



# Understanding Learning Styles

Making a Difference  
for Diverse Learners

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Foreword by  
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# *Table of Contents*

## **Foreword**

## **Introduction**

Learning styles and today's student  
The changing role of the classroom teacher  
Summary of learning styles discussed throughout the book

## **Chapter 1: Anthony Gregorc**

Description  
History  
Application of this model for everyday classroom use and lesson planning  
What can a teacher do with this information?  
Sample activities for each learning style  
Teachers and parents working together to accommodate these learning styles  
Conclusion  
Think about it!

## **Chapter 2: Dunn and Dunn Learning Styles Model**

Description  
History  
Application of this model for everyday classroom use and lesson planning  
What can a teacher do with this information?  
Sample activities for each learning style  
Teachers and parents working together to accommodate these learning styles  
A word from the researcher  
Conclusion  
Think about it!

### **Chapter 3: Howard Gardner**

Description

History

Application of this model for everyday classroom use and lesson planning

What can a teacher do with this information?

Sample activities for each learning style

Teachers and parents working together to accommodate these learning styles

Conclusion

Think about it!

### **Chapter 4: Neil Fleming and the VARK Learning Styles Model**

Description

History

Application of this model for everyday classroom use and lesson planning

What can a teacher do with this information?

Sample activities for each learning style

Teachers and parents working together to accommodate these learning styles

Conclusion

Think about it!

### **Chapter 5: Assessing Learning Styles**

Description

History

Learning style assessment and Anthony Gregorc

Learning style assessment and the Dunn and Dunn model

Learning style assessment and Howard Gardner

Learning style assessment and Neil D. Fleming

Conclusion

Think about it!

### **Chapter 6: The Yes I Can! Model of Organizing Teaching Within These Learning Styles**

Description

History

Conclusion

Think about it!

**Appendix 6.1: The Yes I Can! Model Learning Style Survey**

**Appendix 6.2: Sample Individual Learning Plans**

Cells

Classroom environment

**Appendix 6.3: Individual Learning Plan Template**

**Appendix 6.4: Individual Standard Log Templates**

**Appendix 6.5: The Yes I Can! Model Student Feedback Survey**

**References Cited**

**Additional Resources**

## Foreword

Classroom teachers desiring to maximize their students' learning will find *Understanding Learning Styles: Making a Difference for Diverse Learners* by Kelli Allen, Jeanna Scheve, and Vicki Nieter a very useful and practical guide to effectively differentiating their classroom instruction. Throughout my years of elementary school teaching, I always sensed that my students had unique characteristics as learners, but struggled to first accurately identify individual learner needs and then to find the know-how, time, and energy to plan and prepare lessons to meet those needs on a daily basis. *Understanding Learning Styles: Making a Difference for Diverse Learners*, as the title suggests, approaches differentiating instruction with a focus on the practical application of learning styles theory to classroom teaching. Had I read such a book when I was an elementary school teacher, meeting the instructional needs of all of my students would have been much easier.

The usefulness of this book for classroom teachers lies in the practical application of four well-respected learning style paradigms, including perhaps the most well-known learning styles theory of Multiple Intelligences developed by Howard Gardner. Each of the four models is concisely summarized, followed by a section titled "Application of this model for everyday classroom use and lesson planning." This section of each chapter provides the reader with categorical descriptions of student characteristics, preferred learning strategies and learning products, and a description of what students do best within each identified learning style. The practical classroom application comes from the authors' descriptions of the types of instructional focus proven to be effective for each learning style and a clear, concise description of each learner type, titled "Student profile." Each learning theory chapter concludes with a section called "Sample activities for each learning style" that models for the reader activities designed to match and enhance each learning style.

The four learning styles theories are further applied to the classroom in [Chapter 5](#), “Assessing Learning Styles.” Each of the theory’s assessment instruments are described and applied to classroom learning. To fully understand each instrument’s instructional application, teachers are encouraged to complete the assessment surveys. Information on how to secure access to these instruments is provided.

Perhaps the most useful and encouraging part of the book for classroom teachers seeking to apply learning style theory to their classroom instruction is found in [Chapter 6](#), “The Yes I Can! Model of Organizing Teaching Within These Learning Styles.” This chapter describes the development of Individualized Learning Plans that account for individual student learning style preferences, followed by procedures for implementing these plans, sample activities, and finally, assessment ideas. The book concludes with sample forms suggesting ways to successfully develop, implement, and assess these Individualized Learning Plans.

After reading this wonderfully practical book addressing the challenge of meeting the diverse learning needs of all students, I came away with an appreciation for its compassionate approach towards both teachers and students. The authors successfully met their book’s dual objective of articulating the need to understand and apply learning style theory to classroom instruction as a vehicle for meeting the instructional needs of all students and the practical challenges teachers face when working to effectively differentiate their instruction.

