

## LSA at Ballarat Secondary College, Victoria, Australia

If you were going to be asked to '*learn something new and difficult*' how would you go about doing it? You might find that you need to talk with someone or find a quiet place with natural light and that a cup of tea would help. Others may find that breaking the task down to a checklist and then lying on the floor while listening to music may make the task more manageable.

At Ballarat Secondary College (BSC) we are discovering that knowing a student's learning style assists us in developing personalised learning strategies for the individual and the preferred learning styles of entire class cohorts. Undertaking *Learning Styles Analysis* (LSA), with both our staff and students, has opened up a greater understanding of how we learn. In the past we have worked with Bloom's Taxonomy and Gardiner's Multiple Intelligences amongst others, which was beneficial, but the *Learning Styles Analysis* takes this to another level, one that is far richer and holistic.

The LSA brings the complex interrelationship between biological, learned and environmental learning preferences into a simple diagram. In addition, it interweaves brain dominance, sensory modalities along with physical, environmental, social and attitudinal components of learning in such a way students as young as twelve through to staff can successfully interpret it. All agree that they have learnt more about themselves and others as learners.

*Keys to Success*, with Mary Brell has provided Ballarat Secondary College with practical, useful, encouraging training and support. Mary's professional development sessions with teachers have been enjoyed and highly regarded for their hands on approach. In one situation in depth learning was taking place while the room was filled with balloons and laughter as Mary led a brain dominance exercise. As Mary presents the content of her training she models strategies that can easily be used. Each session uses different strategies to support the LSA. Teachers leave *Keys to Success* training with a range of practical tools that can be used immediately with people of all ages.

At Ballarat Secondary College we are so impressed with *Keys to Success* and *Learning Styles Analysis* we are embedding it into our College curriculum. At the time of writing we are taking our Year 7 students through on line testing. Our Year 8's and 9's have already been profiled and their classes are exploring how different cohorts of students learning styles should impact teacher practice. We are still hoping to build our current Year 10's in to the program this year. We want to provide them with the opportunity to understand how they can learn something 'new and difficult' in their preferred learning style before they move into our senior school.

Increasingly concern with the lack of student engagement becoming an issue for educators we believe that the LSA will improve students connectedness with school. DiMartino and Clarke in their recent book *Personalising the High School Experience for Each Student* (1) identified several keys areas of student disengagement. In the table below I have outlined some of their concerns and how the *Learning Styles Analysis* is being used by BSC as a strategy in building student connectedness with school.

Area of Concern	BSC with LSA
<u>Lack of adult support:</u> Students spend more time speaking with peers than	As teachers <b>know</b> their students through their LSA they are increasing able to build positive and productive relationships with the students within

caring adults	their classes.
<u>Unresponsive teaching</u> : Using the same material to teach all students despite broad range of differences	Teachers are increasingly adapting their pedagogy to the LSA of individual's and class cohorts.
<u>Invisibility</u> : Only the most notable students, leaders, and athletes (and troublemakers) earn recognition beyond a small group of friends	We have found that students become 'visible' when they know 'how they learn' and that their individuality is valued. Students in the class, who may have been invisible in the past, now have identified strengths that can be celebrated by the group and they can become a resource that the class draws from.
<u>Isolation</u> : students need opportunities to engage in the wider world so that they can aim their education toward a clear purpose	We are finding that students who understand their learning style are developing a stronger sense of themselves and their worth. This is giving them the confidence to take greater control of their learning. We are also noting that the improved sense of themselves as learners is giving them the confidence to widen their horizons with future employment prospects and their level of willingness to engage with the broader community.

In summary, the LSA assists us in knowing our students and how they learn. The outcome is that we are developing more positive and productive learning relationships. This is producing greater levels of student engagement and connectedness with the school and with the students taking greater control of their learning.

Working with Mary Brell and *Keys to Success* has been enlightening and valued by our school community. Mary is an excellent communicator who provides timely, practical and useful support in developing student's understandings of themselves as learners. I have really appreciated working with her.

Kay Oswin

Leading Teacher: Pathways and Transitions Improvement, Personalised Learning  
Ballarat Secondary College

1. DiMartino, J and J Clarke, 2008, *Personalising the High School Experience for Each Student*, ASCD, Virginia.