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AUTHOR Reckinger, Nancy R.
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ABSTRACT

This speech presents a case for "joining hands" as the educational theme of the 1980s. In "joining hands" with their students, schools need to abandon assembly-line models of instruction in order to adopt learning and teaching styles that nurture students' inner potential and provide for individual differences of both teachers and students. Hence, the speech argues that teachers should combine the roles of "farmer" in attending to optimum conditions for students' physical and mental development, and "artist" in recognizing and respecting their natural talents. A list is provided of over 50 learning style variables, classified as environmental, physical, sociological, psychological, and mental. The rest of the speech provides advice for teachers in learning to adjust their teaching styles to fit varied classroom needs and various types of students. Teaching styles are categorized according to the four basic personality types of students (based on the Myers-Briggs indicators): SJ (sensing-judging), SP (sensing-perceiving), NT (intuitive-thinking) and NF (intuitive-feeling). Advice is then provided, along with a chart, on aspects of educational environment that can or cannot be varied to accommodate different learning styles. The author presents a point-by-point comparison of "alternative" (humanistic) teachers with traditional teachers and concludes with an appeal for an instructional model that calls for teaching people according to the way they learn and simultaneously recognizing that teachers, like students, vary in style and personality. (TE)

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JOINING HANDS: USING LEARNING AND TEACHING STYLES

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Speech given at Indiana University's Alternative Schools Conference, June 29, 1980

Joining hands before it is too late is the educational theme of the 80's and we can do it in a number of ways.

Getting education back WITH the community is one way. More and more schools are bringing the community into the schools and getting students out into the community. Joining hands with the community helps us learn to recognize and embrace different ways of learning. It reminds us vividly that the traditional schoolhouse has never served the needs of all students. Disraeli left school at 15, preferring his father's library. Michael Bennet, author of Chorus Line, left school to travel to Rome, London and Paris - surely as educational as his final semester in high school would have been. Joining hands with the community is a necessity if we have real hopes of meeting everyone's learning style needs.

Joining hands with parents is another way. Parents are taking an increasingly active interest in becoming educational advocates for their children, and there is a growing awareness that parents have an absolutely necessary role in the education of children. A number of organizations are working at ways of making that connection again; for example our Center for Educational Alternatives is working on a Parents' Record of Educational Progress, an elaborate kind of home cumulative record, which reverses the trend of telling parents, especially secondary school parents, to stay out of the educational arena and let the professionals do it. Schools were never intended to be the sole educating instrument. People have always learned a great deal at home and we need to join hands with parents.

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Another way of joining hands - and the critical way for all of the adults in the lives of children - is with our students. Joining hands with... is quite different from ordering, manipulating, or controlling.

Four points that are part of joining hands with students involve using learning and teaching styles. One of those points is the need for the right attitude - an attitude of helping; an attitude of including people in on the decisions which affect their lives from the earliest possible years so they learn how to make their decisions from the inside-out, learning to recognize, develop and use self-guidance mechanisms.

The second idea is that learning style theory gives us exciting, specific, practical means of providing for individual differences, helping people know themselves better so they can develop their own personal learning style.

A third point is that educators are people too - which means that they are individually different, have different styles - and that that has to be OK. There is not one way to be a good teacher. There are basic personality differences leading to distinctly different learning and teaching styles - and probably you cannot Style Flex those basic differences a great deal.

The fourth idea is a plea and a warning that if we as educators do not pay attention to the first point - that it is not our job to control other people or run their lives for them by making all their decisions for them, - and if we focus our attention on a need to match learning styles to "correct" educational environments, then learning style will probably become one more educational "fad" that promised far more than it delivered even as it remains part of educational rhetoric.

The first point again is that joining hands with students requires an attitude of nurturing inner potential.

There is an internal design in nature - the determination of each seed to develop into a specific organism with all of its own complex and characteristic parts.

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Acorns strive mightily to become oak trees. Pollywogs inexorably become frogs. You can try all you want to turn them into roses or trout, but you will only succeed in stunting, distorting or destroying what could have been a perfectly fine oak tree or frog.

Nurturing that internal design requires the expertise and the humility of a farmer who gets the most growth from his seed, and on the other hand, the joy and expectancy of an artist who approaches each new canvass as a new opportunity. A farmer accepts the necessity of knowing the nature of the things he would grow and the kind of environment in which they develop best. The artist expects each work to be an exciting original.

It does not occur to the farmer to impose conditions he thinks "ought to be" on plants or animals. He knows that unless he provides the conditions innately required by the various things he would raise, he is out of business. No farmer could stay in business if a third of his fields or animals perished and up to another third were functionally minimal - which is our current record in schools. He cannot feed them all the same thing at the same time in the same kind of place for the same number of months. He studies the nature of each variety of plant and animal he would raise.

