



### At least two important experimental studies have shown

that most teachers may be teaching foreign language incorrectly to many adolescents. For example, Solomon-Hollander (2005) revealed the negative effects of traditional versus perceptually responsive instructional teaching for on-and above-grade level vocabulary acquisition of eighth-grade Spanish students. Similarly, Perna (2007) noted the statistically positive effects of beginning language instruction with each individuals' strongest perceptual strength and then reinforcing it with their secondary strength. That simple procedure impacted significantly on both the achievement- and attitude- test scores of ninth and tenth graders studying Italian.

Perna actually compared the effects of two popular methods of teaching foreign-language — traditional and Total Physical Response Storytelling (TPRS) as opposed to introducing vocabulary through individuals' strongest perceptual modality and then reinforcing it through their second-

ary strength. In both the Solomon-Hollander and Perna studies, attitudes toward the language middle- and high-school students were learning were statistically higher when they were taught through their perceptual strengths than through any other method. It is logical that, when learners prefer one instructional method over another, they are likely to perform better in the preferred strategy.

In 1970, St. John's University (SJU) in New York established the world's first Center for the Study of Learning and Teaching Styles. Over the last four decades, the University's learning-style model developed and was researched repeatedly by at least 18 doctoral faculty and more than 162 doctoral graduates. Called the Dunn and Dunn Model because of its originators, Professors Rita Dunn of SJU and Professor Ken Dunn of Queens College, it subsequently was adopted by educators in many nations, some of whom created their own local Learning Style Centers (see mem-

## Rita Dunn and Lois R. Favre ask if we really know how to teach foreign languages

bership of the International Learning Styles Network at [www.learningstyles.net](http://www.learningstyles.net)). The ILSN website's bibliography currently cites more than 850 published studies conducted by researchers at more than 140 institutions of higher education internationally on this specific model.

Lakeland Central Schools in Westchester County, New York became the first district to be established as a Learning Styles Center by the ILSN. For the past four years, district staff and administration have been engaged in improving teaching and learning through attention to students' learning-style strengths. This focus addressed gaps in instruction across content areas and resulted in a substantial decrease in Special Education referrals. Their academic intervention services were so successful that many students were returned to general education classrooms — all because of the focus on teaching new and difficult academic information through students' learning-style strengths.

### World Language Application

One focus of the Lakeland School District is the introduction of elementary students to world languages to enable their active participation in our increasingly global economy. It is believed that early exposure will increase enrollment in foreign language instruction as children develop their skills and the program expands from the elementary levels into middle school and beyond. One of the unique aspects of Lakeland's program will be its immediate connections with overseas schools that also serve as Learning Style Centers through the ILSN. Another will be the establishment of early conversational communication with same-age children in those schools through the facilitation of multiple pen-pal, video-conferencing experiences. A third will be the use of teacher- and student-made tactual and kinesthetic instructional resources to teach children of different language backgrounds the same basic vocabulary through identical materials.

### Project Design

For the past four decades, SJU professors and doctoral students have pioneered experimental research comparing traditional versus learning-style responsive teaching in virtually every discipline, kindergarten through college. They studied, compared, and published data concerning the learning styles of students in Bermuda, Brunei, Denmark, Finland, New Zealand, Norway, Russia, Sweden, Turkey, and the U.S. They learned and reported about at-risk versus gifted versus average-achieving versus officially classified Special Education students of various ages and by gender. Studies have ranged from primary schools to professional adult populations and, in virtually every case, most youth learn differently from the way most Teacher Education institutions prepare prospective teachers to teach.

The Dunn and Dunn Model of teaching and learning includes age-compatible learning-style assessments for elementary, middle-school, high-school, and adult populations that provide computer-generated prescriptions for studying and doing homework based on individuals' learning-style strengths (Brand, 1999; Carns & Carns, 1991; Geiser, et. al., 2000/2001; Lenehan et al., 1994; Maltzman, 2008; Marino, 1993; Minotti, 2002; Turner, 1992; White, 1996). These reliable and valid assessments have been field-tested internationally with many different approaches for teaching identical subject-matter to students with unique learning-style strengths (Dunn & Griggs, 2007). Indeed, this model has been explored and ana-

lyzed by researchers at more than 400 institutions of higher education (Dunn & Griggs, 2007), and has been implemented successfully throughout the U.S. (Dunn & De Bello, 1999) and in at least 30 other nations (Note 1).

