

# Reader Views

Book reviews, for readers, by readers.

7101 Hwy 71 W #200

Austin, Texas 78735

512/288-8555

admin@readerviews.com

www.readerviews.com

## Interview with Mark Kennedy

### Author of *Lessons from the Hawk* and *Dance of the Dolphin*

Reader Views would like to welcome back Mark Kennedy, noted author of two acclaimed education/teaching books – “Lessons from the Hawk” and “Dance of the Dolphin.” Today we will be talking to Mark about “Lessons from the Hawk” which offers a realistic model detailing four avenues of learning, one of which we all possess.

**Juanita:** Mark, thank you for joining us once again. Please tell us about the metaphor of the hawk in “Lessons from the Hawk” and how it inspired the development of the concept of four fundamental approaches human beings have to learning.

**Mark:** I have to begin by telling you why the question of learning differences came up in the first place. In my first few years teaching, I would often get assigned the kids no one else wanted. This is common (although a well guarded secret). So having a preponderance of those who hadn’t been successful in our system, I was struggling doubly hard to come to terms with the ways people learn, and so determine how I might reach these outcasts. Around that time (early to mid-90s) several theories were in play and being pushed pretty hard by various factions in the educational establishment. The two most appealing to me were Gardner’s multiple intelligences, and Rita Dunn’s learning styles model. While I loved the ideas in both of these, their implementation turned out to be pretty complex for a flesh and blood teacher with a real classroom. Even then, Gardner was proposing seven types of learners which would be in every class, and Dunn had more than 20 things to consider for every learner. Long story short, as a practitioner, I just couldn’t juggle everything necessary to get either of those systems to work. Maybe it was just me, but I remembered something Richard Feynman said, I believe it was in *Six Easy Pieces*: The really good teacher/professor can take the most complex idea and make it simple. According to Feynman, the teacher who is difficult to understand is not proving his brilliance, but rather the opposite. Just so, I believed there must be a simpler, yet perhaps even more profound truth about differentiated learning, or learning styles, that I was probably missing. Enter my encounter with the hawk.

While on a stress relieving walk one day after work, I noticed a hawk circling a field (and this was in a mostly industrial area, so the contrast of nature and industry really gripped me). As I stopped to watch, the hawk seemed to effortlessly glide through a complete circle of the 100-square-yard field in seconds. I realized that s/he was seeing the same

thing from myriad perspectives in just seconds—almost simultaneously, it felt like—while I was rooted in one perspective. It dawned on me that an entire class of students positioned around the field to represent the different points of the hawk, would likewise have different points of view, and most would be different from mine. Obviously, the variations could be endless, one for every individual, but again I needed a model of differences that would be doable for a practitioner. It so happened that the number ‘four’ was already on my mind because I had just been to a workshop on how to become a better presenter to adult learners. The leader had proposed four different types of sub-audiences within each main audience. Using that idea as a skeleton, I began to flesh out a hypothesis that maybe all the various K-12 learners—not just adult audiences—could be segmented into four basic types. And working along Feynman’s plumb line that anything really good should be simplifiable (and so useful to a real live teacher), I realized that the concept of four perspectives was very old. We only need think of the four compass points, the four winds, the four corners of the earth (yes, I know the earth is round, but not when we’re standing in one place—it’s pretty flat for an individual, like an individual student or teacher—or hawk). Thinking as a practitioner without a lot of time to generate and refine speculative theories, I fell back on these age-old truths and experience to begin drawing up a working model of learning differences, something that could work for all teachers and all students all the time. As one high school teacher who has begun to use these ideas said, “As a teacher, it is a whole lot easier to focus on teaching to 4 styles rather than 8 or 9 multiple intelligences.” By the way, I also had years to test and refine the Four Perspectives concept before the *Hawk* was published—yes, they worked right from the start, but I kept asking myself how they could work *better*.

**Juanita:** What are the four teaching and learning perspectives? And please give us a little background to their unique attributes.

