



If You **Let Them** Build, They Will **Learn!**

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Sound like a message in code? Well, **Let Me Learn** is really not a special code, but it is the philosophy behind a lesson plan in Eileen Randall's 4th grade class at Lawrence Intermediate School in Mercer County, New Jersey. During a recent visit to Mrs. Randall's classroom, the students were enthusiastically engaged in a group activity where problem-solving and creative thinking would be required to find a solution to the challenge that was presented. The setting for this team project was a construction site. Only instead of today's modern construction site, students were stepping back in time to an ancient civilization where materials were extremely limited and heavy machinery was non-existent.

The challenge: To move a "pile of building materials" represented by a large book without using their hands, which symbolized the lack of modern equipment. Working closely with their team members, each group brainstormed, discussed and sometimes argued their way to a plan. Then the theories and methods were put to the test in actual simulations utilizing the available building materials such as string, boards, pulleys, rubber bands or any other simple item they elected to use.

All of the groups discovered that the objective to move the book required two or even three trips back to the drawing board before successfully reaching a solution and hence, moving the book. The students admitted that it was surprise to them at how long it took to accomplish this assignment. What sounded fairly easy in the beginning actually became a series of trial-n-errors. And, as one student quipped, "just how did the Egyptians build those pyramids?"

"It was really awesome because our plan did work – we moved the book! We all agreed (on a plan) together, so that is why it went well," observed Liana. The project was presented ahead of time, so students had the opportunity to think of how they would approach the assignment. The designated team leader for one of the groups was fully prepared when arriving that morning. "I read in a book about how an everyday clothes hangar could be a pulley, so I brought one in for my group. We used it with string and it did work. But, the book was a little too heavy for the hangar, so it bent. The next time I'll bring in a stronger hangar," shared potential "future engineer" Rachel. "I liked working with the group and helping out by being the leader."

Overall, there was a unanimous vote by all these young builders that activities like this are really fun, and a cool way to learn. And, this was not the first time that Mrs. Randall's class participated in such a terrific activity, and it certainly won't be the last. That is because Eileen Randall is just one of 43 teachers that benefit from a program that has made these "Construction Kits" resources and activities available to the Lawrence Township teachers.

"The groups work so well together because they are based on the children's Let Me Learn scores. Each child has a role. One might keep the group organized and on task while another brings information relating to the project. Still others might be the idea person or the problem solver. The activities in the construction kit allow the children to utilize their pattern combination while at the same time learning the science behind machines and buildings they see all around them", said Randall while working with her students during the project.

Let Me Learn (LML), a non-profit educational services company, and The Construction Industry Advancement Program of New Jersey (CIAP of NJ), joined together in 2003 to launch a pilot program in the Lawrence Township School District using the Scholastic and Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) "Build Up" and "On Site" science kits. The program initially limited to a single 5th grade class has grown significantly due to the overwhelming acceptance by teachers, students and parents.

"The primary motivators for expansion of the program were both anecdotal responses and enthusiasm plus objective analysis indicating ability to effectively teach the core curriculum and achieve improved student performance with the use of the LML Process and the construction kits developed by Scholastic", said John Clearwater, Managing Director of CIAP of NJ. "The pilot led to implementation at appropriate grade levels district-wide."

Within one marking period, applying the LML Process showed a significant 8-10% increase in holistic test scores for the 3rd to 5th grade classes that were participating in the program. Test results showed 51% of the 4th grade students' holistic writing scores improved by one or more points and 55% of the 5th grade students' scores improved by one or more points within that one marking period. On further examination, the test scores reflected the highest range of improvement came from those students who had been at the lower end of the learning curve.

The Let Me Learn (LML) Process was developed in 1996 by Dr. Christine Johnston, of Rowan University, and is designed to help students (of all ages) to find out how to recognize who they are as a learner through the four key learning patterns. LML is a results-oriented system that works to identify these patterns for individuals and then provide the learners with strategies to help them maximize their learning potential. Over the past 10 years, LML has worked with teachers and administrators to create a learning environment that changes the dynamic of the learning climate within the classroom; helps teachers understand the different ways each student processes what is being taught; helps parents to connect with learning by also recognizing how they learn; and maybe the most important goal is to help students recognize their own learning style which maximizes their learning potential and academic confidence. LML was seeking a hands-on application to enhance their program and that is what the “Build-Up” and “On-Site” kits provided. The results of applying the LML Process have been particularly positive, yielding enhanced writing scores for those learners who frequently struggle with state assessments and standardized tests. Robert Kottkamp, educational researcher from Hofstra University, NY, devoted an entire chapter of his recent book to examining the positive difference in test outcomes understanding learning patterns can make using the LML Process.

