

Thinking outside the traditional educational model to teach all students

by **TRICIA DESPRES**

Within the walls of this Carbondale school is classroom after classroom after classroom of brilliant students. Yet, due to the affects of neurologically based Learning Disabilities/ Attention Deficit Disorder and Language Based Processing issues, the students within these lines of classrooms could easily get lost in the shuffle at any other school... but not here at **Brehm Preparatory School**.

You see, at this school and at this time when more and more schools can see and understand the benefits of looking far beyond the traditional educational model of learning, it is these students,

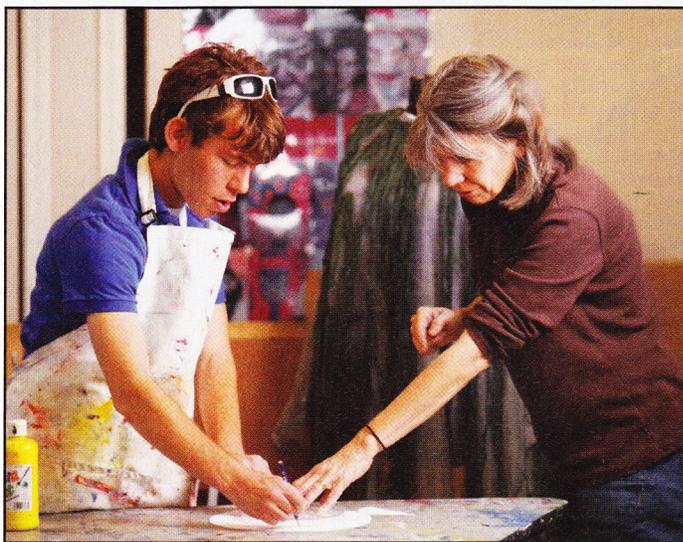


PHOTO COURTESY OF BREHM PREPARATORY SCHOOL

with the help of their dedicated teachers and families, will undoubtedly find a way to succeed.

"We individualize our

expectations of students and provide the level of support that the student needs in their content area," explains Richard Collins PhD., Director

of the Brehm Institute for Cognitive and Curricular Research. "The level of support may be untimed tests, tutors, aids, or training in the assistive software we have in our one to one laptop program. We also remediate the areas of weakness and teach students how to apply their strengths in each content area and what strategies to use in combination to demonstrate mastery and success."

"No two students are alike, even if the data they present to us is alike," adds Marjorie Hill, Principal at **St. Stanislaus Kostka School**. "Every student has his/her strengths and every student has an area in which they can grow. It is important to recognize

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Educational models

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that we teach students, not content. We can't simply approach the teaching and learning process as a checklist of facts to learn. We have to teach a student HOW to think...that is how you can reach a class full of students."

And while individualized academic placement is often a tricky proposition, some schools have found great success with various programs of study that offer personalized attention to a student's strengths and needs. "We recently underwent the accreditation process through AdvancedEd," tells Karen Booth, Principal at **Guerin College Preparatory High School**. "After an extensive review of our practices, their team determined that Guerin Prep High School offers a strong framework for student success by ensuring that the faculty and staff implement holistic support structures to help students grow and prepare them for the next level of achievement."

Some schools have found that the multi-age classroom gives them the best shot at success with the wide range of students that they are met with each and every school year. It was a concept that came rather unknowingly to the staff at **Akiba-Schechter Jewish Day School** years ago, when Principal Miriam Schiller she combined grades as a way of creating larger social groups for students for the small school. Little did she know it would be a concept that would still nearly 25 years later. "I never have to explain the multi-age classroom to families that are here," says Schiller. "They see how successful it is. Only when I talk to prospective



PHOTO COURTESY OF GUERIN COLLEGE PREPARATORY SCHOOL

families do I remember what 'normal' is. Why would I ever go back to 'normal'?"

Perhaps one of the many intriguing examples of traditional learning that goes far beyond the norm is online school at **CHALK Preschool**, which combines hands on learning with online possibilities. "At preschool age, tactile learning is so important for development of motor skills as well as being able to touch

and hold something gives them a greater understanding," explains Angela Johnson, Executive Director of CHALK Preschool. "What we have created with the online program is tens of hundreds of "How to videos" for a child. For example, a child will watch a video about counting, and then at the end of the video encourages the student and the parent to apply what was

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"Brehm has helped me become more aware. I've gotten to know myself, my learning disabilities and my processing issues. If I have a problem, I now feel comfortable talking with someone about it. After making so many friends here, it's the first time in my life that I feel that I'm not alone."
- Anna

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learned, by let's say going on a walk and counting flowers. This not only gets a child practicing their counting but it doesn't lock them into an electronic device and it encourages the parent to give the greatest gift to their child which is their time."

