

EL SIN NEWSLETTER An International Forum



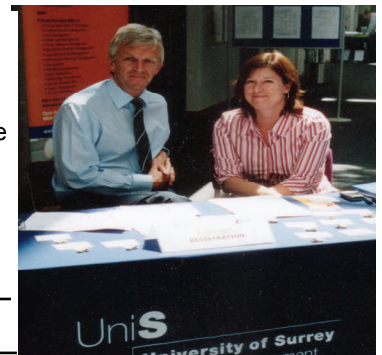
EL SIN'S 10th Anniversary Conference University of Surrey: UNiS

Items of Interest

- **University of Surrey: UNiS;**
- **Keynote Speakers, & Our Present Executive Board**
- **"ISSID" by Liz Peterson**
- **The ELSIN VOICE '05 and '06;**
- **Cross-Cultural Learning Styles: S Armstrong Keynote Speaker in Singapore**
- **Joining the ELSIN Mail-base Information**
- **Awards Recipients**
- **Teacher Elixir or Fools Gold..Does Learning Style Matter?**
- **Most Recent Publications of ELSIN Members**
- **Andrew Ashwin: Thoughts on The Coffield Reports**
- **Melodie Rosenfeld: A Reason For Optimism Concerning the Coffield Report**
- **Thank You to Eugene Sadler-Smith and Rebecca Weale**
- **Looking at a "First-time" presenters reaction to the 2005 ELSIN Conference;**
- **Learning Style Professional Development and Bjørnemyr Skole Visitation, in Norway**
- **Recent "Style" Publications/Presentations constituents**
- **Email Address of the ELSIN Exec.**

Pictured right: Eugene Sadler-Smith and his assistant, Rebecca Weale, welcome presenters, delegates, participants, learning-style theorists and practitioners to the 10th Annual ELSIN Conference. It was a spectacular program, which included many sessions during the three days. There were two keynote speakers (see p.2), opportunities to visit Surrey, the excellence of good company, fine dining and sharing our own insights about learning styles, while gaining new information from others' experience about practical applications of style.

See p. 12 for information on the 2006 ELSIN Conference in Oslo, Norway



Pictured below: Participants and delegates viewing learning-style instructional materials, entertainment at the UNiS Lakeside Restaurant, Steve Rayner addressing the benefits of ELSIN membership and fine dining. Additionally, awards for Best Paper and Conference Excellence were provided (see pages four and nine for details on the Awards Recipients and Conference Honours articles).



Keynote Speaker: Dr. Honey

The 10th Annual ELSIN Conference was privileged to have, Dr. Bill Lucas as a keynote speaker on the first day of the Conference. His topic was, “*What are the learning styles of an effective lifelong learner? Should we be doing more to profile these?*”

The second speaker was Dr. Peter Honey, learning styles ‘guru’ of Honey and Mumford fame. Dr. Honey is pictured and his address included humor and poignancy regarding the need for learning accommodations to be present in every classroom.



Poetry Selection: What Is Good?

“What is the real good?”
I ask in musing mood.
“Order,” said the law court;
“Knowledge,” said the school;
“Truth,” said the wise man;
“Pleasure,” said the fool;
“Love,” said the maiden;
“Beauty,” said the page;
“Freedom,” said the dreamer; “
“Home” said the sage;
“Fame,” said the soldier;
“Equity,” said the seer.
Spake my heart fully sad:
“The answer is not here.”

Then within my bosom
Softly this I heard:
Each heart hold the secret:
‘Kindness’ is the word.”

ELSIN Executive Board Members Continuing their endeavours....

The 2005-2006 ELSIN executive was self-elected at the 10th Annual Conference. the majority of the previous year's executive officers continue their services. The following ELSIN executive roles have been agreed.

Full Exec Members

Carol Evans UK
Elizabeth Peterson NZ
Marjorie Schiering USA
Martin Graff UK
Steve Armstrong UK
Steve Rayner UK
Andrew Ashwin UK
Michael Sheehan UK



Pictured, at left, the Ongoing Executive Board Members

Carol Evans, Steve Armstrong, Martin Graff,
Steve Rayner, and Marjorie Schiering

Liv Lassen Norway (Steve Rayner is pleased to announce that the group has agreed that the Oslo nomination from Liv Lassen for the ELSIN Conference 2006 has been accepted for June, 2006.)

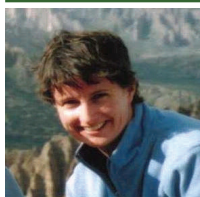
Lena Bostrom Sweden

Associate Members

Kris Bakhaus USA
Svend Schmidt Denmark



What we learn from books is continually supplanted / underscored by what we learn from our life experiences.
(Schiering, 2005)



ISSID Conference in Adelaide, July 2005 Reported by: Newsletter Co-Editor, Elizabeth Peterson

ISSID stands for the *International Society for the Study of Individual Differences*, a society that was started by Hans Eysenck, one of the foremost personality researchers. The society's journal is *Personality and Individual Differences*, which is publishing style related papers more often, so it is worth looking out for and signing up for their journal alerts.

ISSID, is a biannual conference and this year it was held in Adelaide, Australia. I can highly recommend these conferences, particularly if one is doing empirically-based individual differences research. ISSID attracts some of the big names in the field (E.g.; Ackerman, Deary, Mathews and Neubauer) and excellent keynote speakers (e.g.; Plomin and Bouchard), so the calibre of papers is generally high. I, for one, left the conference having learnt much, particularly about the most recent ideas in personality, intelligence and emotional intelligence.

