

### Partners in Education

Five years later, the faculty at Blake Middle School are still using a learning styles approach, although we must note that not all teachers are using it on a daily basis. While some choose to do so because it suits their own styles, others renew their efforts with reminders and suggestions from the Curriculum Enrichment Team. Team members work to keep learning styles in the fore by

presenting mini-workshops for faculty and students, providing in-house training for new faculty as well as for the larger community, and serving as consultants for interested faculty. Blake is probably not a perfect model of a learning styles school, but we are making a sincere effort to form a partnership with students and parents to improve the quality of student learning. □

<sup>1</sup>R. Dunn, K. Dunn, and G. E. Price. (1987). *Learning Style Inventory* (Lawrence, Kans.: Price Systems, Inc.).

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MARIE CARBO

## Igniting the Literacy Revolution through Reading Styles

To become literate adults, students must be capable readers. To be capable readers, they must enjoy reading. Matching instruction to their reading styles can help accomplish all of these goals.

*Eric:* And I'll tell you right now. I don't want anyone else to go through what I went through.

*J.C.:* It's hard. It's not fun.

*Eric:* It's real hard. It's boring. You get tired after you finish reading. You don't ever want to read again.

*J.C.:* As soon as you're out of school, you don't read.

*Eric:* You go home and you watch TV., and you lay down until it's time to do something else. That's how tired you are from reading.

*J.C.:* You want to forget about school.

—From the videotape, *How Kids Feel About Learning to Read—Eric and J.C.* (1991)

For too long, learning to read has been a torturous process for many American students. The unnecessary distress these students have experienced is a sure sign that our educational system is suffering from deep-rooted misconceptions

about how children learn to read and how to guide them toward becoming literate adults. We need to change dramatically the way in which reading instruction is being delivered to our students.

At the heart of our literacy problem are the dangerous notions that all youngsters should be taught to read in the same way and that failure is nearly always the fault of the student. Those misguided beliefs, coupled with the

*Photograph by John L. Daugherty, Maricopa Elementary School, Maricopa, Arizona*

*For learners who are "global," the principal style of poor readers, listening to stories recorded at a slower-than-usual pace (the recorded book method) reduces much of the stress involved in reading and has been found to increase fluency and comprehension.*



Photograph by R. Fogg,  
East Side Elementary School, Brazil, Indiana



*For students with a strong preference for sitting informally while learning, a special reading place is just the ticket to create feelings of relaxation and pleasure.*

subskills lessons and worksheets used in America's classrooms for the past 20 years, have made learning to read needlessly difficult and boring.

Just ask Eric and J.C., the two middle school students quoted above, why they don't read. Their litany of charges has a familiar ring. Seldom were any attempts made to discover their interests, much less how they learn. They say they were bored by the steady stream of mindless worksheets; insulted by the low-level, uninteresting books; embarrassed by their placement in low reading groups and special education classes; and devastated by retention.

Yet, when Eric and J.C. started school, they were excited about learning to read. Both are bright youngsters from middle-class homes. What chance do our disadvantaged or lower ability students have to survive in the 1990s and beyond?

### **Education for the Future**

As a group, American students don't read well; in fact, they don't read much of anything. Many of our top students, who have grown accustomed to reading as little as possible, have a shallow fund of information. Our poorest readers are likely to wallow in expensive remedial or special education programs for a decade or so and then drop out of school.

The human and financial costs of illiteracy are astronomical. Our prisons are bursting with high school dropouts with low reading ability. A year of prison costs more than a year of schooling at Harvard. Corporate America estimates that it will spend at least \$30 billion annually to teach its workers reading, math, and writing skills (Barker 1990).

Workers will also need to learn large amounts of new material in unfamiliar situations, and they will need to acquire new skills as yet unidentified. More

than ever before, the future will demand knowledge. If we are to increase learning to meet that demand, educators must familiarize themselves with how learning styles influence that most fundamental skill, reading.

### **Five Recommendations to Increase Literacy**

The simple truth is that American students don't read because they associate reading with pain. Students will spend a substantial amount of their free time reading only when the act of reading is easy for them and when it is what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) calls a "flow experience," one that is intensely pleasurable.

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also helps students enjoy reading. But that's not all: when the reading styles of poor readers have been matched to their instruction, many have made gains in reading comprehension at 2 to 10 times their former progress within a school year (Carbo 1987). Of course, not all learning problems disappear when we accommodate students' reading styles, but we create unnecessary learning problems when we don't.

The following five recommendations incorporate the most effective procedures of successful reading styles programs.

- *Identify students' reading styles.* Using checklists, interviews, and questionnaires, teachers can identify students' reading styles. Particularly useful for this purpose is *The Reading Style Inventory*, which produces profiles that describe students' reading styles as well as the methods, strategies, and materials that match those styles (Carbo 1983).