**Mark:** As I mentioned, I came to hang the four-perspective idea on the earlier workshop’s skeleton of four types of learners. These each have a symbolic profession for ease of connotation, as well as a signature interrogative. In short, they are The Professor, who asks *What?* The Scientist, who asks *Why* or *How?* The Inventor who asks *What if?* And the *Guide*, who asks *So what?* I also came to believe, and so weave into play, the idea that the four perspectives follow a continuum from very traditional to very non-traditional, which will be important as we begin to think about the implications for teaching, learning, schooling and school reform.

It goes like this. First on the continuum are the most fact-based learners, the Professors. They first want to know about anything new and difficult, What are the most important places, names, dates, and what truths have we generally come to accept as a result? They are concerned with preserving The Truth as we’ve come to accept it. They have no problem absorbing these facts and concepts and recounting them later, such as for a test. They believe this is a legitimate use of school and homework time. I had a seventh grader years ago who memorized the first 50 decimal places of pi *just for fun*. Obviously, this is a quite traditional view, school as we’ve always done it (in modern times anyway). Professors are recognizable for being dead serious about school achievement.

Second comes the other fairly traditional type of learner, the Troubleshooter /Scientist/ Investigator: I use the terms interchangeably, having found through experience that some teachers, parents, and students take to one, some to another. Troubleshooters are precision thinkers, and so want to know Why and How something works. It may be something tangible, as a mechanical thing, or a concept, but in either case they strive for

understanding this thing precisely as intended, and if it's not working correctly, restoring it to its intended and optimal condition. I have had Troubleshooters take apart broken classroom items which I'd given up on, such as electric pencil sharpeners, and have them repaired and reassembled, in the *few seconds* I had looked away (I actually would prefer they not do that, but they're often too good at it and too fast for me to stop them—and really, what would I scold them for that wouldn't sound petty?). A pretty dead giveaway: very detail oriented.

The third and fourth learning perspectives/styles are non-traditional. Inventors or Innovators are imaginative thinkers, always searching to improve...well, anything at all. Whatever the topic, the assignment, the solution in use or being considered, they look at it and ask, What if we changed it in \_\_\_\_\_ way? And they'll never be at a loss for ideas to fill in that blank. Most of these ideas will seem off the wall to others, while occasionally one might actually be brilliant. Obviously, if these students don't learn to keep their constant mindstorming to themselves until the appropriate times to share in class or on family outings or gatherings, they can be seen as smart-alecky and always engaging in constant one-upmanship. But if a parent or teacher can find ways to channel this inventiveness, the child, peers, and adults can benefit. One sure sign of an Inventor: a quirky sense of humor.

Fourth and last on the schooling continuum from conventional to unconventional is the Guide or Communicator. These learners are creative thinkers, even more creative than the Inventors. The latter think, Give me an idea and I'll make it better. The Guide, though, comes up with original ideas and intuitive connections without prompting, seemingly out of nowhere. They want their creative ideas to be taken seriously and if the teacher or parent is more conventional in outlook and believes in a top-down model of learning and authority, then Guides can suffer. Guides also tend to be Communicators, though this doesn't always mean talkative—they are just more concerned for and tuned into people, other living things, and creative projects than tasks. So, if one of their friends is having a problem, they may spend class time trying to console or help solve the problem (communicating), and get into hot water for not taking the academic task at hand more seriously. Communicators are very creative. They often have hobbies (or professions) as musicians, artists, counselors, creative restoration projects as in auto body repair, or can also be gifted in natural or spiritual things: with animals, plants, and spirituality (especially in non-traditional, or new, dynamic avenues to traditional approaches).

**Juanita:** What is the typical model being used in classrooms today?

**Mark:** The Professor model, sometimes called the Sage on the Stage. This is fine for one fourth of the learners, the student Professors, and even the Troubleshooters can often adapt although the ones who care more about mechanical, tangible things may have blue-collar goals and dreams, while the Professorial model—seeing school as an end in itself—wants everyone to continue formal schooling as long as possible, that is, to go to college. Evidence for this being predominant is everywhere: we only need think of the national demand for statewide standards in the No Child Left Behind legislation. NCLB *means*—intends and demands—that all students are prepared for and go to college. In fact, however, if there are really four perspectives on learning and education, as there are four directions the wind blows, then at least half of all learners are being left in the dust. So while NCLB is meant to level the playing field for getting into college, in reality it does the opposite by making success in school almost impossible for those who feel

teaching and learning should be conducted by the proverbial Guides on the Side; that it should be more Socratic in nature, with real give and take between teacher and student.