However, the agricultural model is not enough by itself for it does not deal with heart, spirit, and will -- or self-determination. Some people would have us think that will doesn't count for much - that we are all manipulable and extrinsically motivated. But I have not seen genius flower through such manipulation. Capacities are part of the internal design of people and are needs motivating people from within to develop.

Along with the agricultural attention to optimum conditions for physical and mental development, we need the artist's fascination with original combinations and respect for genius. Genius is defined in the dictionary as "a natural talent or

inclination" and we could so arrange our educational system to nurture and enjoy the creative genius that is a part of each person.

So, to join hands with students we need to leave the medical and assembly-line models, creating from farmers and artists a new model of helping individuals create their lives.

Secondly, learning style theory is telling us that since all of our students do not learn the way we teach them, everyone would be better off if we taught them the way they learn.

Many people¹ are working in the field of learning styles, identifying possible variables. Without presuming to have included all of the variables mentioned as a part of learning style, the following list of over 50 from the literature indicates that there are a great many dimensions of human beings which can affect the way they learn:

LEARNING STYLE VARIABLES

ENVIRONMENTAL

- Sound - quiet or noise
- Light - bright or dark
- Design- structured or informal
- Temperature - cool or warm
- Place -

PHYSICAL

Time Preferences

- Time of day - bio rhythms
- Concentrated or segmented periods of time
- Externally imposed constraints motivating or discouraging
- Spontaneous - Self Imposed - Externally Imposed
- Ability to behave according to time expectations of others

Pace

Food

Mobility

SOCIOLOGICAL

Social or Independent

Peers

Adults

Instructional Mode - Self, Tutorial, Adult, Group

With -- Self; Peers - pair, team, group; Adult; Varied.

Relationships - People/People; People/Things; People/Action

Personal - Impersonal

Competitive - Non-competitive

PSYCHOLOGICAL

Locus of control - external or internal

Locus of status - derived or earned

Motivation

Persistence

Responsibility

Counseling support needed

Risk taking or cautious

Methodical or open

Independent/self-directed or need explicit instructions and directions

Use constructive criticism or need praise

Creativity

Temperaments - Need Freedom, Mastery, Belonging, or Self-Actualization

Prefer Action, Ideas, Order, Expression

Curricular Interests - liberal arts, general studies

Special studies, on particular topic

Cultural Codes - esthetic, proxemic, synoetic, empathic, ethic,

histrionic, kinesic, temporal

MENTAL

Locus of information - Intrapersonal or extrapersonal

Field Independent or Field Dependent

Left Brain dominant Right Brain dominant

Analytic Global

MENTAL (cont'd.)

Analytic	Relational
Independent	Subjective
Deductive	Inductive
Level of symbolization - concrete or abstract	
"Conceptual Level" - self reliant and complex information processing or dependent and simple information processing	
Thinking - random or sequential look for differences or commonalities reflective or impulsive	
Learn - passively or actively vicariously or through direct experiences	
Perceptual preference - visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, olfactory, taste	

We lack a uniform way of analyzing or talking about even these variables. Rita and Kenneth Dunn aim at culling out what they call "FACTORS", or those few variables which strongly affect a person's learning. For example Temperature is an element that can be a Factor, which means that some people learn much more when they are warm, others when they are cool, but for most people temperature does not make a significant difference - at least within a tolerably large range - hence it is not a factor. With other variables, such as locus of control or brain dominance, preferences are always significant to learning style.

Educators also assume some variables are given - or unchangeable determinants of learning style, while other variables can and should be changed through school activities. For example, temperature is allowed as a given, while there is evidence that achievers are internally controlled rather than externally.² Hence, we should "teach" or develop internality.³

Taken all together, much remains to be known about Learning Styles before we can develop a taxonomy or precise applications. It is clear that a great deal of work is still needed to clarify the variables and define their parameters.

Then why is this field of "STYLES" so exciting, so wonderful, so valuable to educators here and now? Because it provides real, understandable, usable handles to that so far gossamer subject of meeting the needs of individual differences seen repeatedly in the literature but far less often in the classroom.

It opens the conversation of individual differences on personal, understandable terms. Teachers, parents, students all reach moments of insight - the "aha" of "That's why I do that" or "That's why that kid does that."

It rips the veil of our egocentrism which otherwise leads us to think there is only one right way to organize a school and that is, of course and always, the way we learn. To realize that not everyone learns the way we do or sees the world the way we do or values what we do can be a shock. Discovering that not everyone was interested in self-actualization - that in fact it absorbs the attention of only about 12 percent of the population - was a great surprise for me.

Which leads us to point number three, TEACHING STYLES. What about the teacher in this process of determining learning styles and providing nurturing educational environments?