### What Is Learning Style?

People begin to concentrate, process, and remember new and difficult academic information in unique patterns. Thus, the SJU Model is based on decades of research substantiating that different instructional approaches, environments, and resources are responsive to diverse learning-style strengths. Most individuals have strengths, but different people have very different strengths that can be measured reliably. Furthermore, students attain statistically higher achievement- and attitude-test scores in congruent, rather than in incongruent treatments (Dunn & DeBello, 1999; Dunn & Dunn, 1999; Dunn, Dunn, & Perrin, 1994; Dunn & Griggs, 2007). They also behave better in style-responsive environments (Fine, 2003; Oberer, 1999).

Any teachers who wish to do so can learn to use learning styles (Dunn & Dunn, 1999), and most students can capitalize on their learning-style strengths when concentrating on new and difficult information (Dunn, 2001; Dunn & Honigsfeld, 2009).

### How Do Most Children Learn?

Some children learn a language by being read to, or by seeing printed words as they are being read to — particularly when the text is related to their interests. Others learn language by acting, or concentrating on cartoons, graphs, pictures, or taking photographs. Some need combinations of listening and reading, but many more learn through combinations of listening and speaking. Other children learn language through kinesthetic strategies such as baking (tactual, kinesthetic), seeing and becoming accustomed to everyday print such as the McDonald's symbol, activities such as Floor and Wall Games, poetry (rhyme and rhythm), preparing for a trip, television, and singing (Dunn & Blake, 2008).

Less than 20 percent of students in grades K-12 learn best by listening and no more than 30 percent learn visually; the majority of those are visual/picture rather than visual/print learners. Most young children master new and difficult knowledge tactually — and that does not include note-taking or writing.

The basic technique for mastering new and difficult knowledge by primary-age children is through a focus on combined picture/print and word recognition in a game-like tactual and/or kinesthetic strategy supplemented by speaking — not necessarily by listening. For example a three-part Task Card might show a picture of a tree in the middle with the word in Turkic on one of the outer thirds and the English version on the opposite outer third. Each third would be cut into a puzzle-like pattern made self-corrective by matched, fitting-together shapes. After such an exposure, saying the word to someone else after hearing it would be helpful.

### Environment

Lakeland will conduct its early elementary language experiences in an after-school immersion program in a club-like setting where students can relax comfortably, with or without shoes, and snack while learning through the use of game-like, hands-on materials based on the SJU research.

This research aligns with the ACTFL (1998) standards to consider the interpersonal mode (active negotiating of meaning by individuals), the interpretive mode, considering cultural interpretations, and the presentation mode that permits the creation of messages (text and conversational) that can be understood by students in another nation.

The club will meet twice each week for 120 minutes after school which makes it convenient for parents to pick up their children after work. Students will use multi-sensory instructional materials designed to teach and reinforce language instruction that responds directly to the learning-style strengths of each youngster in the group as determined by his/her learning-style profile as revealed by the Elementary Learning Style Assessment (ELSA; Dunn, Rundle, & Burke, 2007).

Materials will be posted on District and ILSN web pages for easy access by students at home, as well as for practice and engagement between club sessions. Parents will be part of the process to assist in engagement activities at home, understanding the language acquisition process, and seeing that their offspring attend consistently.

### Objectives and Assessments

Benchmark assessments will measure individual students' successes as they move through stages of understanding, being understood, accuracy, vocabulary usage, cultural knowledge, and maintaining communication as delineated in the Five C's outlined by the Standard for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century (1999): communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities. With the excitement of developing relationships and making friends as they learn, the language students should remain actively engaged.

