

LOWERED REJECTION OF CP (RED) ENHANCES THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR AT-RISK-YOUTH: A HYPOTHESIS IN NEED OF TESTING

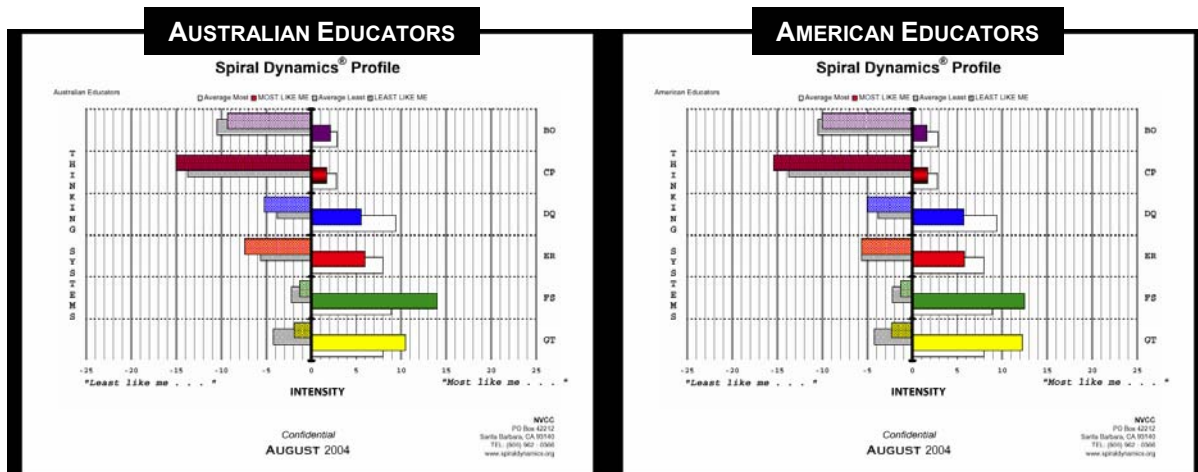
by Natasha Todorovic and Christopher Cowan

In this case we compare educators in a range of traditional structures who are searching for alternative educational approaches with the staff of a small firm specializing in work with troubled, at-risk-youth and young adults in a very non-traditional structure. The ‘traditional’ educators come from both the US and Australia and work primarily at secondary school and university levels, though some are consultant/trainers in the business sector. Assessment results from the two traditional groups are quite similar. The alternative educators working successfully with at-risk-young people are with the award-winning Australian firm, Optimal Learning. Their profile is very different from the ‘traditional’ educators and leads to the hypothesis presented here.

The assessment data is derived from our Spiral Dynamics Discover instrument, as well as comments completing ten “This I believe ...” stems in the vein of O.J. Harvey. Data on the educators were gathered prior to two educational conferences addressing alternative approaches to education. Participants were provided with an online link, username and password. There were 20 U.S. participants and 24 Australians. There are two principals in Optimal Learning.

The Discover generates twelve final scores which reflect self-reported preferences of the proportion of six Gravesian levels of existence (see appendix) – BO (Purple) through to GT (Yellow). The participant sorts through 30 statements which are cross-compared five times, then sorts an additional 60 statements. These choices lead to 40 “most like me” choices – the protrait range - and 40 “least like me” choices – the contrait range. The tally of choices is presented in a scalar from with contrait scores on the left of a 0 mid-line and protrait scores to the right. A total of 40 accept and 40 reject points are distributed with a maximum of 40 points on any scale. In the displays which follow, each group’s tally (in colored bars related to the Spiral Dynamics® colors) is overlaid on group averages of a broad population sample which are represented by clear and grayed bars.

The data suggest two profiles are common among ‘traditional’ educators curious about alternative ways of educating: an FS (Green) dominated one; and a bimodal pairing of DQ(Blue) and FS(Green). In both cases, the CP (Red) contrait pattern is slightly higher than established averages (the Australian and American educators’ group scores are shown below). As we shall see, the highly successful educators of at-risk-youth exhibit a very different profile with markedly lower CP (Red) contrait and an elevated DQ (Blue) contrait pattern. In addition, they exhibit a stronger element of GT (Yellow) and lower FS (Green) than their counterparts.