“The essence of what we are doing is bringing two parts of the teaching-learning connection together by moving beyond content to personally connecting the teacher and the student through an understanding of themselves as learners,” explained Dr. Christine Johnston, founder of the LML Process.

CIAP of NJ (The Construction Industry Advancement Program of NJ) serves the New Jersey Construction Industry by developing and providing construction-related educational activities and encourages exploration of careers in an industry which just so happens to be one of the nation’s largest employers. The construction industry employs more people and contributes a higher percentage to America’s gross domestic product than any other single industry.

Through the Construction Futures campaign sponsored by the national organization of Associated General Contractors (AGC) and produced by Scholastic, the “Build Up” and the “On-Site” construction kits were the perfect resource for LML and CIAP of NJ to utilize for their classroom partnership. The Build Up kit is geared for 3rd to 5th grades while the “On-Site” kit targets the 6th to 9th grade; however, there is no set rule regarding the use of kits. There is a teacher’s guide that lists activities for specific age groups or grades. The tool kits are just jammed with every supply that comes to mind including Activity Books, Videos, Teaching Guide, Take-Home Family Pages, Posters, and Consumable Materials for all those exciting projects including wooden dowels, Popsicle sticks, even floatable concrete mix.

“CIAP of NJ believes academic success can be enhanced through continuing real-world application of what is learned in school, especially through hands-on activities and group settings that provide invaluable problem-solving experiences,” emphasized Clearwater.

The partnership of LML and CIAP of NJ and the success of the Lawrence Township schools show clear opportunities for program expansion already evident with the number of additional districts who have signed on. Along with Lawrence Township, other schools participating are Hopewell Township, Cumberland County, North Wildwood, Pittsgrove, Oldmans Township, Vineland, Alloway, Avalon, Delsea Regional and Salem. The Lawrence Township schools continue to grow this program with 22 teachers currently using the kits. The teachers have been using the LML Process for over six years, and with the introduction of the kits, the majority of Lawrenceville students can identify what patterns influence their learning.

“Group discussions and even conversations with individual students about careers are sparked by these group building lessons tied in with LML,” said Sue Rooney, a 3rd Grade Teacher at Lawrenceville Elementary. Which is the very reason that LML and CIAP of NJ joined together - to motivate even in the early years of the educational process how students’ natural learning skills and interests can encourage them to do well in school and also guide them towards exploring all the potential careers that are available.

While meeting with Judith McLaughlin, principal of Lawrenceville Elementary, she thought it would be best if we went directly to the source for feedback on the LML Process. What followed was a lively interactive discussion with a group of students representing various grades providing valuable insight about individual learning patterns and career discussions. There was no hesitation from the students when asked about potential careers in relation to their learning patterns – everyone was eager to share!

Shaye volunteered first, “I’m a sequential learner first, and I would like to be a lawyer.” The Sequential pattern is a learner most comfortable following step-by-step directions and completes assignments without interruption. Another student, Tanay, commented on his pattern, “No doubt, I’m technical first and I would like to be a civil engineer or a researcher. I like to solve problems.” The Technical learner seeks practical applications, does not like to communicate using words, and learns best from experience. Several Precise Learners were present with Erica stating, “Because I’m very strong in my Precise Pattern,

I think I may be a Doctor.” The Precise pattern learners are naturally inclined to take detailed notes, ask plenty of questions, and answer questions in a highly specific manner – perfect for medical school!

Along with the involvement in the LML partnership, CIAP of NJ is involved in other areas in the educational community such as: awarding scholarships and stipends to students pursuing careers in the construction industry, sponsoring summer camp programs to introduce young students to the world of construction in a very hands-on, interactive setting, providing motivating speakers from the industry for school career days, and administering the NJ Department of Labor Youth Transitions to Work Grant, as well as a similar program sponsored by the Port Authority of NY and NJ to promote apprenticeships in the trades.

LML and CIAP of NJ will pursue their plan of recruiting interested schools across the state to develop programs of their own utilizing the LML process along with the construction kits just like Lawrence Township has succeeded in doing. And, the goal of empowering these young students to truly understand how they best learn so that academic confidence and success are achieved will continue to be the motivation behind this partnership.

“Life is about problem-solving, so by providing as many opportunities as possible for students to learn how to reach solutions will equip them for the real-world,” commented Lee PISAURO, Ed.D. Education Representative for CIAP of NJ.

For more information on Let Me Learn, please call (856) 553-6281 or visit www.letmelearn.org. To learn more about CIAP of NJ, please call (732) 738-8636 or visit www.ciapofnj.org.

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