To date, ISSID hasn't attracted many style-based papers (I think there were two: love styles- hit had to happen sooner or later—and my own paper on the wholistic-analytic dimension), but the opening address by the then president, Adrian Furnham, 'Exploring no-man's land in differential psychology' did acknowledge the role of style in the individual differences field. So, there is definitely room for more contributions from the ELSIN community. Maybe we could put together a symposium for the next one.

Arguably, one of the best things about ISSID is that, like ELSIN, it is a very friendly society. Since its inception, the society has remained fairly small and this has probably helped. It is the kind of conference where people talk to each other, share ideas and show a genuine interest in other people's research, something that the author thinks is lacking from many of the bigger conferences. So, if you're interested in the general field of individual differences and you fancy a good conference in 2007, look out for ISSID in Germany. Their website is: <http://issid.org/issid.html>. With any luck, I'll see you there.



Dr. S. Armstrong
THE ELSIN VOICE
June '05 and upcoming June '06
EL SIN Conferences

delegates treated to a party at a local café to celebrate the ELSIN's 10th Anniversary, but also to a sumptuous three-course conference dinner at the Lakeside Restaurant at the School of Management on the first evening of the conference.

JUNE 2005

The 10th Annual ELSIN Conference was organised by Professor Eugene Sadler-Smith and Rebecca Weale with more than 60 delegates in attendance, from all over the world. Of special interest is that one result of this years conference is that Professor Sadler -Smith of the University of Surrey Management School, and Dr. Carol Evans of the University of Durham are co-editors of a special double issue of the journal *Education and Training*, which is based upon the best papers from the conference. Interest in the field of individual differences in learning and cognition continues to grow and has sparked some thought-provoking papers, which included the topical areas of styles and e-learning, the nature of the style construct, new approaches to measurement of styles, and the impact of style upon performance in the workplace, lecture hall, and classroom. Additionally, it should be noted that not only were

JUNE 2006

The 2006 Conference is to be hosted by the Faculty of Education at the University of Oslo in Norway from the 12th to 14th of June. The theme for the conference is "Enabling Human Performance." Both Steve Rayner and I visited this institution on the first and second of December to discuss their proposal and to have (Continued on page 4.)

JOIN the ELSIN MAILBASE

CLICK ON

www.elsinnet.org.uk

Why should I join the mail-base?

The ELSIN mail-base is an email forum that enables style researchers, educationalists and trainers to stay in touch, ask for advice and discuss issues relating to style. It also enables us to inform each other of up-coming events, conferences and other items of interest to our members.

How do I join?

- 1) Log onto www.elsinnet.org.uk (the ELSIN home page)
- 2) Click on the [Mailbase](#) link, which takes you to another mail-base link. Click on this.
- 3) This will take you to the [ELSIN@JISCMAIL .AC.UK](mailto:ELSIN@JISCMAIL.AC.UK) website, which gives you various options.
- 4) Click on '[join or leave the list](#)' and enter your details as instructed.

How do I post an email to the list?

- 1) Repeat steps 1-3 above but click on '[Post to the list](#)'
- 2) If you have forgotten your password, you can enter a new one and a confirmation will be sent to your email address. On receiving and replying to this confirmation email, you can then post directly to the list.



**The "Best Paper Prize,"
sponsored by Web CT, was
awarded to:**

Helena Pedrosa de Jesus and
Patricia Almeida of the Uni-
versity of Aveiro, Portugal
(Seen flanking Steve Rayner,
left and right, respectively), at
the 10th Annual ELSIN Con-
ference June 13-15, 2005.

ELSIN Vice President
Steve Armstrong. Chair-
man of Business Manage-
ment at Hull University,
England

Dr. S. Armstrong

THE ELSIN VOICE

June '05 and upcoming June '06
ELSIN Conferences (Continued from p. 3)



a look at the proposed conference venue. We were very impressed!

The institution is situated at the main campus of the University of Oslo (at Blindern) about ten minutes from the center of Oslo, which is the capital of Norway. The University of Oslo is Norway's largest and oldest institution of higher education founded in 1811. Today there are approximately thirty-thousand students and forty-five hundred employees. Four Nobel Prize winners indicates the quality of the research at the University. The Faculty of Education includes two departments titled, The Department of Teacher Education and School Development and the Department of Special "Needs Education, as well as the Institute for Educational Research and Inter Media. There are 235 staff members covering all aspects of teaching and special education from kindergarten to higher university levels. The faculty is situated at Helga Engs House, which is the next newest building at the Blindern Campus. The newest building is George Sverdrups House, which is their elegant and super modern library. These will be the sites for all lectures, dinner and informal meetings. For further information about the University of Oslo, visit, [http:// www.uio.no/english](http://www.uio.no/english).

The primary host for the upcoming 2006 conference will be The Department of Special Needs Education (www.isp.uio.no/english), and this will be led by Liv M. Lassen and her support team. However, the Swedish Learning Style Center (Lena Bostrom) and the Danish Learning Style Center (Svend Erich Schmidt) are also involved in its organisation, making this a truly Scandinavian venture. The best form of transportation to Oslo is by air to Gardermoen Airport. A train can then be taken to the center of Oslo (19 minutes; kr 160), followed by a tram (10 minutes; kr. 20) or Taxi (15 minutes; kr. 20) to Blindern Campus—Helga Engs House. There are many airlines flying to Oslo. Flight time from Heathrow/Stanford is about 2.5 hours. It is also possible to take a boat from Newcastle, Kiel or Copenhagen into Oslo harbour. Day passes for all trams, subways and busses within Oslo cost k. 60 (approximately 5GBP). The transport network is entirely sufficient and easy to use.