SIGNIFICANCE OF A CP (RED) CONTRAIT PATTERN

The CP existential state frames the world in terms of imposition and control, survival of the fittest, and the laws of the jungle. Behavior tends to be impulse-driven, uncontrolled, and without ability for self-restraint. Anger is a commonly displayed emotion. Learning occurs through Skinnerian principles with focus on rewards; punishment is ineffective and often perceived as a challenge or a dare, thereby resulting in an increase of the specific, undesirable behavior it was intended to squelch.

Students with a strong element of CP (Red) have simplistic and critical responses regarding education. One young person in the Optimal Learning program said the following of the “education” stem: “You have to learn something. Mainstream schools are crap.” Education is an undifferentiated concept from school, thus the word represents a specific location where unpleasant activities are imposed upon the young. However, there is an unstated differentiation between mainstream schools and Optimal Learning since the response specifies ‘mainstream schools’ rather than school in general.

The “student” stem elicited this response: “you have to show respect to educators. It has to be enjoyable.” The CP existential state is about getting and giving respect, control and power; students are viewed in this power differential where they must give respect to educators who receive it. They believe life is about engaging in one’s impulses, having fun, and tend to think that school and teachers get in the way, are trying to control them, or stop them from their goals. The sentiment is echoed in this observation: “[I] don’t agree with rules; rules are too judging.” Because the world is seen in terms of imposition and control, they are often on the receiving end or, if tough enough, on the giving end of power and dominance displays.

There is criticality and snide cynicism exhibited in cognitively simple ‘This I believe...’ responses for CP. For example, marriage is seen as “a waste of money ... and heart.” Sin is “great – I’d like to thank God [for sin].” For those centralized at CP, shock value, challenges to controlling others’ views, and resistance to norms is fun, a way to explore independence, and to exercise the newly emerging sense of self. Many responses resist authorities’ norms and controls. For example, the following statement would aggravate many conventional educators with strongly held religious beliefs: “[I] don’t believe in religion - sex, drugs & rock’n roll!”

This existential state is an “I” centered one with an internal locus of control. In the Gravesian model, its theme is “express-self without shame or guilt, to hell with everyone else.” Consequential thinking has not yet developed, deferred gratification is meaningless, and the ‘chemistry’ for guilt does not yet exist. Therefore, “fun, fun, fun - that’s what we believe” can be an extremely frustrating position for educators demanding self control, overwhelmed by large classes, and who do not have the time, know-how or natural inclination to put up with wise-cracks, challenges, and episodes of aggression. At the extreme, teachers fear these young people. Their work is poor; some can’t read, even in their late teens. Others skip class, run in gangs and are eventually expelled or incarcerated. It’s these students who are sent to Optimal Learning as a last chance.

Most people have trouble dealing with CP. It is quite understandable why this existential state typically has a high contrait pattern: it is antithetical to modern ‘society’ and a smoothly running classroom. Behavior in this system is described as disruptive, and the student often doesn’t have the ability to see how it impacts others or to exercise self-control. It is frustrating to educators who must get down to the business of teaching prescribed content. While it is very much unlike them (as reported in their scores), many educators are also intolerant of it (despite some rationalizing to the contrary). This intolerance translates into vulnerability - buttons to push - and frustration results in lack of patience to reward good, appropriate behavior when it happens – a requirement for proper motivation. Instead, anger is an understandable

consequence and leads to punishment – an inappropriate and counter-productive strategy for change in this existential state - which leads to incendiary escalation of challenge, punishment, counter-challenge and greater punishment. (Although negative in the educator's eyes, the attention often acts as encouragement in and of itself, escalating the student's position/status in CP opinion.)

The pair of highly successful educators of at-risk-youth (the Australian conference mentioned above was about their methodology) have a significantly lower CP (Red) contrait pattern than the overall average; their score and similar lower scores occur in less than 17% of profiles. When compared to the educators in this study, whose CP contrait pattern is slightly elevated, they have 40% less 'rejection' of the system than 'traditional' educators (the average and above average contrait score for CP(Red) occurs in nearly 60% of profiles). We believe this is one key to their success, and a trait worthy of further study. A low CP(Red) contrait should result in (a) fewer buttons to push; (b) willingness to ignore or reframe behavior that would be punished as disobedience or disrespect in a different environment, thereby lessening it; (c) less threatened by challenges to control, thereby avoiding one-upsmanship and the game-playing cycle; (d) not intimidated by aggression and no needs to dominate, thereby earning respect; (e) ability to respond to challenges in appropriate ways creating trust; and (f) willingness to creatively channel excess energy in more empowering avenues because of less reactivity to it.