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# *Introduction*

If you are reading this, you are most likely in the education field at some level, whether it be in teaching, mentoring, or administration. Try to remember when you were sitting where your students are now. Were there times that you felt anxious, ill-prepared, or confused by content that just didn't make sense to you? Maybe you went to another teacher or a peer who explained the content differently, drew a picture, or used props, and finally, you got it! It was probably not that you were incapable of grasping the content, but possibly that the approach used to provide the necessary information was ineffective. In this time of outcomes-based and high-stakes assessments, it is crucial that the most efficient approaches be used in every classroom and with every student. This book offers multiple ways you can rise to the challenge and enhance your classroom with innovative and research-based techniques that will appeal to each learner's strengths.

Every classroom consists of individuals with diverse strengths, backgrounds, and approaches to learning. Understanding and responding to each student's individual learning style can be challenging for teachers. This book will introduce various learning styles, the research behind each style, and how to use this information to engage students in learning activities that are best suited for them. We will discuss numerous types of learning styles and provide practical strategies that enhance learning according to each style.

## *Learning styles and today's student*

What is meant by *learning styles*? A variety of different answers exists, but a formal response is that a learning style is a preferred way of thinking, processing, and understanding information. Each person prefers a pattern of thought and behavior that influences his or her learning process. In other words, we all learn in different ways. You might ask, "If that's *learning style*, then what is *teaching style*?" The *teaching style* is the way instructors teach.

## Appendix 6.5

### *The Yes I Can! Model Student Feedback Survey*

These are the results from a survey gathered in Spring 2008. Some students (depending on their age) had been involved with The Yes I Can! Model since 2004. This survey was created using SurveyMonkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>).

Question	Student answer
1. Are you male or female?	Male – 45%, Female – 54.9%
2. What is your grade level?	9th – 0%      11th – 40.8% 10th – 26.8%    12th – 32.4%
3. Activities in class were appropriate for my learning styles.	Yes – 95.8% No – 4.2%
4. Individual work activities deepened my understanding of the topics being learned.	Yes - 87.7% No – 12.3%
5. Using learning styles to customize my education was beneficial for me.	Yes – 82.4% No – 17.6%
6. Knowing how I learned material best helped me in other classes.	Yes – 63.0% No – 37.0%
7. I prefer having choices in how I learn the topic presented versus conventional learning methods (notes, lectures, tests, etc.)	Yes – 93.1% No – 6.9%
8. Using learning styles to customize my learning helped me to better prepare for the science assessment, to be more motivated, and to approach the assessment with a more positive attitude.	Yes – 69.0% No – 31.0%
9. If I could change one thing about the	<i>“I want to use this information in my other</i>

<p>learning plans, it would be:</p>	<p><i>classes.” “</i>  <i>We have a lot of options for individual work, but I want even more!”</i>  <i>“I learned more in this class because of the way the lesson plans were set up. I would hope that more teachers would adjust their teaching to each student’s specific needs.”</i></p>
<p>10. My favorite individual learning activities were:</p>	<p><i>“I did very well learning with groups and seeing what other people thought. I liked doing certain activities of my choice that interested me instead of doing something boring.”</i>  <i>“Discussions, because the teacher always welcomed us and asked for our input and opinions...it was refreshing to be respected.”</i>  <i>“I am not the type of person that can learn with notes and lectures. I only learn by interacting. This class was great for that!”</i></p>

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# Additional Resources

## Websites:

### *Curriculum Design for Excellence, Inc./Dr. Roger Taylor*

Dr. Taylor has several webinars posted on this website, which is a professional development resource. Available at: <http://www.robertaylor.com/>

### *Discovery Education*

This subscription website offers numerous resources, video clips, lesson plans, and online tools across content areas. Available at: <http://www.discoveryeducation.com/index.cfm?bluSearchluit=true>

### *Institute for Learning Styles Research*

This website is devoted to providing training and community resources for evaluating Learning Styles. Available at: <http://learningstyles.net>

### *JeopardyLabs*

This website allows you to create a customized *Jeopardy*® template. The games you make can be played online. Available at: <http://www.jeopardylabs.com>

### *The Learning Web*

This is an online edition of *The new learning revolution and the seven keys to unlock it* by Gordon Dryden and Jeannette Vos. Available at: <http://www.thelearningweb.net>

### *Multiple Intelligences Inventory*

A part of the Learning Disabilities Resource Community, this website offers an online inventory survey to determine multiple intelligences. Available at: <http://www.ldrc.ca/projects/miinventory/miinventory.php>

### *Project Zero*

Howard Gardner's official website is located at this Harvard Graduate School of Education research project page. Available at: <http://pzweb.harvard.edu/index.cfm>; also, <http://www.howardgardner.com>

### *SurveyMonkey*

This is a web-based survey tool that allows you to design, administer, and tabulate your own customized survey. Available at: <http://www.surveymonkey.com>



*VARK: A guide to learning styles*

This site offers the VARK questionnaire and offers suggestions for useful materials.

Available at: <http://www.vark-learn.com/english/page.asp?p=questionnaire>



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