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"My Brain Doesn't Work Like That" Creating Success with Non-Traditional (and Traditional) Learners by Accommodating Learning

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Handouts to accompany

*“My Brain Doesn’t Work
Like That!”
Success with
Non-Traditional Learners*

by Dr. Jane Bluestein

Presented for the
National Youth at Risk Conference
Savannah, GA
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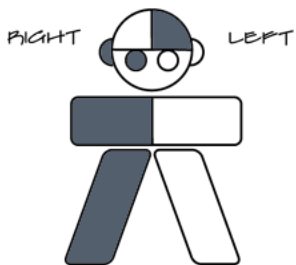
The “Ideal” Student

Traditional classrooms tend to favor students with the following characteristics or strengths:

- Dominance profile: Left-brain dominant, full sensory access: dominant right hand, eye, ear and leg (see figure, below left). Note: Students who are right-brain dominant, full sensory limited (all functions right-dominant, as in figure, below right) may be at the greatest disadvantage.
- Strong in linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences
- Academically on grade level (not too far ahead or behind)
- Learning Preferences:
 - * Prefers working in a quiet environment
 - * Best time of day: Early morning, afternoon
 - * Social: Prefers working quietly alone or in a group (limited need for interaction)
 - * Can handle highly-structured environment (seated in chairs, sitting up straight, not rocking or fidgeting)
 - * Limited intake needs while working (food, drink, gum, snack)
 - * Low mobility needs
- Modality Strengths: High auditory, high visual; low kinesthetic
- High verbal skills; ability to respond immediately when called on (low need for time to process quietly, internally, before responding)
- Attending behaviors: Eye contact, little talking or movement (note-taking OK particularly in linear, traditional form)
- Temperament traits:
 - * High in adaptability, persistence, regularity
 - * Low in distractibility, intensity, sensory awareness (sensitivity to sound, light, smell or touch)
 - * Low to moderate in activity/energy levels
- Personality Traits: Concrete thinking, logical, rational, organized, prompt, able to follow rules and procedures.
- Studies show other factors (gender, culture, socio-economic status, appearance, popularity, membership in highly-valued groups or teams, for example) to be relevant in certain instances

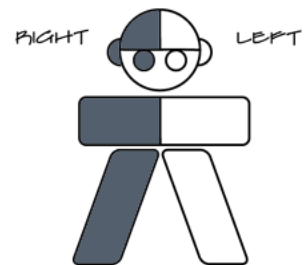
Ways to reach more students:

- Build on student strengths; teach to a variety of intelligences and abilities
- Respect different types of thinking processes, different ways of attending (taking in information), explaining and experiencing the world. (Think beyond uniformity; your own style.)
- Allow students to learn or demonstrate knowledge in ways that are natural for them.
- Provide a comfortable physical environment (light, heat, seating, etc.)
- Allow for movement (stretching, chewing, walking, etc.), talking and social interaction.
- Use a variety of instructional and assessment techniques; integrating curricular areas.
- Minimize or eliminate fear-based interaction, instructional and discipline strategies.



Full Sensory Access
Logic Dominant

“Nearly all the ‘dropouts’ of society have learning styles different from their school’s main teaching style.”
Gordon Dryden



Full Sensory Limited
Gestalt Dominant

Multiple Intelligences: Many Ways to be “Smart”

Linguistic

Skill with words; using language, expressing with words, written or spoken, and understanding what is said or written. Related skills: storytelling, memorizing, writing, discussing, debating, journaling, oration and reading.

Logical-Mathematical

Skill with numbers, puzzles, experiments; logical reasoning. Related skills: understanding principles and systems, problem solving, logic games and brainteasers, logical patterns, manipulating numbers and quantities.

Spatial

The ability to create or think in images, representing the spatial world internally (mentally); manipulating objects, understanding spatial relationships. Related skills: thinking visually, remembering visual details, enjoying movies or video games, building, drawing, sculpting, doing crafts activities, designing architecture or playing chess.

Bodily-Kinesthetic

The intelligence of physical skill; awareness of the body in space, capacity to use the whole body or parts of the body to solve a problem, make something or perform. Related skills: dance, athletics, role playing, getting “gut feelings” about things, acting, sports, physical games, building, movement, tactile or hands-on learning.

Musical

The intelligence of melody, tone and rhythm; hearing, recognizing, remembering or manipulating patterns of sound; a feel for rhythm. Related skills include singing, composing, playing an instrument. Can benefit from activities involving music, such as listening, singing along or playing.