Simon and Bryam say, "While it is true that you cannot readily change your personality, you can change your behavior." They suggest that teachers learn to STYLE-FLEX. "The ability to shift away from your own primary style to a more appropriate style," they say, "...is the heart of effective teaching."⁴

Joyce and Weil suggest training teachers in all the models of teaching, expecting them then to choose the appropriate models to fit varied classroom needs. They define a MODEL OF TEACHING as "a pattern or plan, which can be used to shape a curriculum or course, to select instructional models, and to guide a teacher's actions."⁵

That sounds good. It appears to be a practical solution to the recognition of differences in learners, and it certainly is in line with the age-old and never

challenged myth that any "good" teacher can teach any group of children the subject matter the teacher has studied in college. Yet every teacher I know admits in safe quarters that there are some students they cannot reach or with whom they find it particularly difficult to work.

Research in personality styles-which affect learning and teaching styles - sheds light on this subrosa fact. A number of investigators have used the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator⁶ to look at learners and teachers. The Myers-Briggs is based on Jung's psychological types which, if you accept his theory, make people fundamentally different.

David Keirsey and Marilyn Bates have reduced the 16 types of the Myers-Briggs to 4. They say, "People can't change form no matter how much and in what manner we require them to. Form is inherent, ingrained, indelible. ... Of course, some change is possible, but it is a twisting and distortion of underlying form. Remove the fangs of a lion and behold a toothless lion, not a domesticated cat. Our attempt to change a spouse, offspring or others including teachers can result in change, but the result is a scar and not a transformation."

According to this idea of Styles, "...people are different from each other, and ... no amount of getting after them is going to change them.

"...They want different things; they have different motives, purposes, aims, values, needs, drives, impulses and urges. ...They believe differently: they think, cognize, conceptualize, perceive, understand, comprehend, and cogitate differently."⁷

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator groups people into INTUITIVES - labeled N - and SENSING TYPES - labeled S. These two categories refer to the way people prefer to take in information or process the world - through their senses which is true for 76% of the population, or through their intuition, true for 24% of the population.⁸

Most style researchers work with four rather than 16 styles. Keirsey and Bates use four groups, coupling intuition (N) with feeling or thinking, so that styles are NF or NT, and coupling sensing (S) with perception and judging to get SP or SJ styles. If these are fundamental, unchangeable, un-flexible personality types, as it appears they are, they have deep implications for education as a whole and especially for alternative education. So people are SJ, SP, NF, or NT.

Comparing the general population, and therefore students at least up to the age of 16, with the teaching population shows an interesting pattern, explaining some of our current pain and problems.⁹

LEARNING - TEACHING STYLE PERSONALITIES

MYERS-BRIGGS STYLES	THE GENERAL POPULATION (STUDENTS)	THE TEACHING POPULATION (K-12)
SJ	38%	56%
SP	38%	2%
NT	12%	6%
NF	12%	36%

The SJ or Traditional, conforming person is 38% of the population and 56% of the teaching population. Schools as originally formed needed and rewarded the SJ student and teacher. They continue to reward them. Respect for institutions and conformity to pre-set rules were what schools were all about when 10 to 30% of the population graduated from high school.

The NF or Catalyst, alternative school type person is 12% of the population and 36% of the teaching population. They have always been a part of the school

scene, generally thought a bit kooky, pushing the system for more personal, human, aesthetic approaches until the SJ's called a halt and pushed back to the basics or to science or whatever, as the pendulum has been swinging for many years.

The NT or Idea person is 12% of the population and only 6% of the teaching population. Those attracted to teaching most often go into college teaching. Of those in public school teaching, nearly all are in high schools and usually in math or science.

Finally we come to the SP - the person who must have and who does not truly exist without ACTION - who learns and lives through sensory perception - a whopping 38% of society and a miniscule 2% of the teachers, most of whom are in elementary schools.

As might be expected, these doing students who see no reason or value in sitting still, being neat, piddling with dittos, or even with reading books, drive the traditional SJ teacher up the wall. SJ teachers frequently truly believe these SP kids are tormenting them purposely. The SP is frequently forced out, kicked out, eased out, pushed out.

It is this startling gap between the numbers of SP learners and the few teachers who identify with or understand how they learn which seems to me to be one of our most serious and exciting challenges.

Teachers have as many and as valid individual differences as students have and probably not all of those differences can be Style-Flexed away so that all teachers can match any given student style. Descriptions of the four styles follow:

SJ TEACHING STYLE: THE TRADITIONAL SCHOOL PERSONALITY

56% OF THE TEACHERS

School and Classroom Organization

Carefully organized, neat
Seats in rows - the traditional pattern
Well-established routines
Work well-laid-out, planned in advance, sequential
Has specific rules, expects them to be followed
Bulletin boards neat and up to date

Personal Characteristics

Must belong and wants to nurture and support people
Foundation, stabilizer of the socially recognized institutions
Values students who are on time, neat, prepared for class,
respectful, follow instructions
Supports curriculum and extracurricular activities
Is responsible, law abiding, expects others to be