And when a parent is unable to work alongside their child, sometimes it is their classmates that create an undeniable bridge for learning in these non-traditional environments. "It's kind of a revamped "one room schoolhouse" approach around here," explains Kate Fabiszak, Director/Teacher at **Lovebugs Preschool**. "Here at Lovebugs, we allow our children to learn from each other. We have always felt that peer learning is a fun

and affective way of learning. Our older students have the opportunity to teach and help the younger children learn about the ABCs and 123s."

Of course, despite the technology and the plethora of ways to learn these days, perhaps nothing is as important as the role of the actual teacher to the success of any given student. "We are extremely proud of our low teacher to student ratio," explains Fosca Shackleton White, Head of School at **Montessori Academy of Chicago**. "I look inside some of our classrooms, and it's almost as if it's a private tutoring situation. We have co-teachers in every classroom, and in our three to six program, the afternoon lesson allows children the time to break into two different rooms and work together in groups that work best for them and their learning styles."

Lastly, many schools remain tied, and with great success, to the fundamentals of an arts component to education, making the traditional look rather non-traditional right before their very eyes.

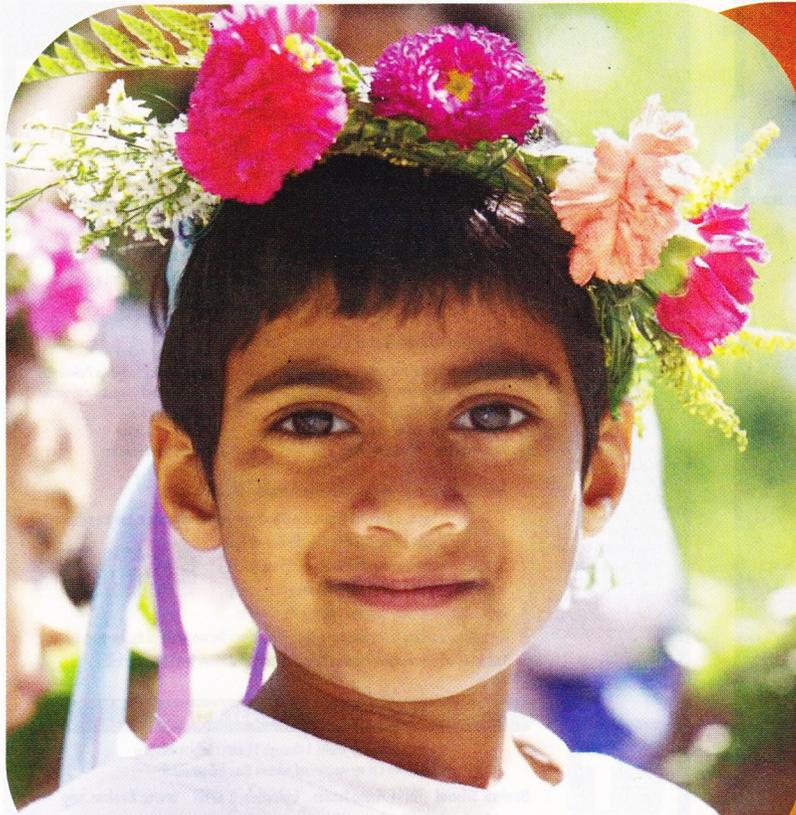
Rainforest Learning Center, for example, routinely use a diverse range of media like sculpture, pottery, painting, piano, dance, yoga, and theater to "encourage academic, personal and social growth".

And as with life itself, the magic formula of thinking outside the traditional educational model of 'how it's always been done' is a constantly



PHOTO COURTESY OF MONTESSORI ACADEMY OF CHICAGO

evolving proposition. "The process of consistently evaluating and developing program improvements has created the culture, which blends the traditional and non-traditional models," concludes Dr. Collins. "We depend on research both internally and externally generated to consistently push the envelope of innovation in providing services for our students. We are still evolving."



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