Interpersonal

The ability to understand other people, sensitivity to others’ needs. May manifest in strong social skills, the ability to cooperate and work with others, empathy for and enjoyment of others, and the presence of many friends. Related skills: leadership, volunteering, mentorship, teaching, counseling, listening, sales, mediation or politics.

Intrapersonal

The ability to understand the self; self-awareness, a good sense of personal strengths and weaknesses. May show up as a desire to be alone, make choices, work independently and self-pace. Related skills include the ability to anticipate personal needs and possible reactions, pursue goals independently, reflect on and learn from experience.

Naturalistic

The ability to discriminate among things, identify patterns in the natural world, skill at classifying and organizing. Includes the tendency to be comfortable out of doors, touching and exploring, be attracted to things related to nature, as well as the ability to recognize and categorize things like plants, rocks, animals and other elements of nature; also includes the ability to recognize cultural artifacts (like cars or clothing).

Spiritual or Existential

Awareness of “otherness”; wonder, awe; wisdom (proverbs, sages); perspective, ability to listen; comfort with chaos, dichotomy, paradox (counter to conventional wisdom); commitment, dedication, faith. [From http://www.uiuc.edu/ro/ICFS/Papers/Spiritual_Intel.pdf. *Moral Intelligence* also proposed.]

Information on Multiple Intelligences, Modalities and Personality Types was taken from Creating Emotionally Safe Schools by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc., 2001)



Working with Sensory and Modality Strengths

Verbal Ability

Strong Verbal

- Can communicate even under stress
- Like to talk about what they're learning
- May be overreactive to noise, touch, visual input (difficulty paying attention)

Verbal/Communications Limited

- May need more time to think, respond
- May be able to demonstrate understanding in other ways
- May do better in conversation than in front of the class or "on the spot"

Visual Ability

Strong Visual

- Can take in and understand visual input, even under stress
- May notice visual dimensions of an experience (ex: scenery, lighting, color, texture)
- Receive info by looking, watching, reading or being shown
- Need eye contact, need to see speaker
- Do well with maps, charts, diagrams

Visually Limited

- Can overload in a "busy" environment
- May look away from teacher or close eyes to concentrate
- Keep maps, charts and diagrams simple
- Provide verbal directions

Auditory Ability

Strong Auditory

- Can take in and understand auditory input, even under stress
- May notice auditory dimensions of an experience (ex: dialogue, sounds)
- Receive info by listening or being told
- May process with self-talk, inner voice
- May need to look away (shut out visual distractions) or not look at speaker

Auditory Limited

- May tune out speaker after a while

- May close eyes to concentrate, turn dominant ear toward speaker
- Put directions in writing, make visual info avail, allow to create mental image

Kinesthetic Ability

Strong Kinesthetic

- Would rather touch than look
- May notice kinesthetic dimensions of an experience (ex: action scenes)
- Receive info by touch, movement
- Often described as hyperactive (can become agitated, restless when movement is restricted)
- May have difficulty with visual or auditory input if kinesthetic needs are not met (especially if movement is restricted for a long time)
- Provide kinesthetic outlets (ex: playing with string, clay, beanbag; chewing gum; stretching, moving, bouncing) throughout the day or during "quiet" (non-kinesthetic, listening) activities

Kinesthetically Limited

- Fewer kinesthetic demands in traditional classroom, so will probably do OK
- May have problems in classes that require movement
- Work from their strengths

Keeping Modality Channels Open

- Minimize stress in environment (weaker channels shut down under threat)
- Do integration activities to "wake up" various parts of the brain
- Accommodate more than one modality whenever possible (ex: saying and writing directions)
- Teach kids to self-regulate (without disturbing anyone else)
- Provide outlets, various ways of paying attention (options you can live with, options that will not disturb other learners)

Conditions with ADHD “look-alike” symptoms

- Highly Kinesthetic and/or Tactile Learners
 - Strong in bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, musical intelligences
 - Auditory Dominant
 - Communications-Limited (needs time to process, retrieve and articulate information)
 - Sensory Integration Dysfunction
 - Depression
 - Bi-polar Disorder
 - Asperger’s Syndrome
 - Absence seizures (Petit Mal Epilepsy)
 - Chronic middle ear infection, Sinusitis
 - Visual or hearing problems
 - Sleep disorders
 - Lack of natural light, sensitivity to fluorescent lighting
 - Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome
 - Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)
 - Too-warm temperatures
 - Thyroid problems
 - Poor diet, food allergies, sensitivity to food additives
 - Chemical, environmental sensitivities
 - High extrovert, processes through social interaction, talking, writing
 - Emotional problems
 - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (trauma or abuse survivor or witness)
 - Lack of clear guidelines or instructions
 - Inadequate feedback
 - Inadequate instructional stimulation
(lack of novelty, relevance, choices or autonomy)
 - Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Effect
 - Absence or petit mal seizures
 - Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)
 - Child abuse and neglect
 - Reactive Attachment Disorder
 - Oppositional-Defiant Disorders, Conduct Disorders
 - Temperament-related patterns
- (oversensitivity to sounds or sights, difficulty sequencing movements or processing visual or auditory input, or a tendency to be distracted by details).
- Use of stimulants
 - **Deliberate misbehavior: Better to be “bad” than “dumb”**

