


## Teaching Students About Their Abilities and Challenges

### The Learning Strengths Project




*"He's just doing that to get attention."*

Diana Browning Wright, 2012

## Learning Strengths Project

- **A form of educational caregiving**  
(Mel Levine M.D. <http://www.allkindsofminds.org/>)
- **Acknowledges and Understands**
  - strengths
  - weaknesses
  - affinities
- **Does not seek to "cure"**
- **Does not seek to radically alter the students' characteristics**



Diana Browning Wright, 2012

## Learning Strengths Project

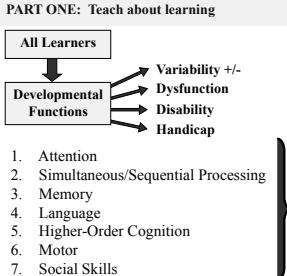
**Learning Strengths Project Components:**

1. **Seminars**
  - Teach About Learning
  - Group Demystification
  - Classroom Follow-up
2. **Portfolio Development**
  - Connecting seminar and individual learning strengths
3. **Conferences**
4. **Ownership Demonstration:**  
Asking For & Analyzing My Accommodations/Modifications

Diana Browning Wright, 2012

## Component One: Seminars

**PART ONE: Teach about learning**



**Synchronized interplay of these functions lead to successful learning.**

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## Component One: Seminars

**PART TWO: Group Demystification**

**Demystify through group acknowledgement**

- Use small groups (when possible)
- Include students without known learning problems (when possible).
  - They often reveal their own struggles which is very helpful for students with difficulties.

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## Component One: Seminars

**PART TWO: Group Demystification**

- Hold multiple sessions, can be small doses.
  - **Formats**
    - Students complete questionnaires (such as after a test, Attention Cockpit, Anser System). Students often discuss responses individually with teacher, or in groups if the classroom climate is conducive.

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## Component Two: Seminars

### PART THREE: Classroom Follow-up

- Students read from a text about learning or learning disorders. Then discuss individual chapters and their personal relevance.
- Students read and discuss case studies, making suggestions



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## Component Two: Portfolio Development

### Connecting Seminar and Individual Learning Strengths

- Students write and discuss their own autobiographical “case studies” (e.g., “My Career in School”)
- Students analyze their own work using formats provided by the teacher that relate success/failure to strengths/weaknesses and strategies selected

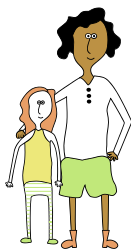
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## Component Three: Conferences

### One-to-one Meetings With Staff

- Conduct with the student by an assessor
- Explain the students’ strengths and demystifies the weaknesses
- Use actual test results



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Meet with the student one-to-one following the steps listed below:

COMPONENTS	CONTENT
<b>Destigmatization</b>	Provide assurance that all individuals have strengths and weaknesses; the sooner one learns about oneself the better; possibly cite examples of one’s own dysfunctions; point out that even honor students are imperfect. Cite examples!
<b>Strength Delineation</b>	Provide a description of student’s strengths: this must be concrete, honest, offered with evidence, and if possible, compared to peers.
<b>Weakness Enumeration</b>	Cite the number of dysfunctions (e.g., “there are 3 areas that are a problem for you”) and their observable effects: use graphics and analogies; elicit examples from the student if possible.
<b>Induction of Optimism</b>	Provide a profile projection of the future to show how these strengths can work well in adulthood; restoration of self-esteem and hope for the future.
<b>Alliance Formation</b>	Focus on communication of interest and a willingness to be helpful and supportive in the future – “we’re in this together.”

- Individualized demystification usually requires periodic follow-up “booster” doses.
- It can be very helpful for parents to be present during the demystification session, so that they can make use of the same terminology and frames of reference at home. Alternatively, a cassette recording could be made available to the student to share with his/her family.
- It is essential that the overall tone be supportive, non-accusatory, and not “preachy.”
- Students should be helped to understand that she or he is accountable for work output, etc.; i.e., one cannot use the identified weakness as an excuse for poor performance.

\* Adapted with permission from the work of Dr. Mel Levine, M.D.