Student-oriented Teacher Attitudes

Wants students to acquire specific skills
Stresses memory and comprehension
Active students are often perceived as making trouble on purpose
Willing to devote energy and effort to conforming students
Impatient with the nonconforming students

Teacher Behavior

Favors recitation, drill, tests, demonstration
Rewards the right answer
Uses the Socratic method well
Sees running the classroom as his/her responsibility
Verbalizes "corrective" statements, counts errors

NF TEACHING STYLE: THE CATALYST PERSONALITY

36% OF THE TEACHERS

School Classroom Organization

- Can be a "three ring circus"
- A multitude of simultaneous activities
- Informal or varied classrooms
- A genius at running a democratic classroom
- Willing to change a lesson if students need other experience
- Uses a variety of instructional technology
- Excellent with group processes if he/she has learned the skill

Personal Characteristics

- Personal Charisma - relates well with students and colleagues
- Enthusiastic
- Does not believe he/she is the source of all knowledge
- Creative approach to teaching
- Empathic
- Puts off paper work

Student-oriented Teacher Attitudes

- Committed to students he/she teaches
- Gifted at seeing possibilities of students
- Relates to each student in the classroom
- Builds self-concepts

Teacher Behavior

- Communicates caring and enthusiasm
- Favors group projects, interaction, discussion, shows, simulations, games
- Uses values curriculum
- Individualizes instruction well
- Uses a variety of materials
- Doesn't like workbooks

NT TEACHING STYLE: THE VISIONARY PERSONALITY

6% OF THE TEACHERS

School and Classroom Organization

Room can be cluttered
Emphasizes ideas - often in science and math
Formal, impersonal
Organize in their mind rather than on paper

Personal Characteristics

Like to solve problems more than to implement solutions
Cares more about process than results
Interested in understanding
Loves intelligence, competence
Can get bored easily
Prefers not to teach the same thing over and over
Can be oblivious to the emotional climate
Sees relationships between complex components

Student-oriented Teacher Attitudes

Dreads boring students, may move rapidly
Holds high standards for students
Impersonal in his/her approach to students
Wants to lead students to discover relationships between complex components
Enjoys tracking the thought processes of students
Has difficulty communicating with students

Teacher Behavior

Favors lectures, tests, compositions, projects, reports
Helps students learn to think
Encourages students to go off on their own projects when the projects make sense
Uses problem-solving approach
Becomes impatient if class drags
Avoids boring, sometimes goes too fast
Values knowledge of subject matter
Students know where they stand
Often fails to verbalize positive gains of students

SP TEACHING STYLE: THE SENSOR PERSONALITY

2% OF THE TEACHERS

School and Classroom Organization

May turn in lesson plans, but doesn't follow them
Filled with a jumble of objects
Construction materials
Areas for many kinds of activities
Uses media materials

Personal Characteristics

Hungers for Action
Thrives on performance
Must be free
Impulsive, unpredictable
Cannot NOT use tools
Enjoys randomness
Pragmatic
Values activity, leadership, competition
Does many things at once
Doesn't waste time
Unpredictable
Focus on the immediate, spontaneity, enjoyment

Student-oriented Teacher Attitudes

Interaction mainly teacher to student
Not too concerned about homework
Enjoys performing for students
May or may not teach prescribed curriculum
Likes activities and competition

Teacher Behavior

Favors projects, contests, games, demonstrations,
shows, activities
Uses concrete and physical materials
Wants students to be active
Designs plans for concrete objectives
May or may not complete activities
Performs dramatically for class-exciting
Entertaining, fun, cheerful and the unexpected
Something is always happening
Excellent at construction activities

A teacher's style greatly affects the amount of Structure in the classroom on a continuum from Low to High Structure. Variables within the area of Structure include: planning, location, design, time, authority, their own roles, grouping, grading, materials, and methods. Other variables affected by the 4 personality styles include: values, goals, standards, amount of direction and supervision, methods of influencing students, relatedness, tone, and approach to tasks. Research by others, including Combs,¹⁰ Rogers,¹¹ Aspy,¹² tells us that concepts held by the teacher greatly affect what happens in the classroom. Teaching Style variables include important concepts about other people and about him or her Self.¹³

Teachers, like people in general, are saddled by their own goals, needs, motives and value systems. From kindergarten on, children are the victims or benefactors of these biases. Teachers cannot help perceiving children as ideal, good, cooperative, or slow, unruly and difficult. The favored receive most of the teacher's attention, time and positive rewards. The other children often receive negative feedback or are generally ignored.

The Traditional SJ teacher will probably always be uncomfortable with and disturbed by clutter and disorganization. She will probably always feel in her heart that the students who come on time with their homework done are the better students. And the NT teacher cannot help but be thrilled by the student who wants to pursue an idea too.