THE EDUCATOR WITH A DQ (BLUE) WORLDVIEW

The DQ existential state centers around maintaining the *status quo*, accepting prescriptions of higher authority, following the tried and true, and sacrificing self for reward later. Learning in this state involves compliance to rules, memorization, receiving truth from authority, and avoidance of punishment for errors. Consequential thinking develops, as does guilt and a greater ability for self-control. Delayed gratification becomes important. The thinking tends to be concrete, linear, literal, and absolute. People centralized here often view the world in terms of clearly delineated categories - good and evil - and obey rightfully ordained leaders. There were a handful of educators in our sample who had a strongly centralized DQ perspective, though it was a notable component in most respondents.

A common view of students and education from this existential state is expressed in the following statement extracted from the responses: "Students are empty vessels which, if taught correctly, will soak up knowledge and learn enthusiastically. If taught incorrectly, they will shut down and be discouraged from learning, and even turned away from trying to learn." In this view, there is a sharp power and knowledge differential. The educator's duties involve the correct inputting of material. There is a right and a wrong way to teach, and the learner is a blank slate until the educator makes their mark. The view is clear, concise, knowing, concrete, and pointed. The sense is that students are closer to information assimilating objects than human beings with affect and interests.

Because this is a deny-self, stability-seeking state, some educators sharing this view have a concern with our way of life feeling: "It moves too fast. Society has become too caught up in the quest for everything new and has forgotten how to value the simple, foundations of life - friendship, community, family." They are concerned that the world "is getting faster and faster and more complex. We are trying to juggle too many things at one time."

They tend to rely on rules because they help "maintain an order to our way of living" and are "set to keep us in line." Rules are a comfort and "a necessary evil," particularly in a time when events are perceived to be chaotic, unpredictable, and moving too quickly to keep up. This is often a 'dangerous world' perspective where controls are essential to maintaining the order of

things. The impulsive, self-expressive, chaotic CP (Red) worldview simply reinforces this sense. (Typically, with DQ(Blue) protrait there is a negative 0.23 correlation at the .01 level with CP(Red) contrait.)

Educators in our sample are different from many other people with a more typical DQ perspective, however, since they view people and human nature as essentially good and well-meaning, whereas others with a conventional DQ perspective tend to think of human nature as essentially corrupt and evil. One of these educators attests: "People are basically all good at heart. Through societal pressure or quest for personal gain, some loose their sense of community and belonging. In a crisis, the majority of people will return to their basic nature."

The view of teaching is similar. The raw ability to convey knowledge and inspire a desire to learn is viewed as innate: "Teaching is an art form. Whilst skills can be taught, truly good teachers are born with a talent for working with, and shaping the learning needs of students." Note that there is great certainty with little relativism expressed, a sense of inborn capacities as pre-ordained, and the view that the teacher has the responsibility to shape the student. Views in DQ tend to be clear and concrete: "Teaching is about learning from one another" (a statement which could be misconstrued as FS interpersonalism except for the certainty of *how* it is said rather than *what* is said, and the repetition of a cliché as fact, a reflection of common belief).

THE EDUCATOR WITH AN FS (GREEN) WORLDVIEW

This existential state centers around sacrificing self to gain for self and others – gain in terms of reciprocal relationships, as well as materially - in the near term. (The DQ (Blue) worldview also involves sacrifice and denial of self - and sometimes unknowing or unwilling others - for reward later; gratification is deferred to the distant future or even into an afterlife.) Thinking in FS is more here-and-now, present tense. It also tends to be more ambiguous, relativistic, context and affect-sensitive, interpersonalistic, egalitarian and situational.

The majority of both the Australian and American groups expressed preferences for many of the characteristics which come naturally to the FS (Green) worldview. They report that they believe education should: "equip people to deal with the world they live in and assist them to navigate their way to a fulfilling life - whatever that means to them." "It is important that all children can access education. Education needs to be more tailored to different learning styles, i.e. hands-on. Education is also for adults, not just children, and continues through life."

Note the focus on differences, adapting to a changing environment, dealing with the process and not just the content of education, and meeting the needs of different learners in various ways. There isn't a sense of right or wrong ways to teach; rather the focus is on the overall outcomes of both learners, their future needs, differences in learning styles and approaches, and flexibility in teaching styles.