The District's first objective is to teach children of one nation each word as it is printed in their native language (by recognition of the picture) and the same word in another language — either English, Korean, or Turkic. Why would young children want to learn similar words in another language? So that they can demonstrate knowledge their parents and/or siblings do not have and develop a beginning relationship with a similarly-aged pen-pal in another nation. What would be the long-term objective of such a procedure? To encourage children from different nations to develop beginning relationships with each other so that they can eventually learn what practices and beliefs they have in common, and to develop incentives for peaceful caring and co-existence.

Using a Task-Card design would be the beginning step for first graders. Once children have learned to recognize the word-picture threesomes, those who are involved in the project can use an iPod to hear the pronunciation of the words they need to master by manipulating the self-corrective cards and putting them together with their matching illustrations. (See Task Card samples in Appendix A.)

Children who become successful with the first 100 words will be offered the opportunity to write to a similarly aged child at one of the participating centers. Correspondence (by putting together words and pictures) would be carefully supervised by the educators involved in the participating centers. As children mastered the tasks and develop interest in using the language to communicate with another child, they will be offered additional tactual instructional resources (or similar ones if preferred), and permitted to master beginning phrases by connecting some of the words with which they had already developed familiarity.

Gradually, via the same methods, full sentences and their pronunciations would be added to the iPods or computers. The district is equipped with technology that would permit students to speak to each other, across

nations by teleconferencing, skype, blogs, wikis and podcasts ([www.lakelandschools.org](http://www.lakelandschools.org)). As language mastery was evidenced, children gradually could expand the number of pen pals with whom they correspond and the number of words — or even languages, they begin to use.

### Other Resources

Formal teaching of grammar would not begin until words, phrases, and sentences were being used to communicate with ease — and then it would be taught through non-traditional methods such as Programmed Learning Sequences (PLSs) and Contract Activity Packages (CAPs) (Dunn, Dunn, & Perrin, 2004; Dunn & Honigsfeld, 2009). However, in the interim, children would be taught how to cook or bake food and/or sing a song or do a dance popular in the other culture, and to exchange photos with their pen pals. Gradually, as communicative language skills developed, children would be taught to use their own and their pen pal's language for interactive discussion and to teach each other by writing letters or sending supervised recordings on interesting topics to them.

The second objective is to teach language the way most young children can master new and difficult information — based on their identified tactual and kinesthetic strengths, interests, and developing communicative skills. Not all children will master foreign language this way, but more will than through traditional approaches (Solomon-Hollander, 2005; Perna, 2007).

As fluency develops and interest continues, children who continue to participate will be provided Programmed Learning Sequences (PLSs) to teach bits of grammar and culture. PLSs are intended for students who are visual/print and visual/picture oriented, tactual, global, and in need of structure (Dunn & Honigsfeld, 2009; Dunn, Dunn, & Perrin, 2004). These are booklet-type resources that teach through stories, humor, tactual reinforcements, and auditory recordings. Gradually, grammar and correct pronunciation will be added through PLSs and CAPs, after word and phrase use and interest are demonstrated.

A third objective is to gradually reduce cultural dislike and fear. People may fear others they know little about, but if children can get to know each other, they may harbor fewer concerns and learn to like each other. Slowly, that may lead to the obliteration of inter-cultural anxiety and concern. If children never learn to speak to each other, they may never learn to like each other. Intercultural understanding is an important goal, not only for this project, but for the world.

A fourth objective is to help children enjoy learning languages. Few enjoy processes which they find difficult to master like learning a language by essentially listening and reading, without any concrete applications for their efforts. Initially, this project will be made available to the Lakeland Central School District and the Turkish Learning Style Center's Schools. As their first- and second-grade children demonstrate ability, interest, and a propensity for mastering unique languages, they will be guided through the process by Dr. Lois Favre, selected Lakeland Center teachers, and Professor Rita Dunn, who will teach and supervise SJU graduate students.

### Procedures

Initially, photos of Turkish children in the relevant age group will be shown to selected Lakeland first- and second graders and their parents who already know about learning styles. They will be told a little about those children and shown three-part Task Cards with English, Turkic, and a picture to begin developing a vocabulary to enable simple understandings and communication between the two groups. The same procedure will be used in Turkey, where first- and second graders who already know

about learning styles will be told a little about the Lakeland children and shown the same three-part Task Cards.