Dealing with so many variables boggles the mind and threatens to overwhelm us - which brings us to the fourth point. The cry goes up, "How do we match learning styles and environments?" and "How can we train teachers to adapt to all of these styles?"

One problem with matching seen by experts is that, "Establishing a number of different learning environments into which students are placed via a preference

inventory may create a new form of an old problem: tracking."¹⁴ Did you hear the tripper - the Key Words? To me they are "INTO WHICH STUDENTS ARE PLACED." We - the experts - are still in the business of PLACING them - the students. Another expert says, "...it cannot be assumed that either allowing students voluntarily to choose among learning environments or assigning them to classes on the basis of subjective judgments of school administrators will match them with environments most likely to promote academic success and prevent delinquency.'

"Student learning style assessments may ultimately provide a basis for more rational matching of students and learning environments though,...there is not enough evidence available to adequately evaluate the effectiveness of these approaches."¹⁵

Something there is that doesn't trust people participating in the decisions which affect their lives, learning who they are and how to choose what is good for them from the inside out.

Consequently the problem is perceived as the need for us to match them. To see what is involved in accomplishing that task, it is helpful to see what it is that the theorists are talking about matching with learning styles or what makes up the Learning Environment?

A list of elements of Learning Environment from Hunt and Sullivan's "Between Psychology and Education" follows.¹⁶

MATCHING LEARNING STYLES TO THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Elements of Environment* Connected With Learning Styles:	School Can Vary	Teaching Can Vary
1. Cultural setting - national and community elements and values		
2. Current school setting - culture of the school, class values, resources available, rural-urban-suburban locale, etc.		
3. School or Classroom Characteristics - size; number, age, and sex of students and teacher; physical characteristics, etc.	X-	X--
4. School or Classroom Organization - grouping; power relationships, decision-making patterns; division of labor; communication patterns; relations among school staff, students; peer influence; etc.	X+	X+
5. Personal Characteristics of Teacher - personality structure, religious attitudes, social attitudes, philosophy of life, values, etc.		
6. Student-oriented Teacher Attitudes - educational goals, concepts about the teacher role and student role, attitudes toward teaching, acceptance or rejection of student, etc.		?
7. Teacher Behavior - teaching practices, specific teaching techniques, response to student behaviors, changes in teaching strategies, materials used, etc.	X--	$\frac{?}{X+}$

*Adapted from
The Hoffman-Lippitt system from Hunt's "Between Psychology and Education". pp. 89-90.

Which of these seven elements can we vary to match Learning Styles?

Not the cultural setting nor the current school setting. With school or classroom characteristics administrators and board members have some choices. At least they build the schools and hire the teachers. Teachers have virtually none.

It would seem that both groups have real opportunities to determine and vary the school and classroom organization. The choices are largely theirs, determined by their skills, knowledge, and PERSONALITIES.

But number five is the Teacher's Personality. Obviously the school cannot change the personality of a teacher once hired. Neither can the teacher! If we care about varied learning environments including varied teacher personalities, then it is up to the hiring process.

With teacher attitudes about students, once again the school can do little to vary a teacher's attitude toward students. Can the teacher vary those attitudes? That is an interesting question. Aspy¹⁷ and Carkhuff¹⁸ think so. Knowing about Learning Styles might help them. Even so - a single teacher cannot vary his or her attitudes to suit the Learning Style needs of various students.

Which brings us to number seven - Teacher Behavior - which is where most proponents of MATCHING Learning Styles with Learning Environments start. The trend seems always to just switch the mechanisms - to say "Do this and this and this" and "Don't do that and that and that." Behave differently - Flex.

With an internally illogical contradiction which reveals either the rejection or lack of understanding of the very concept of individual differences being dealt with, we hear or read that "Teachers should....." - meaning ALL teachers should, implying that all teachers could if they would - which says that all teachers are enough the same that they can all do the same things if they just learn the technology, which Teacher Educators can of course - or should of course - plaster on the outside, turning out automatons trained to jump through the hoops of the latest educational fad.

It seems like one more of many successful efforts by the assembly-line mentality to absorb, distort and destroy an opposing organizational concept.

But COULD you - is it possible for Schools or Teachers to vary Teacher Behavior to meet the needs of different Learning Styles? Schools try - with more or less success - depending on whom you listen to - to change teacher behavior through Professional Development Programs and Staff Development - so give the School the benefit of a possible positive influence, an X--.

What about Teachers themselves? On the fact of it, it certainly seems as though they could learn enough different models and skills of teaching and become knowledgeable enough about learning styles that they could then vary their behavior to match the needs of the students - if they would. That would be the Farmer-like way I mentioned earlier. Give them a big X+ that they could - they are certainly intelligent enough to learn that academic stuff.

But WOULD they? WILL they? Or is the Will tied in with the personality and the attitudes in such a way that the mind can take in whatever it must without ever synthesizing it into action if the personality and attitudes reject it as irrelevant?

