



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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LEARNING STYLES ACROSS THE COLLEGE

Respecting differences through learning styles has become one of our greatest outcomes from investigating and implementing the 4MAT Learning Styles System at the Community College of Aurora. By law, community colleges in Colorado have an open-door policy. That means that we do not ask what a student's ACT or SAT score is, or even if that student completed high school; anyone over 16 can enroll in our classes.

Adults are generally not passive learners; they "vote with their feet." And if they do not learn, do not receive respect, or do not find meaning in their classes, they simply do not come back. Learning and using learning styles theory has been a scientifically based, structured program to help faculty, staff, and students learn about themselves and others as learners, then put that knowledge into practice. At the end of a yearlong project on learning styles, a science instructor wrote in his final report:

"Hearing the questions put forth by other students in my classes or seeing others working on memorizing facts while I struggled to understand concepts certainly revealed different learning styles. Since my own amalgam of styles had proved so successful through my years of learning, I suppose I felt that any other method must surely be inferior to my own. To speak with and perform exercises with the other learned professionals in our group showed me that other styles cannot only work but work well. And if my colleagues do not do things the same way I do, what of my students?"

Through learning styles workshops and ongoing support, our faculty have learned ways to honor the individuals and meet the needs of a variety of learners in their classes. We started with a three-day workshop in August 1993, which kicked off a yearlong project for about 26 faculty. Our yearlong projects involve 18-20 hours of workshops on a specific topic the first semester, then planning, implementation, peer coaching, evaluation, and final reports the second semester. We have

created wonderful successes with this change model in the areas of ethics, critical thinking, writing across the curriculum, diversity, study skills, and other topics. But even before the end of this project, we knew we all wanted to become more involved.

In August 1994, we followed up with four additional days of training. Near the end of this session, a core group brainstormed a one-and-one-half page, single-spaced list entitled "Learning Styles—Classroom Action Plan." Every item on this list, with the exception of controlled studies in math classes, has been completed and expanded. A major change has been to move from a classroom to a collegewide focus, including students, faculty, and staff.

Highlights of our accomplishments in the past few years include the following:

Students

- In-house learning styles experts are available to visit classes.
- Credit classes have been offered.
- CC Advocates and CC Ambassadors, student leaders who receive credit for visiting high schools and conducting CCA tours, receive training in learning styles and use it to plan their presentations.
- Our Learning Resource Center offers one-hour introductory workshops in learning styles along with other student success topics about once a semester.
- A one-credit class combining learning styles and Brain Gym® is offered to students with learning disabilities.

After visiting a faculty workshop, our president required that everyone at the manager or above level attend a four-hour session. A number of directors sent their entire staff, including work study students, to attend learning styles sessions. A number of departments have completed teambuilding sessions focusing on communication, problem solving, and customer service based on learning styles.



Faculty

- Learning styles workshops for faculty have been offered in four-hour, three-day, four-day, and five-day increments for novices through experts.
- Follow-up workshops include Beyond Mid-Terms and Finals, Teaching Styles and Preferences, Learning Styles and Assessment, Learning Styles: A Second Look Designing Courses with Style
- A real change of compartmentalizing people: at one session, we had a secretary, bus representative, accounts payable clerk, and three work study students in the same workshop with faculty. At most colleges this would be impossible!
- A Friday Afternoon club meets about twice a semester for faculty to discuss their successes, problems, and questions about learning styles. This resulted from faculty demands at the end of a yearlong project that they have opportunities to further explore learning styles theory. It is a casual format which allows faculty to set the agenda, rather than having a formal workshop.
- Five faculty have written *One Approach*, a practical booklet providing information on implementing learning styles at the college level. It is available on our website, cca.ccoes.edu/teachingforachange.
- Four faculty have worked to create a basic guide to implementing learning styles theory into distance courses; this booklet is also available on our website, and both booklets are available for purchase.
- CCA sponsors Teaching for a Change, an annual faculty development conference. Prior to the conference each year, we offer an in-house working session to help CCA presenters employ learning styles theory to create interactive, practical sessions. Some faculty request assistance in planning presentations at other conferences throughout the year.
- At the Teaching for a Change conference, we have offered learning styles workshops and preconference sessions with great results.

What's next? Faculty are interested in additional exploration into assessment and learning styles as well as continuing to offer workshops to newer faculty. A learning styles quiz, suitable for students, faculty, and staff, will be available soon on our website.

Throughout these activities, a major theme has been that learning styles are not designed to label people or put them into boxes. Rather, we have used learning styles successfully to recognize, understand, honor, and even enjoy their differences.

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