This provides a very exciting event with the possibility of a cruise on one of Norway's Fjords as a venue for the conference dinner. There will be two keynote speakers again at this conference. One of these will be Lynn Curry from Canada who has contributed significantly to the field over the past 25 years. In recent email correspondence she is quoted as saying:

and longevity of the interest in learning styles. There is just something intuitively appealing about the whole individual differences phenomena. The problem is to understand it enough, or enough of it, to apply usefully....I would appreciate the opportunity to review the 'state of the field.' Thanks for asking!"

Lynn will deliver the keynote on the second day of the conference. The opening keynote speaker is still to be decided at the time of writing this newsletter.

ELSIN Discussion List

Since taking over the management of the ELSIN discussion list a year or so ago, Charlie Wankel of St. John's University has increased the number of subscribers from approximately 90 to 138, so thanks go to, Charlie, for that accomplishment. The list continues to remain fairly passive, however, and any thoughts on how we can promote this as a more active discussion forum would be more than welcome. Send your ideas to any member of the ELSIN Executive, whose contact details can be found on page ten of this newsletter.

SINGAPORE CONFERENCE ON CROSS-CULTURAL LEARNING STYLES

Keynote Speaker: Dr. Steven Armstrong

From October sixth through the eighth, Singapore Management University (SMU) hosted a conference entitled Cross-cultural Communications. Our own Steve Armstrong was the invited keynote speaker. The conference was sponsored by a project founded by the ASEAN-EU University Network Programme (AUNP), which is being led by the FH Joanneum University of Applied Sciences in Germany, Kasetsart University in Thailand, and Singapore Management University. (cont. p. 5)



SINGAPORE CONFERENCE ON CROSS-CULTURAL LEARNING STYLES

Keynote Speaker: Dr. Steven Armstrong (Continued from p. 4)

One of the conference's key purposes was to explore the concept of cross-cultural learning styles in Higher Education.

Steve's keynote address was titled, "Learning Styles, Cognitive Styles, and their Implications for Teaching and Learning in Cross-cultural Contexts," explored the historical roots of these two terms, and attempted to differentiate between these two terms of, "learning" and "cognitive" styles. This presentation was aimed at trying to bring some semblance of order to what is often regarded by those entering the field as a "daunting task" when attempting to penetrate and make sense of a multitude of definitions, models, and instruments. He identified what he believes to be the most appropriate and influential models, theories, and instruments, and discussed their practical applications for teaching and learning in a cross-cultural context.

Steve also took this opportunity to promote the work of ELSIN, although at the time, he hadn't realised the true extent to which the network had already made itself known across the world. Several delegates were already fully aware of ELSIN's existence, and particularly of the ELSIN annual conference, which "seems to have been the lifeblood of our existence since the network's inception more than a decade ago." Steve added. Indeed, one of the delegates at this conference he had previously met at the 2005 ELSIN conference in Surrey. Her name is Anna Wozniak and she seemed very grateful for the ELSIN experience. Steve is sure some of you will remember her from Surrey, and her research interests, which focuses on managerial intuition across cultures. "We had lots to talk about over dinner," remarked, Steve, as he followed with, "What a small world!"



A TEACHER ELIXIR OR FOOL'S GOLD — DOES LEARNING STYLES MATTER?

***Excerpts from a paper by ELSIN'S President, Steve Rayner, School of Education,
University of Birmingham***

Learning styles has been recently described and criticised in a heady mix of metaphor, sound bites and polemic. For example, learning styles as an idea or construct has been variously labeled by Hargreaves (2004) as snake oil, and a teaching elixir; elsewhere by others as a movement akin to a religious revival based on spurious science, or as a dangerous chimera and fool's gold; and it is finally in what seems to be a 'style of plain speaking' adopted by Coffield (2005: 19), simply condemned as clap-trap that should be binned. There can be no argument with the claim that learning styles is a subject of controversy. The topic and concept is subject to a level of attention usually associated with the latest political buzz-word or big idea. The effect, more often than not, is an academic and political debate in which far more heat than light is generated leaving the interested professional no clearer about the merits of the case than one might have been previous to reading conflicting reports on "style."

So, as Stenberg once claimed — "Do learning styles matter?" I hope that this article will contribute meaningfully to what might be called the "psot-Coffield" debate and a consideration of the nature and relevance of research into learning styles, which in my view, is a continuing story of work in progress and as it currently exists—a "science for best fit." The conclusion — well, it really is up to the educational professional to make up their own mind.

(Editor's Note: The following areas in "bold" font are the actual headings of Dr. Rayner's article. The material directly following these sections in "regular font" has been synthesized in some instances, for this newsletter, due to the enormity of profound information Dr. Rayner has provided, but will not fit on these pages. Synthesized areas are marked with an asterisk.)*

Research into Learning Styles

It is most important at the outset to be clear about the place of educational research in developing our professional knowledge as we make decisions about which theory or perspective we draw upon to shape our working practice. I argue here that style remains an important idea and that rather than seeing it as some form of teaching elixir or simple one-size solution for effective learning and teaching, it offers the potential for developing approaches to diversity and individual needs in the classroom. In this respect it is an opportunity to build the base for a 'Better-Fit Pedagogy.'