It is possible for teachers to learn skills, techniques, methods. It seems unlikely that they can learn to see themselves, others and the world differently. They first of all must see the need for the skills and techniques, and they must desire to learn them in order to use them, before they will begin to truly learn them.

Let me show you what I mean with the Alternative Teacher Style.

These are SKILLS alternative teachers say they need, and they are all teachable-learnable:

Skills Requested by Alternative Teaching Staffs

Create structures for personalized learning

- Contracts
- Budget time
- Schedule travel
- Avoid liability problems
- Organize and handle many things going on at the same time
- Create curriculum - especially interdisciplinary curriculum

Work constructively and productively WITH parents

- Plan the program WITH students
- Precipitate youthful decision-making without controlling it
- Help them learn to take responsibility for their own learning

Locate and form new learning relationships with community resources

Shared decision-making skills with parents and students

- Communication skills - especially empathic responses
- Active listening
- Accurate messages

Problem solving skills

Knowledge of and ability to deal with stages of moral development

Social literacy skills and how to teach them

- Evaluation skills - especially formative evaluation
- Variable credit
- Setting standards and goals
- Including affective goals
- Action or proficiency oriented
- Share decision-making to help youth learn to evaluate their own learning

Negotiating skills

- Political and public relations skills to maintain the alternative with
 - Administrators
 - traditional peers
 - parents
 - prospective students
 - community
 - other alternative school students and staff (networking)

These are PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS of Alternative Teachers:

THE ALTERNATIVE TEACHER

The alternative teacher's role requires new skills and special personality characteristics. The skills can be learned, given the careful selection of alternative teaching-style personalities.

Personality Characteristics

Democratic personality structure

Patience

Sensitivity

Sincere interest in students

Sense of humor

Enabling

Doesn't take herself or her authority too seriously.

Life-long learner

Takes risks

Tries, sometimes fails, along with or in front of students

Focuses on creation rather than completion

Accepts differences; recognizes and enjoys diversity

Free of egocentrism and ethnocentrism

Comfortable with different learning styles

Empathic

Unconditional Positive Regard

Genuine

Affirms self and others

Believes in and trusts people

Establishes person-to-person relationships

Develops a sense of community with others

Teachers who don't have these Personality Characteristics usually don't see the need for these Skills! They ask for other skills - like Classroom Management and Discipline.

Characteristics differentiating alternative and traditional teaching styles follows:

THE ALTERNATIVE TEACHER:

1. Emphasizes process.
2. Assumes facilitating role, believing that the responsibility for learning belongs to the student; gives the student choices of what and how he will learn.
3. Plans curriculum to meet student needs and interests, often with student; flexibly adapts to meet district requirements.
4. Aims for understanding and application of learning.
5. Stresses learning by discovery, problem solving, doing, discussion and interaction.
6. Concerned with growth and development of student's capacities, cognitive and affective, emotional, total development.
7. Defines "teacher" as whoever knows what others want to learn.
8. Role barriers blur, establishes student interaction.
9. Facilitates individual learning through many individual and small group activities, grouping structured by the needs and interests of students.
10. Has flexible classroom routines, mutually determined.

THE TRADITIONAL TEACHER:

1. Emphasizes content.
2. Assumes responsibility for and prescribes what and how students learn.
3. Plans curriculum to cover material, has a required course of study.
4. Aims for information acquisition.
5. Stresses learning by memorization and regurgitation.
6. Concerned principally with cognitive development.
7. Defines "teacher" as the credentialed person in authority.
8. Maintains dominant authority position in established school hierarchy; students subordinate.
9. Teaches the "class", thinks of it as a single unit, provides one activity for everyone most of the time.
10. Establishes fixed classroom routines.

THE ALTERNATIVE TEACHER (cont'd.)

11. Provides many learning sources - books, other reading material, concrete items, and activities.
12. Works with students and other adults to set rules.
13. Understands reasons for rules, follows them when appropriate.
14. Creates an informal environment; students often sitting on couches, bean-bags or the floor.
15. Establishes informal interaction patterns; everyone uses first names.
16. Helps students develop self-control and insight into rules and laws.
17. Tolerant of a multitude of different student activities; not easily disrupted.
18. Prefers students who develop autonomy, reason, self-control and creativity; elated when students develop interdependency skills.
19. Allows many trials, offers encouragement, stresses successes.
20. Sets time schedule with students, often flexible for individuals, variable credit for work produced available.
21. Sets goals and criteria with student, uses grade time to involve student in self-evaluation.
22. Evaluates formatively for planning learning.

THE TRADITIONAL TEACHER. (cont'd.)