- *Use reading methods and materials that match reading style strengths.* All youngsters, regardless of their styles, need ample opportunities to listen to and read good books and to share them with their classmates. Of course, poor readers display a wide variety of styles, but many who appear

to be at risk of reading failure today have styles similar to those of Eric and J.C. They are strongly global, tactile, and kinesthetic. "Globals," in particular, need many experiences with holistic reading methods, especially those that provide a *model* of good reading for them.

With the recorded book method, for example, excerpts of stories are recorded at a slower-than-usual pace, so that the printed and spoken words are synchronized for the student. The student listens to each recorded passage two or three times, while looking at the printed passage. When ready, the youngster reads it aloud to an adult or a peer.<sup>1</sup> This method has produced sharp reading gains in just months with global/visual students.

Eric and J.C.'s reading styles teacher, Gari Piper, knew that the recorded book method matched the boy's styles and that they were both highly kinesthetic. So Gari attached a music stand to a stationary bike, placed a book on the stand, and had the boys take turns at pedaling while listening to a recording of a portion of a story and following along in the book. Here's how they reacted to that event:

*Eric:* When you read on that thing, all the words just come out like that. I'm serious!

*J.C.:* When I got up there, well . . . when I started to read, I mean, I don't know, it was probably like a miracle. I started laughing because I couldn't help it because I was reading almost 100 percent better.

- *Demonstrate high expectations for students' achievement and a high level of respect for their different styles of learning.* Informing each student and his or her teachers and parents about the student's strengths increases everyone's expectations for the child's performance. Teachers and parents gain insights into how the student learns and, therefore, into how to teach the youngster. Students who have been failing begin to believe that they are not stupid, that they can learn.

Besides sharing reading styles information with students, respect can be demonstrated by differentiating instruction, designing comfortable learning environments (which may include soft lighting and comfortable furni-

ture), allowing snacks, and permitting youngsters to choose reading materials and reading partners and to work in cooperative learning groups.

- *Use reading materials that reflect the students' interests.* Most students want to choose what they read. The older the student, the greater the need for a wide choice of reading materials. Teachers can find out what the interests of their students are, provide many well-written books based on those interests, and read to their students at least once daily. Although simple, that formula has worked repeatedly.

- *Remove stress from learning to read.* Reading styles teacher Gari Piper described the feelings of the young adults she teaches to read.

They always have knots in their stomachs. They're scared and embarrassed; they can't stand being called on to read and being put down one more time. To them school is a chamber of terror.

Such stress can be decreased dramatically by: helping students to understand their reading style strengths, using instructional approaches that match those strengths, allowing students choices of reading materials based on their interests, designing comfortable learning environments, and by allowing slower readers to listen to tape recordings of stories or texts on their grade level, thereby often eliminating the need for low-level reading groups.

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### Natural, Easy, Enjoyable

How can high levels of literacy be accomplished in a short period of time? As an important beginning step, we need to learn about each student's reading style and about how style affects the way the child processes and retains information. Both the quickest and the most honorable path toward creating a literate society is to make learning to read what it should be: natural, easy, and enjoyable. Only then will our students choose to devote substantial time and effort to reading—and only then are they likely to become truly literate. □

<sup>1</sup>Generally, beginning readers can be placed in books that are a few months above their reading level. Students who are reading on a 3rd grade level or higher often do very well with recorded books close to or above their language-compre-

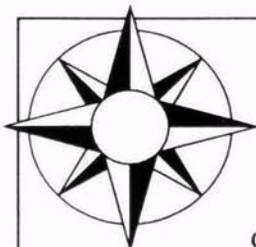
## We need to learn . . . about how style affects the way each child processes and retains information.

hension level, which may be a few years above their reading level. The method can be used with groups at a listening center or with individuals. For more information, see M. Carbo, (1989), *How to Record Books for Maximum Reading Gains* (Roslyn Hts., N.Y.: National Reading Styles Institute).

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## Charting a Course: Social Studies for the 21st Century

The National Commission on Social Studies in the Schools has released the Curriculum Task Force report, *Charting a Course: Social Studies for the 21st Century*. The Report proposes the first comprehensive revision of the social studies curriculum in 55 years.

The report recommends 12 years of social studies instruction for the schools, a history-geography matrix interwoven with the social sciences, and a three year course in United States and world history combined.

*Charting a Course: Social Studies for the 21st Century* is available from NCSS for \$7.00 per copy plus \$2.00 postage and handling charges for all orders under \$20.00. Include 10% postage and handling for all orders over \$20.00. A 20% discount for bulk orders of ten or more copies is available.

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