

might make sense to take one curriculum area and work with that, for example. But it has to be integrated with whatever else is going on in the school. It must not compete. It should not be learning styles or cooperative learning.

Where's all this going? What's the future of learning styles in education?

I'm very excited about the power of learning styles to contribute to our rethinking education. Certainly it can help

us stop looking for the panacea. We're not going to find the one right way to design or restructure schools. We're not going to find the one right way to teach reading. We're not going to find the best way to teach multiplication or supervise staff. If we believe in learning styles, we know that there are always going to be many right ways.

Most of all, learning styles can help us in a practical way to value diversity. It can help us to realize that we can set uniform objectives but honor individual approaches. It can give us direc-

tion for changing schools and help us to find ways for every student to be successful. □

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— KATHI L. HAND —

Style Is a Tool for Students, Too!

By examining their own and their classmates' learning styles, students can learn new strategies for accomplishing tasks.

Long seen as a powerful tool for teachers, knowledge of learning styles is equally valuable to students. Teaching my 8th grade students about style has become my most important learning styles application. I don't emphasize the diagnosis of student style; my purpose is to help students become more aware of their own styles and to help them develop strategies for dealing with the diverse demands of school and of life in general. We learn about style in two ways: through informal debriefing of class activities and through formal instruction in style.

The informal debriefing is probably the most important element. Several times each week we take a few minutes to talk about the ways that our own styles show in class. For example, after students finish a task, we might discuss the various ways in which they approached it and the successes and

frustrations they experienced. When we begin a task, especially an unfamiliar one, I talk about the kinds of thinking that the task requires, and we brainstorm ways to confront it. Frequently we see that very different approaches can produce equally successful results, thus reinforcing my constant refrain that there is seldom only "one right way."

Besides helping students become more aware of their own styles, these informal sessions have an added benefit: by hearing how other students attack particular problems or assignments, students can add many new strategies to their repertoires. This means that they are better equipped to deal with assignments that do not match their strengths; style is a tool, never an excuse.

This style debriefing has been especially useful when students work cooperatively. We can use style to under-

stand why it's easier to work with some people than with others. Style also helps us understand many of the conflicts that arise in groups; seeing behaviors as "different" rather than as "good" or "bad" helps the group concentrate on finding productive solutions. Debriefing cooperative activities also allows me to reinforce students whose styles make them good at facilitating the group, or keeping it on task, or seeing new ways to solve problems that arise. Taking these few minutes during the school day to look at style issues keeps style in the front of everyone's mind and gives me repeated opportunities to reinforce the values that I find in style diversity.

Much of my formal teaching about style happens in our work on study skills. Using Ulrich and Guild's student workbook *No Sweat! How to Use Your Learning Style to Be a Better Student*,¹ we explore the impact of style on skills

like organization and test-taking. We might brainstorm and test strategies for note-taking, after which students practice the strategies that work best for them. Or we may examine ways in which style preferences influence our listening behavior and responses to directions. Again, we share ways to deal with the problems we encounter, knowing that no one technique will work for everyone.

Students also consider their styles in relation to their study environments at home. After comparing our "ideal" study environments, which range from

sterile desktops to sandy beaches, we identify ways to make our real environments match our ideals a little more closely. Students see that the ultimate test of an environment is the quality of thinking and work that the individual student does there.

This focus on learning styles benefits students in many ways. They gain confidence in their strengths and develop diverse strategies for coping with the challenging situations that inevitably arise. Students begin to see how they learn most effectively and efficiently; therefore, they are better

able to take responsibility for their own learning. And, most important, students learn that their ways are not better or worse than those of their peers—they are simply different. □

¹C. Ulrich, and P. Guild, (1986), *No Sweat! How to Use Your Learning Style to Be A Better Student* (Seattle, Wash.: The Teaching Advisory).

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PAT JAOUEN

Fostering Students' Awareness of Learning Styles

Helping students understand learning styles lets them see new perspectives and increases their tolerance for each other's differences.

Most of the staff members at Mt. Everett Regional High School in Sheffield, Massachusetts, have taken learning styles courses with Pat Guild and her associates over the last few years. Our lives were so positively changed by this, we wanted our students to become aware of "styles," too.

We have done several things toward this end for our 7th and 8th grade students. At first we decided to administer the short form of the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* test to the 7th graders, but we had to do quite a bit of prep work on vocabulary with the students so they could understand the questions. Someone suggested we use the *Murphy-Meisgeier* test instead, since it is geared to children. Each time we administer it, we help the children define the meanings of *introversion*, *extraversion*, and other style terms by using a couple of pages from Page's (1983) *Looking at Type*.

We then set up activity stations, each geared to a particular type, and students move from one to the other, trying to figure out which activity goes with which style by experiencing each one on an individual basis. The children seem delighted to find that they can move around, handle items, talk through certain processes, and just experience new ways of learning. An animated discussion usually follows this activity, during which we hear things like "It's awesome!" and "Can we do this again?"

We found that it's easier to design activities in our cooperative learning groups now that we include a cross section of types in each group. We also reinforce style awareness by focusing on individual styles. For example, the teacher of our 8th grade health program reviews the different styles and personality types. Students then analyze lessons from various disciplines

to determine what appeals to different styles. This leads to a unit on personalities; students learn the similarities and differences among individual personalities. These classes have helped children become more tolerant of one another. Now they help each other, instead of making fun or getting frustrated as they often did in the past.

What a help it has been for students to actually come forward and discuss ways in which they can learn a particular lesson! Learning styles has certainly had an impact at our school, and we are all the richer for it. □

Reference

Page, E.C. (1983) *Looking at Type*. Gainesville, Fla.: Center for Applications of Psychological Type.

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