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## Conference Content

COMPONENTS	CONTENT
<b>Destigmatization</b>	Provide assurance that all individuals have strengths and weaknesses; the sooner one learns about oneself the better; possibly cite examples of one’s own dysfunctions; point out that even honor students are imperfect. Cite examples!
<b>Strength Delineation</b>	Provide a description of student’s strengths: this must be concrete, honest, offered with evidence, and if possible, compared to peers
<b>Weakness Enumeration</b>	Cite the number of dysfunctions (e.g., “there are 3 areas that are a problem for you”) and their observable effects: use graphics and analogies, elicit examples from the student if possible

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## Conference Content (continued)

COMPONENTS	CONTENT
<b>Induction of Optimism</b>	Provide a profile projection of the future to show how these strengths can work well in adulthood; restoration of self-esteem and hope for the future
<b>Alliance Formation</b>	Focus on communication of interest and a willingness to be helpful and supportive in the future – “we’re in this together.”

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### Conference Hints

- Individualized demystification usually requires periodic follow-up “booster” doses.
- It can be very helpful for parents to be present during the demystification session, so that they can make use of the same terminology and frames of reference at home.
- Alternatively, a cassette recording could be made available to the student to share with his/her family.
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COGNITIVE/ACADEMIC AND BEHAVIORAL/SOCIAL PHENOMENA				
TASK PHASE	COGNITIVE/ACADEMIC ELEMENTS		BEHAVIORAL/SOCIAL ELEMENTS	
	FUNCTION	DYSFUNCTION	FUNCTION	DYSFUNCTION
PLANNING	Strategizing Reflecting on task requirement	<input type="checkbox"/> Cognitive Impulsivity <input type="checkbox"/> No awareness of sequence of behaviors	Prediction of Consequence	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of behavioral judgment <input type="checkbox"/> Unintended actions <input type="checkbox"/> Risk taking behaviors with no forethought
SELECTION	Vigilance and awareness of saliency	<input type="checkbox"/> Low saliency determination; incidental learning <input type="checkbox"/> Frequent focus on minor features of a task	Action choice	<input type="checkbox"/> Impulsional, random behavioral selection often unrelated to what is required for success
INHIBITION	Resistance to distraction	<input type="checkbox"/> Distractibility (easily forgetting what task one is performing)	Behavioral/motor inhibition	<input type="checkbox"/> Disinhibited behaviors and <input type="checkbox"/> Hyperactivity
CONTINUITY	Sustained mental effort	<input type="checkbox"/> Impersistence; <input type="checkbox"/> Mental fatigue <input type="checkbox"/> Performance inconsistency	Behavior/affective stabilization	<input type="checkbox"/> Behavioral unpredictability <input type="checkbox"/> Affective lability
MONITORING	Ongoing error detection and correction	<input type="checkbox"/> Absent or damaged quality control	Behavioral self awareness	<input type="checkbox"/> Insensitivity to feedback; <input type="checkbox"/> Diminished reinforcement <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of awareness of what actions lead to positive or negative feedback

Malvin Levine, M.D. 1990, with expansion D. Wright, M.S., 1992  
 Diana Browning Wright, Behavior/Response Patterns, 2002

HH3.9  
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### Attention Cockpit Interview

## Small Group or Individual Interview

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### Anser System Form 4: 9 and Up

The Self-Administered Student Profile asks students aged 9 and up to rate how they think they are doing in the following developmental areas:

- Attention
- Language function
- Spatial-motor function
- Graphomotor function
- Gross motor function
- Memory function
- Temporal-sequential ordering
- Efficiency
- Affect
- Outlook
- Academic skills
- Social function
- Outside activities

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### Component Four: Ownership

#### Ownership of Bypass Strategies - Teach Students to Ask for Accommodations

- **Input** Accommodation/Modification Strategy: Alter presentation of information to the student
- **Output** Accommodation/Modification Strategy: Circumvent deficits, alter production from the student

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### Component Four: Ownership

#### True Ownership of Bypass Strategies - Teach Students to Ask for Accommodations

- The need for the bypass strategies should be well understood by the student.
- Bypass strategies should be utilized in such a way that they are not embarrassing and do not imply any disrespect or “writing off” of the student.
- One can “charge a price” for a bypass (e.g., suggesting a student read an extra book in exchange for reduction in length for a written report).