11. Uses essentially one text book.
12. Demands compliance with rules of the classroom set by him and rules of the school set by the administration.
13. Follows the rules himself.
14. Creates a formal environment; students' seats often assigned.
15. Requires formal human interaction patterns; maintains distance with student, having them use Mr.-Mrs.-Miss, calling them by first names.
16. Is a firm and fair disciplinarian - stresses law and order.
17. Impatient with the non-conforming student, especially with disruptive students.
18. Prefers the obedient student.
19. "Corrects" students so they see their "errors."
20. Prescribes time schedule, usually has one schedule for all students, grade given for work produced by deadline.
21. Establishes marking system and "grades" students.
22. Evaluates summatively for grading.

Consequently we may have to look at Personality Types first when we begin to talk about MATCHING Learning Styles with Learning Environments. Certainly it is not a simple task we face. On the other hand, perhaps the answer is not overwhelmingly complicated either.

At least part of the problem is letting go of our Faustian need to control the world and all that is in it including each other. As soon as I start to prescribe what you need without consulting you, we both enter an arduous, wearing relationship for I assume I know what is good for you better than you do. Assuming responsibility for the individual diagnosis and prescription for the growth and development of a continuing flow of millions of people is awesome - indeed, overwhelming.

And if I assume this responsibility of intervening in, perhaps even "saving," your life, am I then, Chineselike, also responsible for you for the rest of your life?

I am quite sure I cannot do that. I am, after all, naving all I can do to wend my own way in this world - seeking answers to puzzles, Truth, and patterns for happiness. It is not a relationship of Farmer-to-grain; it is more complicated than that. It is more like the relationship of Farmer-to-Son, where the unknown potential and the Artist's desire to create enters in.

Robert Louis Stevenson said that youth is wholly experimental, but I am finding that ALL of life is experimental. That is OK; in fact, it's fun. But I am not at all comfortable with the idea of my prescribing life for you. Nor do I want you prescribing it for me. And with the futurists and Margaret Mead telling us that youth now often teaches age, and that the only thing that we can count on not changing is Change, it seems presumptuous of either of us to prescribe the lives of young people.

It is not appropriate for me - or for you - to assume a Faustian role of controlling the young. On the other hand, it has always been the role of adults to help the

young grow up. The question, in the light of individual differences and a constantly changing world, becomes, How do we join hands in a way that has teachers helping students create their own lives? Perhaps in 2 ways:

#1. If you can't help me, leave me alone. Adopt that part of the Hippocratic oath which goes, "Above all, do no harm." We do a great deal of harm in the name of education these days. Do not label me something and put me in some handy slot - be it Learning Style, or slow, retarded, delinquent, deprived or even depraved, because you don't know how to teach me to read or how to feel good about myself or how to discover and develop my own genius.

We teach not the way we were taught, as we have believed for a long time, but rather, we teach the way WE LEARN - we teach in our learning styles, egocentrically assuming that is the way every OK person learns and that there is something wrong with people who do not learn that way.

"Slow" is the term used for many kinesthetic learners and the SPs who make up 38% of the population. Thomas Edison was labeled "slow" and he was kicked out of school when he accidentally blew up part of it.

With Lisa the label was EMR - educably mentally retarded. Lisa was our foster child for three years. She was 12 when she came to live with us with an IQ between 70 and 80. Her family life had been atrocious - she had been taught absolutely nothing by an illiterate mother who abused her in a number of ways - and Lisa had started school knowing much less than other children her age - which is the definition of low IQ. And the schools taught her NOTHING.

Because she is a kinesthetic learner, we taught her to read using things like recipes, seed packages, macrame directions, and nature walks. When she was reading at the third grade level, I had her retested because it is a heavy and stifling weight to carry around the self-concept of being "Mentally Retarded" and, wonder-of wonders, she wasn't mentally retarded any more! They attributed the miraculous

change to the emotional warmth of the foster home, labeled her LDG, put her in regular classrooms, AND CONTINUED TO TEACH HER NOTHING. She made C's in eighth grade history not understanding a single idea in the ninth grade reading level textbook because she "tried hard" - meaning she was quiet, amiable and a darling girl. Lisa was not and is not "slow" but I'm afraid she will go through life thinking she is.

Teachers have no business communicating to any Learning Style types that there is something wrong with them because they don't learn the way the teacher teaches.

If the teacher does not understand and cannot accept the differences, then let the students OUT of that environment before their self-esteem is shredded. John Holt is developing a whole movement of taking children out of schools because of the damage schools inflict. If we respect differences, we can refrain from much damage.

#2. If you like me the way I am, if you really care about me, and if you have something to share that can help me - stay with me. Open the doors of your world for me to experience - and share your skills, your wisdom, your joy. Help me find and develop my world.

Much of what I know about teaching I learned by watching children learn to walk. Nearly everyone does learn to walk, and to talk; only a minute percentage of people born with physical problems do not learn to walk and talk. If you have ever watched that process, you already know a great deal about how we can apply all of this Learning-Teaching Style theory.