There was also a concern with the negative impacts or shortcomings of modern education. One educator reported: "I believe our education system is failing our young people. I watch continuously at the number of young people who continue to fall through our education system that have major learning inadequacies." Another observed that: "[education] is often structured in a way that limits potential for learning for many groups in our society. It is something which needs to be delivered flexibly and ideally should be tailored to the needs of the individual." And yet another remarked: "Education has lost its way. The systems were designed (happened?) for slow-moving societies, a rural/industrial context, and assumed an information-providing role. I believe new thinking is needed - essentially to assume the role of assisting young people to deal with information selectively and with socially critical understanding."

In comparison to the respondents more centralized in DQ (Blue), these educators see their roles as process managers, providing access to information rather than inputting knowledge, as adaptive to the learner rather than the learner having to adapt to their singular approach, facilitative rather than directive, and more egalitarian rather than hierarchical. They raise questions about the overall efficacy of the broader system and whether it helps or harms the people it is designed to serve.

They view students, as well as student/teacher relationships, differently: "All students can learn if they are engaged, respect the facilitator/teacher and in particular will participate if they have a relationship with this person and have relevance with their learning." From this perspective, students are:

- "... adaptive, resourceful, and ready for new generation models."
- "Hungry for schools to become socially attuned to their needs and perspectives."
- "Students are individuals. Their participation will vary for many reasons, some including whether they believe they are there voluntarily or not and what they will get out of it."

Paramount for this FS (Green) view is the idea that students are thinking and feeling individuals with motives, interests, and desire to learn which vary with the teacher and their approach. One participant stated: "Teaching methodologies need to change. We need to embrace learning styles, and creative processes that engage our cohort of learners - regardless of age, sex and gender." (That this is still at issue and a future goal in 2004 is somewhat astounding.)

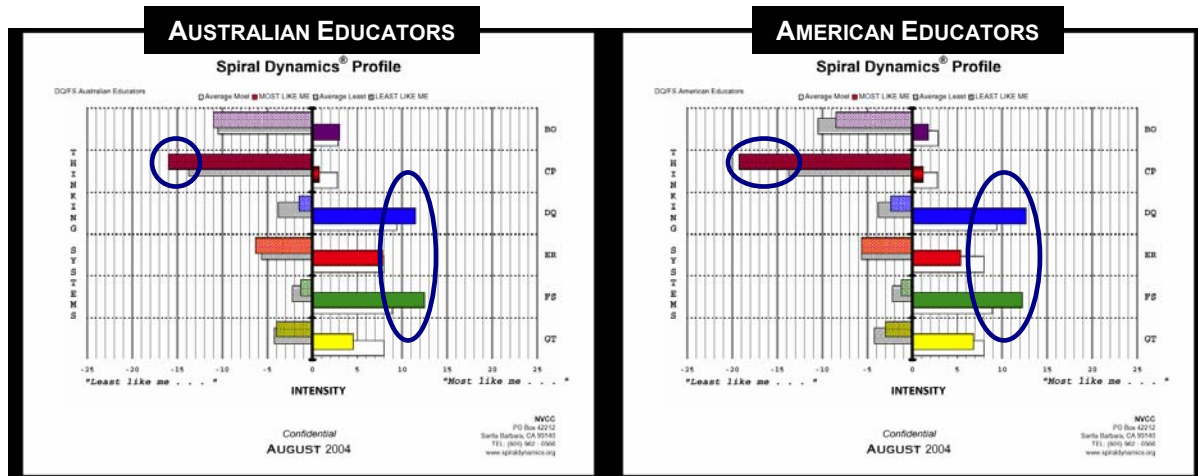
These FS-oriented educators tend to see themselves as facilitators and partners in the learning experience, taking their cues from the student rather than seeing young people as receptacles for their imposed wisdom. Their view of students and people is generally positive with attention to environmental influences, uniqueness of individuals, and distaste for institutions, practices, and persons who do harm to others. For example: "People are generally good. There is a basic humanity in nearly every person. Subject to an unbelievable array of influencing factors in their environment, people still demonstrate an innate sense of goodness to each other. Mostly the leaders of governments, armies, and industries lose sight of this sense of goodness and abuse their power over others." (Note the rejection of power over others. This is implied in the Pearson correlations which typically give us a negative .39 correlation with CP(Red) contrait at the .01 level and a negative .37 correlation with DQ(Blue) at the .01 level.)