The "thinking practitioner" is always involved in working through such ideas, continually creating their own practitioner models of learning and teaching, and applying these in their own work place context. The process should be a never-ending story of continuing professional development in which learning and the construction of knowledge is a life-long requirement for the professional. It is exemplified in the work of Lucas et al. (2002;2003) as part of the Campaign for Learning and the developmental work of various academics in the field. The charge made by Coffield et.al. (2004 A,B) that the field of learning styles does not yield a simple solution or an off the shelf-tool for application is absolutely correct, but betrays, in my view, a rather simplistic or perhaps partisan idea of what so called science or empirical evidence can provide for practical application. (Continued on pp. 6 & 7)

A TEACHER ELIXIR OR FOOL'S GOLD — DOES LEARNING STYLES MATTER?

***Excerpts from a paper by ELSIN President, Steve Rayner, School of Education,
University of Birmingham (Continued from p. 5)***

Research into Learning Styles (Continued):

that critics of learning styles, in a recent wave of publicity for their research, have set a particular tone, akin to that of Coffield's report, where there's a not-so-subtle mix of inferred revulsion combined with cleverly delivered put-downs. Nonetheless, the criticisms of style in what should be acknowledged as a considerable effort by Coffield et al. to map the field includes: **a.** No consensual theory, **b.** Consistent psychometric failings in models and measures developed in conjunction with theories of cognitive and learning style, **c.** Theoretical isolation and an 'incestuous research' in what is perceived to be a self-containing loop of replication, **d.** Commercial conflicts of interest that result in affirmation rather than genuine confirmation of proof for empirical research and in some extreme cases, reveal a messianic drive for field domination, **e.** No clearly established evidence of positive effects related to the application and practice of learning styles, **f.** Disregard of a gold standard statistic used in evidence informed methodology—effect size, and **f.** Competing theories and explanations of the learning process in social psychology and sociology that are seen to offer a better prospect of return for resource investment in the educational setting.

This review, originally commissioned by the, *Learning and Skills Development Agency* in the UK, and tasked to examine the relevance of learning styles in the English context of further education, does provide a useful description of a wide selection of learning-style models. Nonetheless, it's difficult to access this information without being affected by the tone and nature of the evaluation and perspectives offered by the review of them.

It should be noted, too, that the review itself is arguably flawed. It is predicated on a methodology drawn from evidence-based theory articulated by the *Evidence for Policy and Practice Information Centre* at London University. The researchers then dispense with a "rigorous criteria" established as part of this methodology citing the complexity and failing of the learning styles field. The researchers, to all intent and purposes "go native," adopting a differing conceptual basis for their review and one which is actually borrowed from the same field, to categorise types of style model. Much of this review framework is un-attributed, deals in secondary sources, reflects a shaky basis for an interpretation of psychometric judgments, largely emulates the structure but not the process of Curry's review of learning styles completed several decades ago (Curry, 1987), and is summarily legitimised by a declaration that leading academics in the field were given an opportunity to defend their work.

There is no doubt, however, that a psychometric tradition clearly dominates the research of cognitive and learning styles and, in part, reflects a conceptual concern for assessment as a means to an end—that is—the generation of evidence or proof 'by use of a test that a concept and a theory are valid. A further consequence of this approach has been the development of work that has centered on reliability—that is—the generation of proof that an instrument is accurate and can be safely used to measure. The work of the styles field has most certainly not identified or produced definitive proof for any single measure. Finally, positivist principles underlying this entire approach are experimentation and falsification. Empirical research, it is supposed, advance as a science through a process of testing, retesting and verification. The outcome is a field of research that reflects a contested paradigm characterised by adversarial conflict and disagreement. Learning styles research is not unique in this respect. Most fields of specialist knowledge or theory reflect a similar structure or story much to the frustration of a practitioner or policy-maker seeking one-size quick-fix expert advice. Consider work in the psychology of self-reference that for most teachers will always reflect a vital set of constructs in teaching and learning (self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy). The field of self-reference has been subject to academics calling for greater coherence and a consensual theory to help make sense of a disparate theory (See Byrne, 1996). In fact, Coffield et al make the same point in a discussion of the sociology of pedagogy as part of their review of learning styles.

The Current Practice

*There are a plethora of assessment instruments to determine individual's "style" at varied grade levels. (Request full article from Dr. Rayner for a list of these instruments is available upon request from this author.)

The wonder assessment, built to assess all learning needs or differences does not exist, but might perhaps be developed one day. In the meantime, I suggest that the science to support an assessment-based pedagogy is still very much a work in progress. Testimony or empirical evidence is still being collected, never-mind actually being presented to "the jury." But, please remember this is the case for most, if not all education research, just witness the furore surrounding the teaching of reading, or spelling, or the teaching of addition and subtraction. I just hope that the case for learning styles is clearly developing and the jury will by and large comprise practising teachers.

The case for learning styles nevertheless is one that carries an exceptionally high value in terms of "face validity" and "construct validity" (Witkin, 1962; Mesick, 1976). Intuitively, teachers know they work with individual differences, which reflect a person's style of working and learning.

"Effective teaching and learning takes account of this and the teacher uses it, perhaps largely in an intuitive way, but nonetheless in an emphatic way. The teacher will attempt to work with the difference, but from time to time, move against it, flex it, stimulate the growth of new strategies and challenge the learners to adapt to new knowledge in a different way." (Rayner, 2001; 2005)

(At this juncture, Rayner, continues with attention to Kolb's Learning-Style Model with examples of a theory of experiential learning and a learning cycle. This is followed by Coffield et al (2004 a, b) referencing Dunn and Dunn's Model and the idea of "negative-partisanship," with the clear understanding that this model is continually being tested. Furthermore, to reject the theory of learning styles solely on the basis of the statistic of effect size, Rayner continues, is to misrepresent the psychometric work in the field....) It is, as presented, tantamount to offering a simple sound-bite for what is the study of a complex and dynamic relationship between learner, learning and pedagogy. This is followed with encouragement to address the learning-how-to-learn movement, curriculum process, differential pedagogy and meta-cognition.)