**Juanita:** Is there a definitive distinction between one's own particular perspective, or can someone be, for example, mostly a Professor but a little of a Trouble-shooter?

**Mark:** This is an interesting question. One can definitely have a major and minor outlook, and it seems there are countless possibilities (after all, the four categories are useful as a teaching and parenting tool, but each of us six billion people on the planet are unique, as well). One interesting combination is for someone to be evenly split between two outlooks. My home schooling friend Barbara Wood found that she was evenly split between Professor and Guide when she took the Learning Self Observation Survey (it's in the book, but also downloadable at no cost at [www.great-ideas.org/DolphinMaterials.htm](http://www.great-ideas.org/DolphinMaterials.htm)). She related on her Blog how she believed this accounted for her being torn sometimes between learning at the table, or scrapping that to go learn outdoors ('Learning Styles and Lessons from the Hawk' [www.pluggedinhomeschool.com](http://www.pluggedinhomeschool.com) March 31).

**Juanita:** I can see how beneficial this is for teachers in the classroom, but elaborate a little more on how this knowledge would extend beyond the classroom, how knowing our own style can help us in the 'classroom of life'.

**Mark:** Well, the obvious implication and benefit would be for the parent-child relationship. Just knowing the other's perspective would put one miles ahead. Such a knowledgeable parent might then learn the art of reframing in order to see things from their child's point of view; literally, to see what they see. And that could be the beginning point for explaining to a child why the parent is asking that certain things be done certain ways. But we could extend the benefits to spouses—not all of the disagreements are between the sexes. But even in the small things—dealing with a clerk at a store, for example—the ideas can be helpful. A Guide who is shopping may naturally want to establish some rapport with a clerk, maybe commenting on a piece of jewelry or complementing the salesperson on something, but this doesn't work because the Professorial clerk is all business—task first, then we can socialize. Or for another of countless examples we could cite, a Troubleshooter who is shopping for a specific computer or appliance part can be driven crazy by an Inventor who wants to explore all the possibilities before the shopper settles on a purchase: Have you also thought of... did you know that this, and this, can be interchangeable?

**Juanita:** Yes, I see how these learning perspectives can be applied to other areas besides the classroom. This would also make "Lessons from the Hawk" a very effective parenting guide plus a resourceful tool to understand significant others in one's life. Now Mark, regarding home-schooling, how can "Lessons from the Hawk" benefit the home school environment?

**Mark:** Actually, a home-schooling parent/teacher may be better positioned than the rest of us to maximize the Lessons from the Hawk. With fewer students and no supervisor daily judging their lesson's alignment with state standards; without constant reminders of state tests, pressure to teach to those tests and so increase quantitative test scores; and without state 'accountability' (and the constant threat of sanctions), home-schoolers may be the closest we have to pure teaching today.

And the small numbers (1, 2, 3—less than 30, anyway!), allow the home-schooler to really get to know the learning perspective of their charges, as well as how those perspectives may mesh with their own—or clash with it. I see the kids in this optimized kind of environment potentially making giant leaps forward, both academically and personally. And for those who really do go this far, Chapter Four of the Hawk lays out how to get students beyond their comfort zone, their own outlook, and begin to see schoolwork and life problems from others' viewpoints, too. I have had some feedback from home-schoolers already, and would welcome an ongoing dialogue with any who might start the adventure of instituting the four perspectives into their teaching and/or parenting.

**Juanita:** How does a teacher's personal learning style affect the learning capacity of their students?

**Mark:** Well, I think we human beings probably all expect others at worst to *understand* our view, and at best to *have* our point of view. The degree to which a teacher's style might limit students will be determined by whether the teacher can get outside himself and allow for the legitimacy of others' views. Now, I know we would all say we do this, but does the evidence bear us out? I think this is what Sharon Bolle, Administrator of Student Services for San Bernardino County, means when she says 'This is a book that gives educators a cohesive, practical method for reaching all students in the classroom while taking into account your own style as a teacher as well as the individual differences between students.'

**Juanita:** How open do you feel the average teacher is to really understanding how their students learn, and altering their approach accordingly for each student?