An Australian student-teacher sees conflicting meaning in teaching: "The word teaching has a couple of meanings. Traditionally teachers stand in a class room and tell people stuff. Some of the best teachers find out what you want to know, and you will learn that best. I have a friend who is a good teacher as she asks if I understand and takes responsibility for her teaching, not assuming I am a dumb student if I don't understand." This view takes into account the interdependence between teacher and student, i.e., "teaching is about learning from one another," rather than the simpler relationships implied by statements like: "To teach is to show and to explain," and "It is all our responsibility to pass on Knowledge to others." (Note the capital 'K' as if knowledge is sacred and idealized.)

DQ AND FS BIMODAL PAIRING

When we looked at Australian educators with high DQ (Blue) scores, we found they often had a raised FS (Green) score, as well, running with it. This bimodal protrait pattern emerged in about ¼ of the cases (typically, the Pearson correlation between DQ(Blue) and FS(Green) falls at a

negative 0.37 at the .01 level). Although this does not indicate relativism in all individuals involved, responses from these subjects did reveal the appeal and focus on: feelings, sharing, caring, mutuality, and understanding which mark the FS more than the obedience, truth-seeking, and doctrinal learning more common to DQ.



When asked about education, teachers with this bimodal pairing said:

- "Education to me is about understanding and communicating feelings and beliefs."
- "Qualifications are the first steps to enjoying a meaningful working life."
- "It is well worth educating yourself in many different ways to be able to keep up with the future and future issues. You're never too old to learn."
- "continuous, ever-changing and the most important element in life and our future."

These responses are concrete and clearly stated. At the same time, they indicate greater fluidity, increased options, greater ability to adapt to changing external events, and a focus on inner growth, affect, health and well-being.

They focus on the interaction and connection between educator and student. The view is towards greater understanding. When asked about students in general, they said things like:

- "They are crying out to be understood."
- "Over time, students have been seen to become more unruly if you like, but often they just need someone to care and listen to them."
- "Some want to learn; others waste their talents."
- "Students have the best of both worlds today as they are educating themselves and often working part time as well."
- "Everyone can learn. Everyone learns in different ways. The question is to find the right mix."

The essential message has been that Australian educators in this sample group believe people are essentially good and are doing their best. The tone was generally optimistic and content. American educators had a very similar profile to the Australian educators, right down to the DQ/FS bimodal protrait and CP contrait patterns.

But while the overall profiles are similar, American educators' views regarding people had slightly more variability with hints of the characteristic DQ(Blue) caution regarding people:

“People are inherently lazy. This is not a negative. I feel that most people will do the least amount of work to get by, but others work much harder. Overall, I believe people are good natured, it is a few individuals who perform bad acts.” At the same time, the positive view of people continues to exist:

- “People are good. Everyone wants to be needed, wanted and loved. People provide a variety in life and a source of entertainment and love and without people there would be no connected world. People want to enjoy their life and the lives of those they love. People are powerful.”
- “Interacting with people is the most interesting activity there is. Each individual brings something of value to this world when we take the time to find out what it is.”

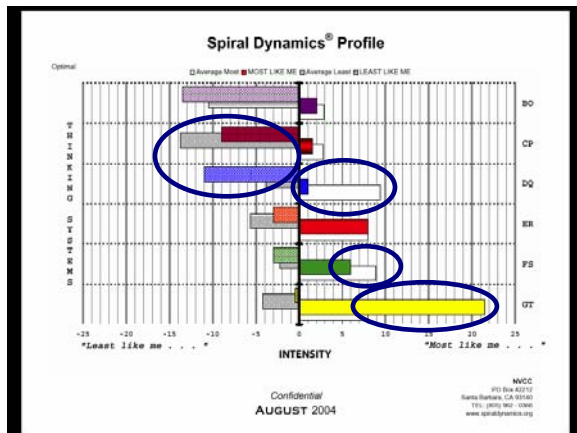
Interestingly, American views on religion were more concrete, straightforward, and clearer than the Australian educators. American educators used the word “God” 60% more often than the Australians in their stem completions. “Sin is putting oneself before God. I believe God created us as we are and the things many people (fundamentalists in particular) view as sin are really of no concern to God.” Essentially, the locus of control is external – proper teaching methods, student needs, curriculum requirements, moral beliefs, peer pressure, etc. – come from outside the individual to be incorporated – sacrifice-self for the student who takes precedence, while the expressive CP (Red) minority is viewed poorly and poorly understood.