First off, you know how much the learner WANTS to learn and you trust him to be involved in the task. You have to have been impressed by how hard and long and diligently the child works at learning to walk. I spent an afternoon at the beach not many years ago, totally distracted from my book by the impressive, magnificent learning endeavor which unfolded. A toddler spent the entire afternoon struggling to

his feet, tottering forward and backward while he gained some balance, then speeding forward with squeals of glee for brief moments until he went down spread-eagle, mouth full of sand. He would roll himself into a sitting position, spit out the sand and start the procedure over and over and over again. You or I have never worked any harder at any accomplishment, nor enjoyed it any more than he did. We would also be considered Simon Legrees if we ever tried to assign that much work to students.

But that was not the beginning of his learning to walk. It started months earlier with curiosity, mobility, a growing sense of competency, and a floor without hazards. There was lots of encouragement when he started to pull himself up to stand on two legs and there was reassurance that he was not hurt when he lost hold and sat down harder than expected.

Maybe there was holding onto a trusted parent who walked him along mechanically before he was ready, but no one called him dumb or slow if he weren't ready. No one diagnosed and prescribed remediation if he were not at a predetermined point by the September of some year.

Then at some point - in his own time and in his own style - he was ready to try it himself. Probably he was holding on to someone's fingers. And probably that person and another person a few feet away were smiling and saying, "Come on. You can do it. What a big boy. You can do it. Come on." So he tried and it was wonderful. And these people who cared about him made such a big fuss, hugging him, smiling, telling him how great he was.

So he practiced walking holding on - to people, tables, chairs, anything. He practiced and practiced and practiced. Not when a bell rang and not the way someone told him to and not beyond when he wanted to quit. But he practiced in his own way for as long as he wanted to when he wanted to - for fun. No one put him down or made him feel bad when he didn't want to, but at least at first they said nice, warm things when he tried.

Then one day he let go of the props. "Come on," those safe arms across the room said. "You can do it. Come to Daddy." So he let go and stepped out of babyhood, teetering and tottering into a qualitatively different level of development. How delightful. The trumpets blared, the symbols changed. Mother and father laughed and hugged and squealed. "He walked, he walked. Our son is a man. Call Grandmother. Write it in the Babybook. He is absolutely the most wonderful child who ever lived."

Nowhere is written the 33 million times he fell down. When he fell at first and was scared, thinking maybe he was hurt, one of those caring older people smiled, picked him up, cuddled him and assured him that it was OK to fall down, he was not hurt, not to be afraid to try again.

And I can absolutely guarantee that there was no arbitrary June or January when these caring people got together to decide if he would now have to go on to a class in running with remedial sessions in walking because he was still falling down a lot, or be put back into crawling. 'ecause that was all the time available for walking on this particular assembly line.

So I suggest we match students with an educational environment as wide as the world, with caring adults around offering their support, their warmth, their suggestions and their encouragement.

I suggest we all learn best about the world and ourselves by trying things - in safety and with support; that failing or falling down a lot doesn't make us failures unless we quit trying; that there are no failures, only quitters; that we learn a lot from what doesn't work for us but that, given all the safe choices (I want to emphasize that I believe it is our job as adults to keep toddlers off of broken glass and from falling downstairs or tottering into the street), we will choose what works for us and develop our own skills and capacities - for that is the nature of healthy human beings and it feels great to be competent.

We can provide opportunities, materials and experiences. We can facilitate learning by finding the places, people, activities and things which help people learn and allowing or encouraging students to join in.

We can be aware of the ambivalent forces constantly working on people for both growth and safety, so that we provide enough safety to encourage learners to keep moving toward growth.

We can keep in mind that nothing else produces as much learning as does intrinsic motivation and that extrinsic motivation drives out intrinsic motivation, so we work always to hook learning on to intrinsic motivation and then keep out of their way, being sure not to stop real learning with superficial and arbitrary requirements.

The crucial need is for students to learn their own personal style and feel good about it. They must be involved in the matching, and their curiosity or lack of self-knowledge will probably lead them into inappropriate places where they will learn what does not work well for them. No great harm is done if other doors open easily and adults who care are there to reassure and help. They want to do it - and indeed only they can do it - themselves. To summarize in conclusion, let me repeat what I have tried to say:

First, let us develop a model of helping people develop their capacities using farmers' and artists' views to replace assembly-line and medical models.

Then, let us teach people the way they learn.

Third, let's stop expecting Teachers to be chameleons and recognize that they are people with various styles too, so if we are going to provide for Learning Style differences, it isn't going to happen by getting all teachers to learn a new bag of tricks. The Alternative Personality Style seems best adapted to dealing with the variety of Learning styles, but we will need a mixture of Teaching Styles.

Fourth, let us practice what we preach. If we believe in democracy, humanistic psychology, and Learning Style diversity, then let us get out of the Control

business and start helping each other have the fun of learning to walk - and run
and maybe even fly.

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