

# Don't teach me - let me learn!

## The Learning Styles of dropouts and at-risk students

*Barbara Prashnig, MA, Director of the Creative Learning Centre in Auckland explains why some students fail and some succeed - with the **same** teacher, from the **same** family!*

**O**ver the last few years major studies on Learning Styles carried out by universities in the USA revealed that the learning styles of dropouts were significantly different from those students who remained in school and finished it successfully.

To be able to understand the significance of these findings it is necessary to explain what learning style is and how it effects students and teachers alike. **Learning Style** is a biologically and developmentally imposed set of characteristics every human being has and provides important insight into the ways individual students process information during the learning process. It is the individual difference in personal learning styles that make the same teaching method wonderful for some and terrible for others.

According to the highly reliable Dunn & Dunn Learning Styles Model highly at-risk and dropout students have eight statistically different learning style elements compared to students who remain at school. These students are not 'learning disabled' but *learning different* and generally show a strong need for:

1. **Mobility** at frequent intervals;
2. **Variety** of instructional resources they like to learn from (to compensate for their low auditory and visual modalities and to respond to their strong preference for variety and dislike for routine and patterns);
3. **Informal seating arrangements** in classrooms (to respond to their inability to sit on hard chairs for more than 10 – 15 minutes **and** their strong need for mobility);
4. **Soft illumination** because their brains seem to get over stimulated especially by fluorescent light, and classrooms providing low light areas contribute significantly to less agitated behaviour.
5. **Tactile/kinesthetic** learning tools and resource materials which introduce new and difficult information through their perceptual preferences to make learning easier and more appealing;
6. **Late morning or afternoon** for difficult subjects rather than early morning classes;
7. **Non-authoritative teachers** who treat these students collegially and know how to respond to their non-conformity thinking;
8. **Recognition** of their **high motivation** *despite* their inability to learn through the methods and resources their teachers use and make available.

As long as teaching methods are not individualised and teachers continue to use identical teaching strategies for everyone, knowing they are only effective for *some*, they will not reach those who need it most and will keep losing them.

As long as students who failed in the normal classroom setting are exposed to one-to-one or small-group instructions provided by specialists who use *exactly the same methods, which failed the student the first time*. They will not change their attitude towards learning and only strengthen their belief learning is not for them.

We will continue to report about the possibilities learning styles hold for students with learning difficulties and the New Zealand's primary and secondary schools.

If readers want to find out more about how to help at-risk students, how to get training in learning styles and their classroom application, please contact: Technology Based Solutions email [asktbs@aol.com](mailto:asktbs@aol.com)