Best Practice

The question most frequently asked of the learning styles proponent is, "What Model of Style should be adopted?" The Coffield Report provides useful summaries of the many models of learning style to be found on "the shelf." What I refuse to supply in good faith is a simple recommendation that an existing off the peg style measure can be purchased and used in absolute confidence. Indeed, there is something in me as a practitioner, and perhaps as an academic, that whispers caution and skepticism when presented with one-size-simple solutions. I am, while writing this statement, however, aware that I am wearing a comfortable and useful "best-fit" suit, just bought off-the-peg. It's a good buy and fits the bill. What is worth nothing at this juncture is that assessment is a tool and not an end in itself. * This section of the article goes on to discuss the impact of statistics underpinning the development of a new product. Tested, the product receives rave results, however, as the saying goes, one-size-doesn't-fit-all. Q: How can one program of any type suit all students? A: It can't.

Rayner goes on to report that teachers and schools can develop an approach that includes a consideration of differential psychology, learning how to learn and learning style. He references Reid, 2005; Mortimore, 2003, and Prashnig, 1998 that offer a useful summary of a practical approach to developing learning strategies and teaching tactics associated with a "style-led" approach.

Concluding this section on "Best Practice," Rayner mentions Hargraves statement in DEMOS, 2005:12, where he addresses learning theory as being "learner-centered, knowledge-centered, assessment-centered, and community-centered."

What is "best-fit pedagogy?" Rayner states,

"The extent to which an awareness of learning style or the self as a learner is currently considered and managed within the educational context raises key questions for the design of instruction and pedagogy, including a consideration of: **a.** an assessment-based approach to learning and teaching, **b.** differentiation within the learning process of the curriculum, **c.** the development of a differential pedagogy, **d.** teaching learning how to learn method—strategies and routines—within the curriculum, and

(continued on p. 7)

A TEACHER ELIXIR OR FOOL'S GOLD — DOES LEARNING STYLES MATTER?

***Excerpts from a paper by ELSIN President, Steve Rayner, School of Education,
University of Birmingham (Continued from pp. 6 and 7)***

e. continuing professional development in the area of pedagogy for the school workforce. Exploiting learning styles as a teaching device and utilising the theory means developing a broad-based approach to the idea of a process curriculum and differential pedagogy.”

The Way Forward

The search for an assessment-led component for developing pedagogy that will help practitioners better meet individual learning needs in the classroom is part of an approach that argues for building a process-centered curriculum. It should not, does not and cannot preclude other aspects of learning, teaching, and the content of a curriculum. It must not be perceived as a substitute for knowledge or a way of reducing the learner to a label or category. To interpret style in this way is a travesty. Coffield et al (2004 a, b) are right to remind us of this fact, as well as point to the danger. But perhaps wrong to so completely condemn academics for slipping into a shorthand version of their theory that points to how style categories feature explicitly in individual performance and behaviour. It is perhaps arguably a similar sleight of terminology on their part to simplify and pass judgment on the work of the learning styles field in this same manner.

Meeting the challenge of applied research in education is crucial in ensuring that work with theory is worthwhile and informs practice. This is why the contribution of the teacher researcher and more particularly the SENCO is so important to the continuing well-being of the educational system. In the field of learning styles, this is doubly relevant, as there is a need to further integrate the conceptual basis of diverse sets of theory in an applied context. Such a development is overdue. There is an already identified need for consensual theory (see Rayner, 2000; Armstrong and Rayner, 2002; Peterson, 2004), and the recent emergence of new literature looking at the research-informed applications of learning styles is welcome. I hope the working SENCO, researching teachers and practitioner enquiry will each form an important part of this work in progress, which is the necessary basis for a continuing development of our provision for learning and teaching.

(The 28 references for this article will be provided, upon request, of the editors of this newsletter and/or Steve Rayner.)

2004/2005 and 2006 PUBLICATIONS OF ELSIN MEMBERS

Berings, M.G., M.C., Poell, R.F. & Simmons, P.R.J. (2005). Conceptualizing on-the-job learning styles. *Human Resource Development Review*, 4, 373-400. (Sent by: Marjolein Berings)

Calcaterra, A., Antonietti, A., & Underwood, J. (2005). Cognitive style, hypermedia navigation and learning. *Computers and Education*, 44, 441-457.

Mortimore, T. (2005). Dyslexia and learning style: A note of caution. *British Journal of Special Education*, 32 (3), 145-149.

Mortimore, T. (2004). Widening opportunity for dyslexic learners—is learning style theory the answer? *Dyslexia Review*, 16 (1), 15-17.

Peterson, E.R., Deary, I.J., & Austin, E.J. (2005). Intelligence and Personality related to Verbal-Imagery and wholistic-analytic cognitive styles? *Personality and Individual Differences*, 27, 201-213.

Peterson, E.R., Deary, I.J. & Austin, E.J. (2005). A new reliable measure of verbal-imagery cognitive style. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 38, 1269-1281.

Rosenfeld, M. & Rosenfeld, S. (2006). Understanding teacher responses to constructivist learning environments: Challenges and resolutions. Accepted by *Science Education* for Spring, 2006.

Schiering, M.S. (2005). Academic and social cognition development: Utilizing interactive instructional resources. Presentation of Papers for Practical Classroom Application and Implementation of Learning Styles, *University of Oslo, at Oslo, Nesodden, Skein, and Asker, Norway*.