**Mark:** The more settled a teacher is, probably the less they are looking for new ideas to try. On the other hand, the more a teacher is struggling (and it may have nothing to do with their abilities—witness my being given the 'throwaway' kids years ago), or perhaps those still new to teaching and so still forming their practice, the more open I believe they might be.

**Juanita:** You have a chapter called *Democracy in the Classroom* that talks about creating a classroom management system that supports learning diversity. Tell us a little about this new approach.

**Mark:** Basically, we turn the class into a Micro Society—either a city-based type of democracy with elected student leaders, or a corporation, with student CEO's and their assistants. We institute the all-important student economy (sometimes called a token economy, except we don't use tokens: we use cash, or checks, or stocks and bonds depending on age and ability level of the kids). And if this sounds childish, or 'great for elementary school but won't work for secondary levels', let me just say I've used it for over a decade with hard-core street teens, many just out of juvenile hall or in group homes as a last chance to straighten up before getting a multiple-year sentence in the Youth Authority (prison). And it's worked just fine for all of them. But the real reason for Micro's success is not the external system (economy, student leadership, etc.); the thing at work is real democracy, which we all say we want our students to participate in, but then we turn around and deny them any say in how their day goes. 'No taxation without representation' is in our shiny history textbooks, but not our grubby classrooms. That makes our words and our actions horribly inconsistent. Again, I'll quote a reviewer:

‘Tired of putting little marks on the board and calling it a classroom management system? This book can change not only your life, but the life of your students as well. This is not just a book about a different approach to classroom management - it is a book about how understanding your own style and that of your students can lead to powerful changes and impactful student learning.’ As you and some familiar with Reader Views know, of course, the Micro ideas later grew into their own book, *Classroom Management: The Dance of the Dolphin*, which we did our last interview about. <http://www.readerviews.com/InterviewKennedy.html>

**Juanita:** What has been the feedback from the teacher and students who have implemented this new style of classroom dynamics?

**Mark:** You can take a look at some of the reviews, one right here at Reader Views and several more on amazon.com, many of which were written by classroom teachers. Beyond that, I would again call on Sharon Bolle, who oversees hundreds of teachers in some of the most difficult circumstances. She says: ‘How do you focus on actual student learning in these days of standardized test-focused accountability? Read (this book) for practical, effective ways to connect with those hard to reach students and get results. What makes this book different? It is written by a classroom teacher asked to teach the most hard to reach students that others have given up on. Caring about those "alternative" kids resulted in development of a strategy that goes beyond mere classroom management to a creative, individualized yet cohesive method with proven effectiveness.’

**Juanita:** Many are calling for education reform. This appears to be an enormous task considering the existing model and all that will be affected, from the top down. How can we make changes to this existing education system to allow a more nurturing, realistic system that allows for personal diversity and fulfillment of potential?

**Mark:** Read Chapters Two and Three of *Lessons from the Hawk* (Laugh out Loud!). No, I don’t really imagine that I have all the answers, but for a classroom teacher or a parent looking for more balance in the education of children, I do think there are many good, practical, doable, ready to implement things already laid out in the book. And these are suggestions which take place at the level where we can actually make positive changes, from the bottom up. Also, Chapter Six may prove valuable for the administrator or policymaker looking for a fresh approach.

**Juanita:** Well Mark, thank you for talking with us again. We at Reader Views are very impressed with your books and know that your book “Lessons from the Hawk” can and will revolutionize learning styles and classroom management and enrich the lives of educators and learners everywhere. We wish you much success. Please let your readers know how they may reach you or get more information about your books.

**Mark:** Of course, anyone with questions or feedback can reach me through my website [www.HarmoniousWarrior.com](http://www.HarmoniousWarrior.com) And I will also watch for any comments posted on the Reader Views Blog. For those readers who may want some further independent input before parting with the price of the book, I suggest they check the reviews on amazon.com, where there are many honest and insightful reviews posted.

**Juanita:** Any last thoughts for your readers?

**Mark:** I appreciate everyone taking the time to read this. Thanks for giving me the opportunity, and challenging me with such relevant questions, Juanita. I know the ideas in the Hawk work, and wish the best to everyone who commits to trying them out.