The second phase will include beginning correspondence between pairs of English and Turkish same-age children through Task Cards they personally create by saying something about themselves, such as a drawing with the word "Me" or "My Family" in both languages, and a drawing or a photo of their family members — perhaps with "My Mother" and/or "My Father" and/or "My Sister" and/or "My Brother." These can be sent via e-mail to the Turkish children who will be working with identical Task Cards. Computers and e-mail communication are available to children in both schools. After receipt of the first set of Task Cards from the Lakeland children, the Turkish first- and second-graders will respond by creating their Task Cards with the same kinds of information.

During this initial phase, both sets of children will receive additional three-part Task Cards with more new words in both languages accompanied by illustrations. When previously un-introduced words are needed, children can ask for them or find them on the internet and create their own personal Task Cards. Gradually, as individuals become increasingly confident and fluent through word/picture matches and email correspondence, beginning phrases, such as "this is my school" or "this is where I sleep in my home" can be added.

### Crucial Research

It took almost a quarter of a century for researchers to accumulate sufficient data to document that between 15 and 30 percent of school-age youth are tactual depending on achievement levels, age, and gender. These students learn best by manipulating instructional resources with a hands-on approach. Another group of mainly males learns kinesthetically, by engaging in activities in which they frequently move from one place to another. This information concerning perceptual strengths is crucial because poorly performing students at various grade levels statistically increased their achievement by focusing on required content through their tactual and kinesthetic instructional resources.

From phrases, children will move onto short and then longer sentences. They will progress at their own pace, but if they do not master 10-20 words each month, they may be moved into another form of instruction such as the Programmed Learning Sequence (PLS)—a combination global/analytic system better suited to children who are visual/print and picture oriented, but who require structure and more tactual engagement (see Sample PLS in Appendix B). The PLS, however, is too demanding as a first step for many first or second graders. For students who excel in these language-acquisition communications, we will develop Contract Activity Packages (CAP) to facilitate rapidly accelerated progress (Dunn & Honigsfeld, 2009; See CAP sample in Appendix C).

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## Methodology

This project will involve first- through fourth graders and permit them to move through the language acquisition process much more quickly than would be possible if they were enrolled in formal language classes. Dependent on their innate and developing skills, they will move through the initial Task Card stages to immediate communication skills with similarly aged children in Turkey while simultaneously developing understanding about Turkish children, their families, their culture and, eventually, their beliefs. Those who pursue these opportunities, appear to be positively engaged in an ongoing process, and demonstrate the ability to master 10-20 words (or more) per month will be supervised closely and encouraged to persist. They also will receive additional knowledge of the culture through additional learning-style responsive internet materials designed by educators in all three involved institutions — the Lakeland Public Schools,' the Turkish Schools,' and SJU Centers. The materials used can be made available to all ILSN Centers and to educators everywhere willing to experiment with this research-documented, learning styles approach. As we add languages, the various Centers will assist with the creation of materials.

This project reflects better up-to-date knowledge and effective practices than might be suggested by foreign language teachers who have not been involved in comparable research. The Lakeland Public Schools Learning Styles Center has evidenced statistically higher standardized achievement test scores in reading and mathematics on the New York States tests since its implementation of learning styles three years ago. Therefore, this foreign language project is just one additional extension of Lakeland's learning-style program effectiveness in reading and mathematics with the same instructional strategies as designed herein.

### Evaluation

We propose a study to quantify children's language proficiency which at the same time measures their ability to converse with others. Recordings will be created periodically to demonstrate the increasing ability of students to use the target language effectively.

The older elementary children (grades three and four) have been tested for their learning-style strengths. We will test our younger learners this fall with the newly developed assessment for primary learners: Observational Primary Assessment of Learning Styles (OPALs; Neiter & Dunn, 2009). Our current data indicate that the majority of young children tend to be tactual, kinesthetic, and visual/picture learners. The vocabulary for this project will be aligned with the New York State standards for foreign language learning and performance for K-12 learners, but based on an individualized, rather than a grade-level spectrum.