ELSIN Executive Board Member, Andrew Ashwin

Thoughts on the Coffield Report

The Coffield Report – the end for Learning Styles?

There were a number of references to the Coffield Report (Coffield et al, 2004) at this year's ELSIN Conference at the University of Surrey. In some respects an air of despondency hung over the conference as it appeared Frank had not only finished the job he had begun at the previous ELSIN conference in Hull when he tackled Rita Dunn so vigorously about the validity and reliability of the Dunn and Dunn model but had also consigned learning styles to the 'round metal filing cabinet'.

Thirteen models analysed in detail – not just any of the models, the thirteen most influential. The conclusions? Not very encouraging. Kolb for example comes in for criticism with even updated versions of the Learning Style Inventory (LSI) being slated for having little evidence of validity with recent studies by Wiestra and de Jong (2002) and De Ciantis and Kirtan (1996) being used as evidence of this lack of validity. Honey and Mumford's Learning Styles Questionnaire (LSQ) is also identified as exhibiting limited psychometric robustness and the problems of labeling students or workers in an organisation as one of the four categories has its deficiencies and dangers highlighted.

In short most of the learning styles constructs come in for similar treatment. The final conclusion being that it is dubious to base pedagogy on constructs/models that have a very weak empirical base with this base defined as a need to have internal consistency, test-retest reliability and construct reliability and validity. The conclusion seems to be pretty damning as far as the case for learning styles is concerned. Perhaps though, none of those who have studied learning styles in any depth would have been surprised at Coffield's conclusions.

Throughout my educational career, it seems that educationalists have been searching for a holy grail – some magic ingredient that would allow those in the know to raise educational achievement and improve student learning. From the days of free schools and progressive education to the traditionalist approach and every shade in between, we have sought that elusive antidote to the problems facing schools in encouraging learning. That a large number of students still do not achieve what they are capable of doing despite all this and the interest in learning styles suggests that we still have a long way to go.

Learning styles does have some attraction – the fact that psychometrics were associated with them gives the impression that these must be 'scientifically sound' and it is not surprising that those who are concerned for their students' welfare take on board the research. Where things fall down is in the failure to read to the end of the work of those who offer these constructs. Few, it seems to me, attempt to suggest that they have all the answers. Gardner, for example, was horrified to hear of the number of schools that had changed to offer an education regime based on 'multiple intelligences'. You cannot 'do multiple intelligences' he countered!

This has happened, it seems, in some schools. The attempt to treat children as individuals has collided with the research on learning styles, brain based learning and accelerated learning and the resulting morphing has been less than satisfactory in this author's view. Having children walking around with a sticker informing whoever meets them that they are 'visual' or 'kinesthetic' or any other style label is surely not what the developers of the constructs had in mind? Perhaps we should have stickers with the labels 'Muslim', 'Christian' 'Black' 'White Caucasian' and so on just to make sure that no-one is in doubt of the extent of our individuality.

It is this sort of response to the research and the way it is implemented in schools and colleges that is seized upon by the media who love nothing more than a good story about how education is failing. Couple that with a detailed report that surveys all the literature and examines each construct in detail and comes out with a negative conclusion about the validity and reliability of measuring what cannot be measured and we have the sort of headlines that could indeed sound the death knell for learning styles.

But a closer look at what Coffield reports actually gives cause for optimism and the necessity for not dismissing this as another failed attempt at understanding learning but as a springboard for reminding us all of the complexity of what we are dealing with – learning and (in the case of schools) young people – humans! It is possible to criticise Coffield's approach to the research.

Each construct was subject to the same analysis and methodology – is this appropriate? Coffield is keen to point out the size of the effects on learning outcome 'individualisation has an effect size of 0.14 while providing feedback or reinforcement has an effect size of 1.13', but can learning outcomes really be subject to such empirical reductionism? What about the other mitigating factors that might have influenced these outcomes? Coffield, indeed, suggests that two of the more valid constructs do take into consideration other factors that might influence the learning outcome, (Vermunt and Entwistle), but is the same approach being adopted in measuring size effects?

Ultimately Coffield does not reject learning styles but applies, as he suggests, a healthy scepticism to some of the claims that have been made for the effect of a focus on learning styles. Coffield and his colleagues have done the field a huge service in making us all stop and think about what we are involved in, of the need to adopt some reflexive methodologies and to look at ways in which the field can be integrated and some order imposed.

We all care about student learning – at whatever age – and we would surely want to ensure that the pedagogy we applied was as rigorous as possible. So this is the start of a new period of research into learning styles. Maybe it does not signal the time to search for new labels and constructs, but to look at what the research has to tell us so far, and how we might look to start putting the pieces of the jigsaw together so that we can all see the picture not just those who only need a part to see the whole!

