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# Introduction

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The idea for *Learning Styles and Performance Assessment* took shape in response to frequent questions from educators about the way learning styles connect to instructional trends in education. Convinced that planning intentionally for learning style differences brought positive results for students, teachers wanted to know how they could connect learning style concepts to co-operative learning strategies, to development of critical thinking, to whole language, to multiple intelligences, and to a wide variety of content areas. Inevitably, they also asked how to assess a learning style curriculum.

For many years, we have used both qualitative and quantitative methods to establish, and to assess, the stylistically different ways that students learn. The leap to performance assessment was a short one, because we found that performance assessment offered a strategic means to formalize the qualitative assessment process we had long followed. As we examined and incorporated performance assessment, we soon came to believe that a curriculum, intentionally planned for learning styles, would facilitate true performance assessment far better than any other method.

.....  
*Curriculum, intentionally planned for learning styles, facilitates true performance.*  
.....

*The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, an exquisite historical novel for students by Elizabeth George Speare (1958), serves as the content through which Bobby Prewitt shows you her connections between learning styles, performance assessment, and current instructional trends. This guide, however, is not a set of activities to use with the novel. It is a serious, comprehensive, and detailed picture of an in-depth, integrated, literature-based approach to teaching and learning. *Learning Styles and Performance Assessment* demonstrates how powerfully a learning-styles, learner-focused approach promotes high-quality learning performance.

All of our experiences as both teachers and phenomenologists, however, have taught us that instruction does not stand apart from the teacher and child (Pinar and Reynolds, 1992; Gregorc, 1985). A teacher who uses learning styles successfully does not simply implement instructional activities. The teacher's invisible beliefs, values, and style, as well as his or her understandings about each child, always massage the visible instructional activities. The children, too, bring their own viewpoints and learning styles to each teacher and every classroom.

We know that every written curriculum must be used with all the sensibilities that come only with reflective experience. Teachers themselves must provide the critical ingredients that transform instructional plans into a vibrant lesson.

.....  
*Teachers themselves provide the critical ingredients that transform instructional plans into a vibrant lesson.*  
.....

Teachers bring the wisdom that chooses, guides, shapes, and troubleshoots paper plans into a living lesson. Teachers offer the passion for good literature and love of reading that a novel like *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* evokes. And, teachers alone bring compassion as they teach for the growth of students rather than completion of tasks.

We agree with this perspective: "*Even though the teacher may be influenced by many powerful sources outside herself, the responsibility to act lies within*" (Magdalene Lampert, 1985).

We trust in you to use this demonstration guide with a healthy perspective for individual differences in both yourself and your students, and to implement it with a fine eye for your needs and the needs of your students.

# Intentional Planning

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The following key points focus our process of intentional planning for students in this guide.



***Content mastery works hand in hand with learner-centred teaching.***

To integrate both,

- ~ Plan the key concepts, desired outcomes, objectives, and skills.
- ~ Establish a way to organize instruction.
- ~ Use active learning experiences that help students achieve.



***Learners bring their own minds to the learning experience.***

To address learning differences,

- ~ Use a variety of learning-style-differentiated experiences.
- ~ Provide a choice of learning-style-differentiated experiences.
- ~ Offer opportunities to use one's learning style through various intelligences.



***Critical and creative thinking promotes high-quality learning.***

To engage thinking,

- ~ Use activities inviting critical and creative thinking.
- ~ Have opportunities to apply critical and creative thinking through various learning styles and multiple intelligences.



***Students grow intellectually, emotionally, and socially when they gain insights about themselves.***

To encourage growth,

- ~ Teach students about their own strengths and abilities.
- ~ Encourage students to develop their own thoughts and decisions.
- ~ Teach students how to make better choices for themselves.



***Students learn how to work effectively with others through experience.***

To offer such experience,

- ~ Work through a co-operative learning approach, diversified for learning style.
- ~ Offer community-based activities, diversified for learning style.



***There is significant value in assessing both the content and process of a student's work through a performance continuum of progress.***

To do this,

- ~ Establish, with students, standards to measure continual progress.
- ~ Establish, with students, standards to measure progress for a final performance task.
- ~ Develop the unit with a learning style perspective in order to assure that students have the opportunity to develop *authentic* achievement and performance.

# The Theories

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## Learning Styles

The Gregorc Model of Mind Styles® serves as our baseline model for discerning learning style differences. Anthony Gregorc describes four types of Mind Styles—Concrete Sequential, Abstract Random, Abstract Sequential, and Concrete Random, each with definite abilities, qualities, and characteristics. His theory opens our eyes to the wide variety of ways in which people approach life and learning. Unique among theories of learning style in its phenomenological perspective, the Mind Style theory of differences allows us to transcend the confines of behavioral style labels and look through the individual’s eyes (Gregorc, 1982).

The Gregorc Model of Mind Styles presents style from a phenomenological and a psychological perspective in which individuals examine style as the powerful, “energetic driving forces” that fuel one’s definition of self and sense of well-being, and establish aspects of one’s self-concept.



*The study of style is, at base, the study of the human mind and personality.*

*Style is universal. Its attraction is also universal. . . The natural appeal and attraction toward style is found in its application and practicality.*

*Anthony F. Gregorc (1985)*



With this psychological foundation, we quickly see that style also influences the affective dimension—how we feel about ourselves in the world—and that our sense of self-esteem often reflects how positively we feel about our style.

®Mind Styles is a registered trademark of Dr. Anthony F. Gregorc. The term *Mind Style* and its identifiers—*Concrete Sequential*, *Abstract Random*, *Abstract Sequential*, and *Concrete Random*—are used with permission of Dr. Gregorc. All uses of the term, *Mind Styles*, in this book refer to Dr. Gregorc’s work.

With understanding, we can see how style affects preferences for cognitive learning, and why we need to make learning style differences a central feature of our work with students.

Gregorc makes a strong case that each individual is unique and that we cannot label adults or students with a style-type in a prescriptive manner. His work clearly asks educators to teach with opportunity for all children to learn about themselves and their own gifts through both choice of style and experience with many styles. He warns, too, that teachers cannot be all things to all children by the very nature of our style differences, and so encourages teachers to collaborate with one another on teams to plan for the most authentic activities and to offer the highest-quality differentiation and understanding. Our own experience confirms this, and we recommend that you work with colleagues of different styles as you work with this guide.

For our purposes, we will summarize key instructional aspects of each of the four Gregorc Mind Styles. Two references, “The Bridging Chart for Learning Styles” (Butler, 1992) and “The SDI Strategy Chart for Learning Styles and Levels of Thinking” (Butler, 1986) have been included with this guide to supplement this information on style. We highly recommend that you read Kathleen Butler’s book *Learning and Teaching Style: In Theory and Practice*, to further your understanding of learning style in the classroom (Butler, 1986).



### *Key References*

*The Bridging Chart for Learning Styles*

*The SDI Strategy Chart for Learning Styles and Levels of Thinking*