These conditions are often misdiagnosed and treated as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. This information comes from a variety of sources as reported in Creating Emotionally Safe Schools, by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc., 2001) with additions to this list as suggested by readers and workshop participants. (Many workshop participants and email correspondents have added to this list. Check Web site under Handouts for Educators for an up-to-date listing.)

Personality Types:

Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory

Overview of David Kiersey's four temperament groups, based on the 16 Myers-Briggs categories (which is only one of over 200 "quadrant models"). Note that people in each group share certain similarities in their reality and their approach to the world, and that the people in one group operate from a different reality than people in the other groups. Our ability to not only recognize that these differences exist, but also to appreciate them and, more importantly perhaps, to provide outlets for their expression in a school setting, can greatly improve an individual's potential for learning and success. See Appendix G on page 105 for additional information.

From Creating Emotionally Safe Schools, Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc., 2001).

The Guardian (SJ; "Gold")

- Planners and organizers.
- Value correctness, promptness, loyalty, stability, work before pleasure and the ability to follow rules and procedures.
- Responsible, productive, concrete thinkers; like following the chain of command.
- 38% of the general population, about equal numbers of males and females.
- 43% of (HS) teachers and 45% of students; large numbers of administrators.
- Differ along the Introvert-Extrovert and Thinking-Feeling scales.
- Upset when others question authority or don't follow rules, act disrespectfully, come late or unprepared, or don't take things seriously. Also stressed by disorganization, inefficiency and unreliability.

The Artisan (SP; "Orange")

- Freedom-oriented.
- Need spontaneity, "active doing," flexibility and unstructured settings.
- Playful and need for work to be fun.
- Differ along the Introvert-Extrovert and Thinking-Feeling scales.
- 38% of the population, equal males, females
- 7% HS teachers (usually in hands-on elective courses; 40% of high school students
- Resent limitations on their freedom or their random, concrete approach to learning.
- Can do high quality work; capable of tremendous concentration for things they like.
- Stressed by boredom, predictability, rigidity, inflexibility, having to follow a plan, people without a sense of humor, rules in general.
- Highest risk for dropping out (given the structure of a school and all those SJ teachers!)

The Idealist (NF; "Blue")

- Empathetic, feelers and caregivers
- Can see potential and encourage growth in others.
- Differ along the Introvert-Extrovert scale, Judging-Perceiving scale (structured, organized, formal, finish-oriented vs. flexible, curious, nonconforming, process-oriented)
- Value acceptance, harmony, positive feelings, recognition, authenticity and integrity.
- Abstract thinkers; good at creative problem solving in relationships and associations, characterized by aesthetic experiences and reflective awareness.
- Upset by insensitivity and narrow-minded, judgmental behavior; details, procedures, regulations and red tape.
- Stressed if yelled at or treated impersonally.
- 12% of population, more females
- 35% of HS teachers, 9% of students.

The Thinker/Rational (NT; "Green")

- Analytical; need to know and understand
- Value knowledge and competence, fairness and understanding, strategies and progress.
- Relate intellectually, preferring logic and thinking to feeling.
- Enjoy a good debate and can usually explain things well.
- Differ along the Introvert-Extrovert scale, Judging-Perceiving scale
- Most bothered by incompetence (especially by people in authority), meetings that have no purpose, arbitrary rules, emotional outbursts or anything that seems illogical.
- Stressed if you question their knowledge, make fun of their ability or argue illogically.
- 12% of population, more males
- 15% of HS teachers and 6% of students.

Learning Styles

Children come with a variety of learning styles and preferences which affect how they listen, learn and work. How do you (or could you) accommodate a variety of learning differences in each of the following areas?

Environmental

Sound

Light

Temperature

Design/Seating/Structure

Sociological

Working alone

Working with a partner (one peer)

Working with two or more peers

Working with (younger) students in other classes?