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SOME MORE THOUGHTS ON THE COFFIELD REPORTS: A REASON FOR OPTIMISM

BY, Melodie Rosenfeld

Doctoral Student—Tilburg University, the Netherlands

I heartily agreed with Liz Peterson's insightful comments in the ELSIN 2004 Newsletter regarding the two Coffield et al. (2004) Reports (Report A: "Should we be using learning style?" and Report B: "Learning styles and pedagogy in post-16 learning.") On the positive side, the "Reports" were extensive and pointed out important concerns for both researchers and practitioners. Peterson points out that they "caution against the use of some style models in pedagogy, but these reports don't deny the existence of style as a construct." On the negative side, the Reports glossed over learning styles benefits and used, "emotive and value-laden language," which biased readers against using styles. In this article, I wish to point out that "Report A" contained some unexpectedly enlightening recommendations, which give stylists reason for optimism. In particular, I was pleased to read that,

"In our opinion, the critics who dismiss all the practical consequences of learning styles research as either trivial or 'old hat' are missing opportunities for professional growth and institutional change... (p. 43)

The recommendations in Section 5 were also encouraging. One recommendation is that learning styles can improve learners' self-awareness and meta-cognition; the strength of learning styles lies not in labelling an individual with a particular style, but in empowering learners to learn about themselves in order to enhance their own learning. Another recommendation is that styles add to "a lexicon of learning for dialogue." The language of styles and individual learning differences can help to put learners' and particularly teachers' meta-cognitive awareness into practice, and such a language for teachers is "critical to success." (p. 50)

Report A continues by acknowledging the far-ranging benefits of learning styles and sees the potential of a discussion of learning styles which "may prove to be the catalyst for individual, organizational or even systemic change" (p.51). This is not trivial prediction. Thus, these serious critics of learning styles acknowledge the potential role of learning styles to advance meta-cognition, self-development of learners, teachers' professional development and educational change in post-16 education. This is reason to rejoice.

My optimism lies in the area of using learning styles theory in professional teacher development, such as in teachers' colleges and teachers' accreditation programs. What is beneficial about using styles theory with teachers in such milieus? First, teacher educators can (a) use a variety of inventories and models minus any financial incentives to push any one program, (b) advance the language of individuals learning differences with teachers, (c) encourage meta-cognition of teachers' learning and teaching styles, and (d) develop teachers' larger repertoires for teaching diverse learners. Clear benefits have been shown for individual teachers undergoing such professional development. These benefits include teachers' development of language, beliefs and practice (Rosenfeld & Rosenfeld, 2004) and development of more effective teacher beliefs about students. Ojure (1997), with no vested interest other than research, found that learning styles training (4MAT Fundamentals Training) significantly increased the self-efficacy of teachers, one of the most important factors in effective teaching.

Presently, studies such as these focus only on the benefits for individual teachers. Nevertheless, research of such teacher development can be the beginning of actualizing the Reports' predictions, namely that Styles can be the catalyst for broader educational change. For instance, what happens when teachers (or even better, principals) who have undergone such professional development and are sensitive to individual learning differences, return to schools and become agents of school change? Even more tantalizing, what would happen if school administrators and policy makers underwent such professional development with learning styles and replaced one-size-fits-all, "coverage" education with more informed choices and support for learners and teachers? As a styles-advocate, I found the Coffield Reports, initially, depressing to read. And admittedly, the field of learning styles needs to eradicate the present pitfalls (pitfalls which include lack of psychometric rigor of inventories, lack of consolidation of theories, and a plethora of commercial models based more on financial incentives than sensible integration—(p. 62, Report A). But the reports have contributed to enriching our understanding, keeping us intellectually honest, and giving us new and promising directions for research and practice.

(See page 10 for references)

Thank You Eugene and Rebecca

Shortly following the 10 Annual ELSIN Conference the ELSIN Executive Board was sorry to receive the resignation of Professor Eugene Sadler-Smith who has decided it was time to move-on and make way for others. Eugene has been involved with ELSIN since its inception. He attended the first one-day conference at Birmingham in 1995 along with Steve Armstrong, Steve Rayner, John Hayes, Richard Riding and approximately 25 others. Shortly after that first meeting, Steve Rayner and Steve Armstrong formally started ELSIN and Eugene was invited to join the Executive Board. Eugene has been involved ever since, working to foster research in the style differences field. Eugene probably will be remembered most for his leadership shown in successfully organising and hosting this years 10th Conference in Surrey, for his outstanding presentation at the ELSIN Symposium in the AOM Conference Toronto 2002, and for his critique of the CSI in JOOP among other things. We are sorry to see Eugene leave and we wish him all the best for the future. We hope our paths will continue to cross in the years to come.



Dr. Steve Armstrong gives former Executive Board Member, Eugene Sadler-Smith an award for "Conference Excellence." As the Coordinator of the 10th Annual ELSIN Conference, Dr. Sadler-Smith was certainly well deserving of this honor. The program was concise with representatives from over 60 European countries.

Dr. Sadler-Smith (below) presents flowers to his assistant Rebecca Weale. She was the initial contact person for delegates. Later, as plans progressed, it was Rebecca who supplied the information, the well organised programme, saw to it that meals and entertainment were ready and generally attended to the proceedings. She made the visit to Surrey an excellent learning experience for learning-style enthusiasts.





A Visit To Surrey, England and the 10th Annual ELSIN Conference

Dr. Barbara Hayes, Molloy College, USA

Reflections of the 10th Annual Conference of the
European Learning Styles Information Network

There is always a melancholy mood present when one reflects on past experiences in life. Such is the case in my reflection of the learning styles conference this past June in Surrey, England. This memory is one that is positive and has given me great food for thought as an educator.

The entire network of European Learning Styles was unknown to me as a newcomer to the Network. I was, of course, familiar with learning styles and I supported it, because it makes sense. What I did not expect was such a great variety of workshops, nor did I realize how far this extended in Europe, and Asia for that matter.

My colleague, Dr. Marjorie Schiering, of Molloy College, was a veteran of this network. My other colleague, Mr. Anthony Marino, an educator from the Oceanside School District in New York, was a novice in the awareness of this network as was I. Our presentation, *Storytelling as a Learning Style Motivational Technique and Within Class Identification of Cognitive and Meta-Cognitive Thought Processes*, was well received.

