

Something wonderful is happening—and it's only just begun. Learning styles is the ingredient we needed to make many of our kids "come alive!" □

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JANET PERRIN

The Learning Styles Project for Potential Dropouts

The learning styles approach offers at-risk youth a second chance—just ask students in Amityville High School's successful program.

"I probably would have dropped out of school, and now I'm graduating."

"I never would have believed I'd be going to college, but I am!"

"For the first time, I really felt my teachers cared about me."

Those reactions are from 12th graders who, for the past two years, have participated in the Learning Styles Project for potential dropouts at Amityville High School in New York. Students were selected for the program at the end of 9th grade, according to three criteria: failure in two or three subjects, scores in the fifth stanine or below on a standardized reading test, and excessive absences.

During the summer of 1987, their teachers were trained in the Dunn and Dunn model (1978) of learning styles. Then, at the beginning of the year, the

school used block scheduling to group the students together for 10th grade math, social studies, English, reading, and science during the regular school day. During the first few

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weeks, the teachers introduced the concept of learning style. Soon the classes began to experiment with alternative groupings, varied instructional strategies, and individualized response activities. They discussed personal study habits and different environments for learning. Then they took the *Learning Style Inventory* (Dunn et al. 1982, 1987) and received individual printouts indicating their learning strengths and weaknesses. Teachers conferenced with each student on how to interpret the results.

At weekly staff meetings, administrators and guidance counselors used the printouts to plan counseling strategies and intervention techniques. At the same time, teachers consulted with each other to plan instructional strategies for students working alone, in small groups, or with the teacher; to develop activities suited to the various

perceptual strengths of students; and to design ways to accommodate their environmental and physical needs.

At first, the students were not positive about the program. They felt they were being treated differently from their peers. The teachers assured them that they were, indeed, learning the same material and taking the same tests as other classes and that only instructional techniques and activities had been changed. At this time, the students were also given the option to leave the learning style classes at the end of the second quarter.

Gradually, however, they began to recognize and respect their individual differences and to experience success in the form of passing grades. By the end of the second quarter, all but one of the students chose to remain in the program. And, at the end of 10th

grade, every student passed his or her English, social studies, math, and science courses. Their GPAs reflected mean increases of 18 points in English, 8 in social studies, 4 in math, and 10 in science over their 9th grade GPAs. They continued the program during 11th grade, and more than half of the students applied to colleges.

These gains in achievement are easy to calculate, but the gains in self-esteem are immeasurable. Now these at-risk students exhibit confidence and accept responsibility for their own learning. Their teachers, too, feel validated by their work with learning styles. For example, English teacher Cathy Corbett relates,

Being able to give a label to my flexible style of teaching is the most important item learning styles has given me as an educator. Being able to share information con-

cerning learning styles with my students is the greatest tool I can give them.

And math teacher Jesse Johnson says simply,

Learning styles produces more success for students and, thus, for me. □

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SUSAN SYKES, BRUCE JONES, AND JANE PHILLIPS

Partners in Learning Styles at a Private School

At Blake Middle School in Minnesota, "style" is the tie that binds students, parents, and teachers in their common goal of improving learning.

Since Blake Middle School in Hopkins, Minnesota, began using a learning styles approach in 1984, we have witnessed the development of a more positive learning environment not only for our students, but for faculty and parents as well. Significantly, adopting the approach has enabled children, parents, and teachers to become partners in the educational process.

Enthusiastic Students

Our students' response to learning styles has been overwhelmingly positive. After they take the *Learning Style*

*Inventory*¹ and receive the results, students and their parents discuss the profiles with the homeroom teachers. Those teachers who are particularly interested in the approach further educate students about their individual needs and allow class time to construct some study aids. We encourage them to use what they have learned about themselves as learners in all subjects, as well as outside school.

Adapting the classroom to accommodate learning styles can result in improved grades for students. For example, Geoff exhibited a high level of test anxiety and frequently did not

complete his tests because of time constraints. However, after his science teacher allowed him to work in an adjacent room where he could be alone and have the quiet atmosphere he preferred, Geoff was able to complete his work in the allotted time, and his grades went from D's to B's.

Students also learn to ask for what they need as learners. For example, shortly after we began emphasizing learning styles, a 9th grader explained to his teacher, "But Mr. Franz, with my learning style, I need to see the assignment, not just hear it!"

Prior to final examinations, our stu-

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