EDUCATORS WITH A Different WORLDVIEW

The learner population that interested these educators is a troubled, difficult one. These are young people – high school to young adulthood - who haven’t had an optimal living circumstance. The students come from fractured homes, often with abusive parents and substance abuse. They have had limited options and poor models to emulate, improper nutrition and limited stimulation. Most have a history of difficulty with teachers and authority figures, ranging from being kicked out of school to being sent to jail. Frequently they have been the bully or the bullies’ perpetual victim at school. They behave impulsively, show little ability to be self-

observing, and often act out angrily. Some have had more experience than others in dealing with punitive administrators and teachers and working systems to their own advantage; nevertheless, they have problems following the traditional social norms and mores.

What does it take to be effective with such a learner population? The profile to the left illustrates the attributes of two very successful at-risk-youth program directors. The circles highlight the differences between them and the ‘traditional’ educators in our sample.



investigation might be useful. Perhaps these characteristics can be applied to recruitment, selection, and training of others charged with transforming the lives of troubled young people who otherwise fall through the cracks.

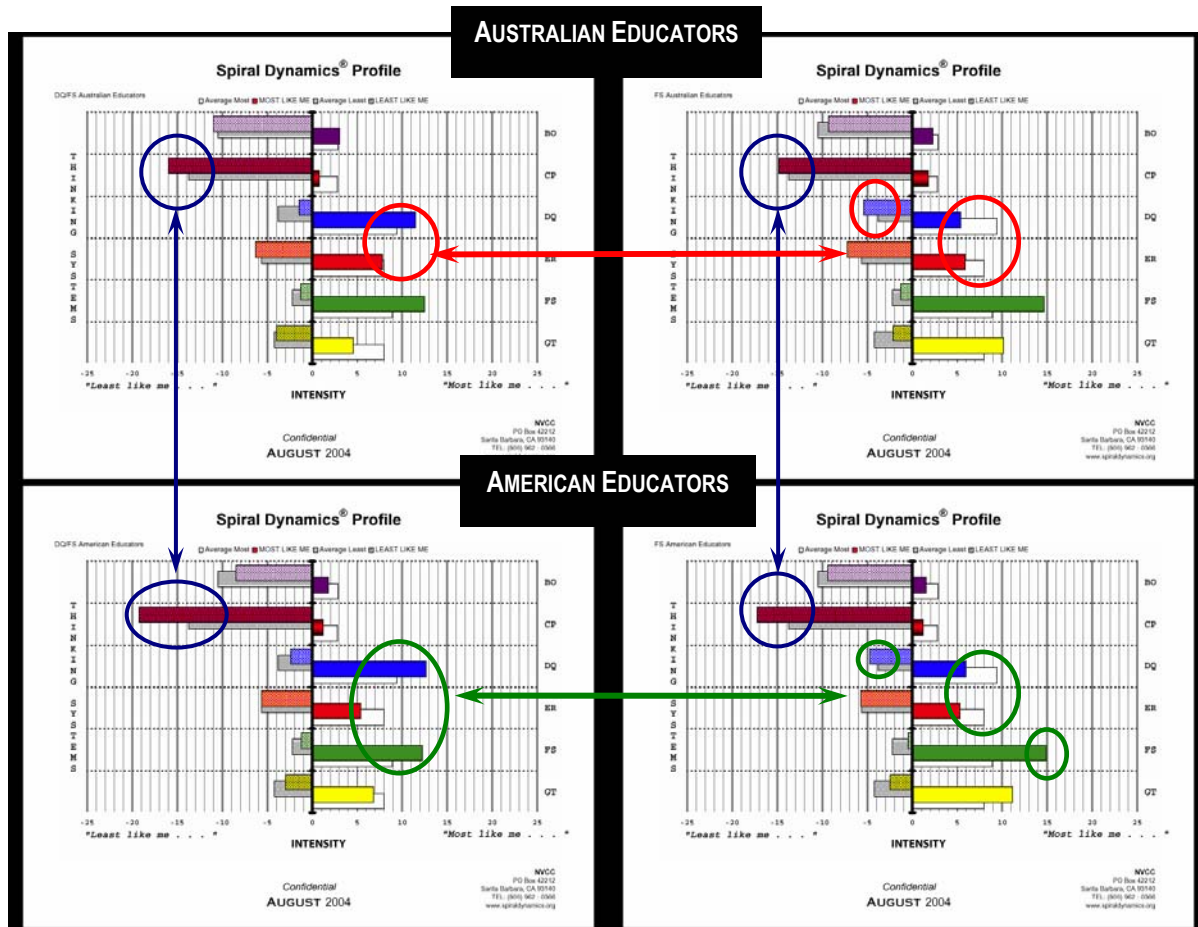
We've profiled the Optimal Learning educators in our newsletter (March/April 2004 at www.spiraldynamics.org) and provided examples of their approach. However, we've not presented their profiles or a comparison with other educators as we do here. It is done with their permission.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