I was delighted to have opportunities to attend other presentations, which were meaningful to me, personally. The presentations that I have continued to reflect on are: *Learning, Learning Styles, Strategies, and Meta-Cognition* (Bostrom, Lena), *Investigating Learning Styles by Looking at Art*, (Mega, Georgia), and *The Fun Factor: A Methodology for Motivating Learning at the Undergraduate Level* (Walsh, Phil).

The five days began on June 13th with an excellent keynote speech presented by Dr. Bill Lucas. His topic was, "*What are the learning styles of an effective lifelong learner? Should we be doing more to profile these?*" As an educator of many years at all levels, my main goal has always been to instill in my students the desire and passion to be life long learners. I knew I was teaching the 3 R's and much more, but I was truly interested in my desire for them to love learning for the sake of learning. I was pleased to see that other educators thought this concept worthy of a keynote address.

The rest of the week was as stimulating and rewarding as the first day. I met educators from Saudi Arabia, Greece, England, Wales and other places in Europe. I was a bit dismayed to find only one other group of American educators. It seems a pity that the concept of learning styles is not taken with such interest in America as it is in the rest of the world.

My first foray into the international conference world of Learning Styles was one of great excitement and personal growth as an educator. I look forward to returning to the European Conference in the near future.

SOME MORE THOUGHTS ON THE COFFIELD RE- PORTS: A REASON FOR OPTIMISM

Melodie Rosenfeld

*Doctoral Student—Tilburg University,
the Netherlands (continued from p. 9)*

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOLLOWED BY A SCHOOL VISITATION IN NORWAY

By, Dr. Marjorie S. Schiering, Graduate Education Professor of Interdisciplinary Methods, Molloy College, USA

Background Information

This past March 2005 I had the privileged opportunity to conduct learning-style presentations involving the use of interdisciplinary interactive instructional resources at the University of Oslo in Oslo, Nesodden, Asker and Skien, Norway. I had been invited by, Ruth Jensen, the leader/coordinator of the Nesodden Learning Style Center, as a result of her seeing Molloy College's students' work involving differentiated instruction, sans learning styles, at the St. John's University's Learning Style Center's 26th, 27th and 28th International Learning Style Institute in New York City. (Drs. Rita and Kenneth Dunn : Conference Originators and Leaders)

Revisiting Norway

Returning on the 7th of November, to Nesodden, I presented an all-day professional development workshop on an Educational Paradigm titled: *Developing Social and Academic Cognition With The Use of Interactive Instructional Resources* (Schiering, 2003). On November 8th I visited the Kindergarten through seventh-grade rural inclusion, Bjørnemyr Skole, from whence the teachers came to participate in the previous day's presentation at the Samfunnshuset building. While there, they'd constructed their own interactive instructional resources. Primarily this involved the design and construction of interdisciplinary Tri-fold Boards and the Interactive Book Report: *Playing The Pages* (Schiering, 2000). Noting that all the teachers who'd been to the previous days presentation were now in-their-classrooms, I questioned whether school had been dismissed the day before, or if the previous day had been a holiday. I was informed that the *parents* had taught the classes on the seventh of November. Thus began my exploration of a learning style school. First, my visual observation noted that the children were happily "engaged" in the learning experience at each grade level. Every classroom had a "Comfy Corner" as well as desks and chairs, and cushioned "sit-upons" for those who preferred this learning-style preference accommodation. Outside one fifth-grade classroom, four boys were working on a project, and they were singing as they worked. Student learners were provided with instruction that involved a multi-modality approach encompassing connections between disciplines.

There was a limit of 15 students to a classroom, and teachers were casually dressed. The children did not wear shoes to class as this is the custom at home and was, therefore, applied to the students' formal learning environment. Actually, the school's overall "communication" and "sense of community" was promoted by learning-style curriculum and project-based assignments. These fostered good teacher/parent/student/school relationships. An indoor and outdoor amphitheatre were present for "large" assemblies. And, inclusion classroom students were wheeled to main classrooms, twice daily, for creating an enhanced "school community." The hallways were well decorated with examples of students' art work that represented the concept of working alone and then joining of individual efforts leading to an overall object of beauty (see last picture bottom row). There was a kiln, photo studio, full kitchen, and woodworking shop for students in grades four through seven, and a general work area for teachers, as well as partnership -offices for these educators. School dismissed at 2:30, but teachers remained until 3:30 to work on lesson planning and/or discuss the days events with colleagues. Teacher evaluations were conducted daily through discourse with peers and administrators visiting classrooms. The journey to this learning-style school was one of the highlights of my career, because it demonstrated the learning style concept being practiced on a daily basis, school-wide, between teachers, student learners, parents and administrators.

The top row of pictures below shows, respectively, a teacher working on a tri-fold board, the Library at Bjørnemyr Skole, students in a classroom, teacher working on a project at Samfunnshuset, and Ruth Jensen, the Nesodden Learning Style Center coordinator. The bottom row of pictures are of teachers working in small-group format discussing what tri-fold and/or Interactive Book Reports will be constructed, students in a classroom and outside of it, and a student created wall hanging art project, as mentioned in the above article.



Please share with ELSIN'S Newsletter readers, your practitioner experiences, or observations of a learning-style classroom or school, for our next publication.

A good deal has been written about the advantages of having a learning style classroom at any grade level. From my personal experience, when students are actively engaged in learning, their thoughts, ideas, opinions, and judgments are most often of a positive nature, because they "feel" good about learning. I think that learning styles promotes self-efficacy, student empowerment, and high levels of self-esteem. (M. Schiering, 1995)

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