

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. □

#### References

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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*<sup>1</sup> 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-

dents request assistance at workshops conducted by the Curriculum Enrichment Team. In these sessions, faculty focus on one aspect of learning (usually perceptual style), suggesting ways students can maximize their time by using a visual, auditory, or tactile-kinesthetic approach as they study.

During testing sessions, when tensions can run high, our students have asked whether they may sit informally (if that is their learning style) and if they might eat non-sugary, quiet snacks (if they require intake). And, instead of scheduling all standardized testing early in the morning, we now schedule an additional session in the afternoon.

### Pleased Parents

Many classroom innovations appeal to students but leave their parents less than pleased. Learning styles appears to be an exception. Parents often find the information in their child's profile useful in helping them understand why the child approaches learning as he or she does. Connie is a case in point. After providing her a desk, chair, and study lamp in her room so that she could have a place away from the hubbub of daily life to concentrate and complete her work, Connie's parents were baffled by her low grades. After reviewing her learning style profile, Connie's teacher explained to her parents that Connie preferred to learn in an informal environment with adults nearby. After she moved her homework to the dining room table, Connie relaxed and began to receive passing grades.

During a parent conference, Ted revealed how much he dreaded the heavy reading load in 8th grade. Noting that he was an auditory learner, his homeroom teacher stated that she suspected he'd had difficulty learning to read. Ted's mother looked up, astonished, "How did you know that?" The teacher explained that auditory learners often have difficulty learning to read unless they are taught systematized phonics.

### Involved Faculty

Ten years ago almost every room in the school was arranged with desks in

## Parents often find the information in their child's profile useful in helping them understand why the child approaches learning as he or she does.

rows, food was strictly *verboten* in the classroom, and there was only one way to meet course requirements. Now, however, greater flexibility has emerged as a result of our collective awareness of learning style. The rows of desks have given way to more informal settings, as students choose to work in pairs or small groups to respond to study questions. Carrots and celery now appear in classrooms, especially just before lunch. And, to meet their course requirements, stu-

dents may choose to write papers, give presentations, or create visual or kinesthetic projects.

As a group, teachers are more sensitive to student needs, feeling equipped to suggest new ways for students to study. They are not as quick to blame students for low grades: "If you'd only open your book and read the assignment, you'd do better." They are more likely to use problem solving to get to the root of difficulties: "Tell me how you approached your studying for this test. Maybe you need to adjust your activities."

For example, Marc, a new student, was struggling in all subjects. His teachers reported that when they explained things to him, he gave them a blank stare and asked repeatedly for clarification of simple directions. The counselors and administrators determined that Marc should be tested for auditory discrimination skills and provided with instruction to accommodate his individual style. Not long ago, Marc would have been viewed as "not Blake material" and counseled to find another school. As a result of our emphasis on learning style, however, we view all students as assets to the school and make every effort to accommodate their learning needs.

Photograph courtesy of Blake Middle School, Hopkins, Minnesota



For students whose perceptual strength is tactual, a hands-on aid is a good way to introduce a topic or reinforce learning.

### 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.*



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