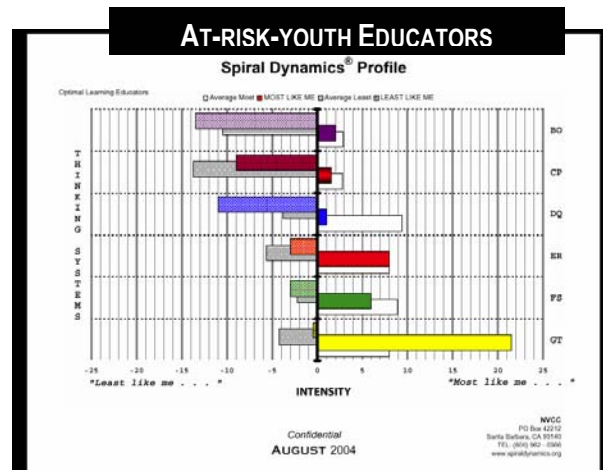
- Similarities between Australian and American educators when compared to the averages were more pronounced than the differences:
 - The distinctive bimodal DQ/FS protrait pattern in both Australian and American educators consisted of 20-25% of each group. This is unusually high.
 - 9-11% higher than average CP contrait is consistent between both groups
 - 25% lower than average ER protrait for both groups
 - 35% higher ER contrait for Australian educators whereas the American group had an average contrait pattern.
 - Participants with high FS protrait in both groups is notable: 44% higher in Australian educators and 33% higher in American educators
- Notable differences between the 'average' educator in this sample and those who successfully work with at-risk-youth (educators are listed first and the at-risk-youth educators are listed next):
 - 10% higher CP contrait versus 36% lower CP contrait
 - Similar below-average CP protrait in both groups
 - 25% higher DQ contrait versus 275% higher DQ contrait
 - 41-48% lower DQ protrait and 89% lower DQ protrait
 - 25% lower ER protrait and average ER protrait
 - 36% higher ER contrait versus 45% lower ER contrait
 - 37% higher FS protrait versus 33% lower FS protrait
 - 25% higher GT protrait and 263% higher GT protrait

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

The colored bars represent the results of our different groups, whereas the gray and clear bars illustrate the average scores. The vertical line divides the protrait patterns on the right from the contrait scores and patterns on the left. The Australian educators' profiles are at the top with American educators' profiles below. The DQ/FS bimodal patterns are on the left, FS to the right.



Profile of the at-risk-youth educators from Optimal Learning below.



CONCLUSION

In this paper we've put forth the hypothesis that a lowered CP (Red) contrait pattern is an asset for an educator with the interest and ability to interact with at-risk-youth in a productive and enriching way, especially compared with more traditional approaches with their higher CP(Red) contrait pattern. If our hypothesis is true, then the high CP (Red) contrait patterns – “least like me” - in the ‘average’ educator would explain their dislike of and inability to cope with students centralized in that system, and perhaps it would explain some of the advantage of the successful Optimal Learning team.

The lower CP(Red) contrait pattern in the Optimal Learning educators might reduce a number of problems since there would be fewer “shock” buttons to push, fear of aggressiveness is lessened, and opportunities for plenty of one-on-one interactions are constantly sought to encourage good behavior while minimizing punishment because these teachers actually enjoy “hanging out with the kids.” At the same time, the high DQ(Blue) contrait – a characteristic shared with many of the kids - offers a mutual base from which a connection with the young person can begin.

There are a number of other factors which we suspect makes them successful and which go beyond the scope of this paper. For example, flexibility is very high in the Optimal Learning educators and their commitment to their groups results in them making themselves available to each student 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Still, we believe a key might well lie in the CP(Red) and DQ(Blue) contrait patterns along with the lower FS(Green) protrait and higher GT(Yellow) protrait views. Further analysis and data gathering is required.