Diana Browning Wright, DCS 2002

Mel Levine, M.D.

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## Component Four: Ownership

**True Ownership of Bypass Strategies - Teach Students to Ask for Accommodations**

- The entire class should know that bypass options are available to everyone who really needs them.
- Never tolerate the teasing of a student who is receiving accommodations.

Everyone is entitled to a special program for an area in need of improvement, to help improve a skill.

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## Brendan



**Brendan**

- 11<sup>th</sup> grader, legally blind, learning problems-IEP
- Achievement on par on many parameters

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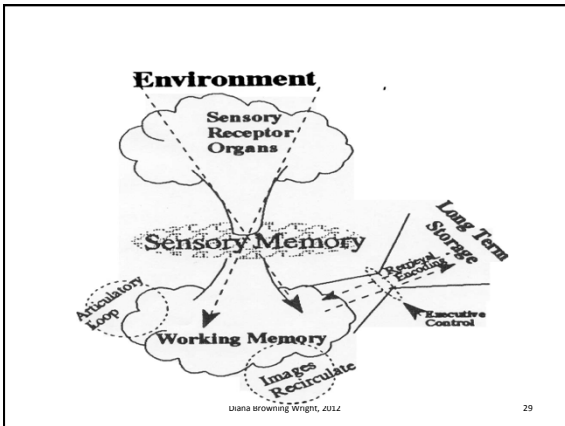
**People react in different ways when they find out a student in their class has special needs ...**

Diana Browning Wright, 2012 21

## Overcoming Barriers

- They don't want to do it!
- Why?
- What Beliefs, Knowledge and Skills are Barriers?

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## Teach About Learning

- Real-World Knowledge (Content)
- Strategy Knowledge (Knowing how to learn)
- Metacognitive Knowledge (Awareness and regulation of cognitive processes)

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### Teach About Basic Cognitive Processes

- Attending to incoming information
- Getting information into short-term memory
- Getting information into long-term memory
- Retrieving information from long-term memory

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### Teach About Metacognitive Processes

- Knowing your learning processes
- Selecting appropriate learning strategies
- Monitoring how learning strategy is working

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### Struggling Learners: Strategy-Based Instruction



**Metacognition: The "Boss"**



**Cognition: the "Worker"**



**Strategies: the "Tools"**

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### Especially for Struggling Learners

Curriculum must:

- Be designed to incorporate the prerequisites of learning
- Information must be accessible
- Support for the development of skills must be available
- Learner must perceive the learning to be important

Diana Browning Wright, *Research in Special Education*, Fall 1999 #5 CEC  
2012

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### Universal Design

The design of the instructional materials and activities that makes the learning goal achievable by individuals with a wide difference in their abilities to see, hear, speak, move, read, write, understand English, attend, organize, engage, and remember.

- Built in, not added on!

Diana Browning Wright, *Universal Design for Learning: Applying Special Technology (CAST)*  
2012

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### Universal Design

#### Six Principles for Effective Curriculum Design

- **Big Ideas:** Concepts, principles, or heuristics that facilitate the most efficient and broad acquisition of knowledge.
- **Conspicuous Strategies:** Useful steps for accomplishing a goal or task.
- **Mediated Scaffolding:** Instructional guidance provided by teachers, peers, materials, or tasks.

Diana Browning Wright, *Research in Special Education*, Fall 1999 #5 CEC  
2012

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## Universal Design

### Six Principles for Effective Curriculum Design

- ◆ **Strategies Integration:** Integrating knowledge as a means of promoting higher-level cognition.
- ◆ **Judicious Review:** Structured opportunities to recall or apply previously taught information.
- ◆ **Primed Background Knowledge:** Preexisting information that affects new learning.

## Thank You!

- Let's hear from the kids now
- If I can be of further assistance,

Diana Browning Wright  
[www.dianabrowningwright.com](http://www.dianabrowningwright.com)  
[dbrowningw@gmail.com](mailto:dbrowningw@gmail.com)  
6264879455 business cell