researchers. We need to be concerned with teacher skills and performance, not factious argument about whose test is the best student labeling device.

<sup>1</sup>David Kolb, *The Learning Style Inventory* (Boston: McBer and Co.); Paul E. Torrance, *Solat Form C-C* (Athens, Ga.: Department of Educational Psychology, University of Georgia).

<sup>2</sup>Bernice McCarthy, *The 4Mat System: Teaching to Learning Styles With Right/Left*

*Mode Techniques* (Oak Brook, Ill.: Excel, Inc.).

<sup>3</sup>David Kolb, *Organizational Psychology: An Experimental Approach*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall).

<sup>4</sup>Jerre Levy, "Research Synthesis on Right and Left Hemispheres: We Think With Both Sides of the Brain," *Educational Leadership* 40 (January 1983): 66-71.

<sup>5</sup>Joseph E. Bogen, "Some Educational Aspects of Hemispheric Specialization," *Dromenon* 1 (1979): 16-21.

## FEW WAYS TO LEARN

This letter is prompted by the continuing articles on learning style that find their way into *Educational Leadership*.

It seems evident that there are only a few ways to learn: we may either see, hear, touch, taste, or smell the material to be learned. I see no value in trying to determine personality type in learning style, or in determining whether silence or background music will help someone learn. This is a private matter of the individual.

There is one area where I concede the value of learning style. This is in situations where one modality (hearing or seeing, for instance) is impaired and another must be reinforced. We normally don't discover these disabilities through categorizing people by personality.

This concern with learning style and teaching style diverts us from a simple fact: learning is a difficult task, done in a serious fashion, with reinforcement of study skills and application of thought process.

In sending you this letter, I hope you will read it. I could have sent a cassette and then you could have heard it. Someone will undoubtedly touch it and learn nothing. Unless someone else has perfumed hands, there is no point in smelling it. And please don't taste it!

H. KENNETH SALENGER  
New Paltz, New York

Copyright © 1983 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.