We plan that, as communications between and among pen pals increase, the children will be provided with additional resources that introduce grammar and pronunciation, so that children will literally be able to speak with each other via iPods, skype, and videoconferencing. Thus, the standard foreign language assessments (translated into Turkic by that Center's staff and scrutinized for cultural bias) will compare these children's foreign language achievement results with those of same-age students studying a foreign language for the same amount of time in New York State's public schools.

However, we seek more than merely quantitative comparisons of the children's proficiency. Another component of this project is the development of children's ability to converse with others, to be able to read and write messages in the target language they study over a three-year period. We want them to understand written and spoken words and respond effectively to queries posed by others with whom they come into contact.

Thus, for evaluation of this project, we will add occasional recordings of the children's conversations with each other and their teachers to demonstrate their gradually increasing ability to use the language effectively.

We will add performance-based standards in terms of the number of words mastered each month by each child and the number of e-mails exchanged between pen pals in a monthly period after the first two or three months, with the anticipation that children will communicate with each other at least five times a year. We will measure student language proficiency in the planned model of instruction with the translated New York State standardized tests (scrutinized for cultural bias), and will determine their interest in the project and the culture in which their pen pals live by interviewing each child at the end of each academic year. We will develop five to ten case analyses of the students who perform best in this project — and those who do not — to determine what contributed to their success or lack of it.

We have planned data collection that includes, but is not limited to testing, interviewing, videotaping, progress-monitoring, and semi-annual reports. All stakeholders will have a part in the program evaluation and the reporting will include evidence as to attainment of short and intermediate outcomes, as well as how progress in the program/project predicts the long-term, overarching goals of uniting students across nations along common goals and fostering genuine interest in each other. We anticipate that the outcomes of the project will result in insights concerning language instruction that can be replicated far and wide. **X**

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### CES References

See [www.languagemagazine.com/july09/refs](http://www.languagemagazine.com/july09/refs) for all materials referenced.

### Notes

**1** Specifically, research projects were conducted in: Australia (Murray-Harvey, 1994); the Bahamas (Roberts, 1984); Bermuda (Bascome, 2004; Bassett, 2004; De Shields, 2005; Landy, 2005; Honigsfeld & Lister, 2003; Ming, 2004; Roberts, 2005; Tully, Dunn, & Hlawaty, 2006); Brazil (DePaula, 2003; Wechsler, 1993); Brunei (Pengiran-Jadid, 1998); Canada (Brodhead & Price, 1993; Mariash, 1983); Czechoslovakia (Karlava, Lekarska, & Kralove, 1994); Denmark (Bostrom & Schmidt, 2006); Egypt (Solinan, 1993); Germany (Hlawaty, 2002,2003); Greece (Spiridakis, 1993); Guatemala (Sinatra et al., 1993); Honduras (DiSabastian, 1994); Hong Kong (Chen, 2006); Hungary (Honigsfeld, 2000, 2001, 2003.); Israel (Milgram & Price, 1993; Shemer, 1995); Jamaica (Roberts, 1984); Korea (Hong, Milgram, & Perkins, 1995; Hong & Suh, 1995; Suh & Price, 1993); Malaysia (Lau, 1997); Mexico (Ingham & Ponce Meza, & Price, 1998); New Zealand (Honigsfeld & Cooper, 2003; Norway (Bull-Holmberg, Guldahl, & Jensen, 2007); the Philippines (Li, 1989; Orden, 2004; Orden & Quero, 2005); Puerto Rico (Ramirez, 1982; Vazquez, 1985); Russia (Ulubabova, 2007); Singapore (Lam-Phoon, 1986; Yeap, 1987); South Africa (Nganwa-Bagumah & Mwamwinda, 1991); Sweden (Bostrom & Lassen, 2006; Calissendorff, 2006; Honigsfeld & Gard, 2003); Taiwan (Lo, 1994); and the United States (Dunn & Griggs, 2003, 2004, 2007). The data from Turkey have not yet been published but the instruments have been translated and many school-age populations and teachers in that nation already have had their learning styles identified.

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