Working with adults

Physical

Perceptual/Modality

Auditory

Visual

Tactile

Kinesthetic

Intake

Time

Mobility

These topics were inspired by questions in the Learning Styles Inventory in The Educator's Self-Teaching Guide to Individualized Instructional Programs by Rita Dunn & Kenneth Dunn (Parker Publishing Co., Inc., Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1975), reprinted with permission in Being a Successful Teacher by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. (Fearon Teacher Aids, Frank Schaffer Publications, Inc., 1989).

Increasing Success for ALL Students

Change or maintain the level of alertness and attentiveness by:

Changing the visual field



- Moving and relating to students from a different part of the room
- Having them change seats, or having them move to a different part of the room
- Accommodating lighting needs and preferences (bright and dim light spaces available in the room)
- Providing full-spectrum lighting when possible
- Providing colored acetate, glasses with tinted lenses for kids to read through, to reduce glare or stark contrast of black ink on white paper

Changing the auditory field

- Listening to music, varying types of music available (appropriate lyrics and sound levels for “public” music)
- Respecting and accommodating the need for quiet



(headphones, earplugs)

- Providing silence, sound block, white noise
- Varying auditory input to gain attention (chimes, bells, tone of voice)
- Moving to (and speaking from) a different part of room

Touch

- Meeting the needs of a tactile anchor (watch for latex allergies):
 - Beanbag, gel ball, stress ball, string, clay
 - Pipe cleaners, clothespin, paper clips
 - Velcro glued to underside of desk or seat
 - Variety of different-sized pens, pencils and markers (fatter, thinner)
- Providing weight on the student’s bod
 - Weighted vest or blanket; sack of beans on lap
 - Rice-filled sock on lap or around neck



- Afghan or comforter (unweighted)
- Providing Alternate Seating
 - Seat with arms, beanbag chair
 - Cushion, “egg carton” foam
 - Air-filled “fidget” cushion
 - Chair with arms; chair attached to desk



Movement

- Stretching, rocking, leaving seat
- Talking, changing affiliation
- Chairs, seating or cushions:
 - Rocking chair, chair with wheels
 - Air-filled “fidget” cushion
 - Exercise ball (with or without “feet”) used as a chair
 - Stool, cushions; space to work on the floor



- Space to work standing up or kneeling on chair
- Tennis balls on feet of chairs (prevent scraping, may reduce the likelihood of slipping if chair is tilted, depending on surface)
- Tactile anchor or activity:
 - Taking notes, writing
- Drawing, doodling
- Playing with string, bean bag or other fidget toy; knitting, etc.
- Tapping: on leg, sponge, mouse pad (or with pencil that has felt taped to the top to cushion the sound, or with pipe cleaners)
- Rubber band, exercise band or bungee cord around legs of chair (resistance)
- Styrofoam “pool noodles” cut to about 2 feet in length for students to roll under their feet.



<continued next page>

Many of these suggestions have come from various occupational therapists, physical therapists, kinesiologists, and special education teachers, among others focusing on the needs of non-traditional learners, as well as contributions from workshop participants and web site visitors. With particular thanks to Mary Sue Williams and Sherry Shellenberger and their book, How Does Your Engine Run? (Albuquerque, NM: Therapyworks, 1994) for their organization of these suggestions into the five categories listed above. See pages 117-118 for resources and information.

Putting Something in Your Mouth

- Chewing
 - Gum (Teach them how! Conditional on defined behavior and disposal)
 - Straws, other oral-motor stimulators
 - Rubber surgical tubing
- Sucking thick liquid through straw
- Hydrating (drinking water)
- Food
 - Crunchy—carrots, celery, pretzels
 - Chewy
 - Intense—peppermint or lemon drops may improve performance on tests or activities for some kids (watch for food allergies)



Making these Resources and Strategies Work!

- Choose options you can live with and those your students can handle.
- Introduce new options one or two at a time.
- Remember that different classes and different individuals may do better with different options.
- Be cautious about possible sensitivities or allergies to certain food or products (latex, for example).
- Let parents and administration know what you're doing and why. There is plenty of research to back up these strategies. Also, collecting data to show improved behavior or performance, and having more kids on task will work on your behalf.
- Look for results: In many cases, accommodating students' learning preference will improve their performance and behavior. If the quality of work or behavior declines, remember the phrase, "This isn't working." Withdraw the stimulus for the time being and look for something else (or try again at another time). This tends to work best when we can continue to make access to these privileges contingent on cooperative, non-disruptive participation by the students.
- Stay positive and flexible! *We are all different in the way we learn best.*

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