

YOUNG WOMAN MAKES LIFE CHANGING DISCOVERY

By Jill Richmond-Covey

Meet Jessica, a vivacious and sunny 20-year-old college student who faced a crisis in the middle of her sophomore year. She took 12 courses, and failed five. Because she had enjoyed working with children in a community art program, she had been considering majoring in education and minoring in art. But she had a big problem: she failed her child development course two semesters in a row.

"I want to learn how to teach," she said. "I'm not at all interested in the theories or in who did what, when." Jessi enjoyed algebra, computer concepts, statistics, and music. She didn't succeed in English, poetry, or child development. The story was a repeat of high school where she did well in science (loved anatomy and physiology), mathematics, art and music. In general, she performed poorly in English and social studies. Unfortunately, Jessi took her failures as evidence that that she wasn't smart and that she was lazy. She had always found it difficult to motivate herself; something else was always more fun than most school work. Because she thought of herself as "dumb and lazy," Jessi was afraid to take higher math and advanced sciences, despite the fact that she had done fine in basic courses.

While working at the community arts organization, Jessi loved painting murals with the kids, just as she had always loved any art or craft project. She could spend hours on a project, decorating her room or watching "Trading Spaces," a design and home-decorating TV program. She thought art was all about fun. That made it a hobby, not a potential career path.

With this picture, what to do? Continuing in college was an open question. Her mother was pushing for her to leave school, but Jessi was looking forward to two art classes, astronomy, and, even the challenge of political science, in spring semester. Still, she was feeling defeated and unsure of her future direction.

After listening to Jessi's academic history, I began to suspect that her ability profile might be "structural." That means she finds working with spatial relationships more satisfying than working with abstract ideas and people relationships. It also means she can work mentally with the possibilities of solid objects in space (how they work) without actually needing to see all the dimensions involved. Other examples of structural tasks are completing a surgical or dental procedure, fixing a mechanical problem with a car, woodcarving, or flying a plane.

A structural orientation would explain why three-dimensional sciences and art lit her up and were fun. Her ease with math suggested another related spatial relations ability: being able to understand complex hypothetical relationships in the mechanical world (the why of that world). These factors would also help explain why the courses in English literature and social studies, where words, ideas and people predominate, were boring to her.

Jessi, after thinking about it, decided that The Highlands Ability Battery might give her some insight into her natural abilities, help her sort out what educational program would make sense for her and what career areas to investigate.

It was a thrill to read Jessi's Highlands Battery report. Every area of success Jessi had described in her school experience jumped off the Battery bar chart. Her scores confirmed that she understands the how and why of mechanical systems, and needs to work in a way that satisfies her spatial relations talents. Therefore, she needs to be thinking about 3-D projects/realities in her mind, working with her hands and producing concrete results. For Jessi the humanities and social studies are not naturally comfortable mental worlds. No wonder that poetry class was a trial!

Separate from her structural abilities, Jessi's scores indicated that she has lots of ideas flowing through her mind, she takes in information through and remembers designs, she is highly observant of things in her visual field, and she is aware of subtle nuances across all of her sensory channels. The results of the Battery also helped Jessi to make better use of newly discovered learning abilities. Now, new learning could proceed more smoothly. Jessi was stunned and relieved by what her scores were telling her. "So that's why I hated English and loved anatomy and physiology," she said. It took quite a bit of hashing and rehashing to fully take in the meaning and implications of her scores. "I'm not stupid or lazy. My brain is wired to think in three dimensions and understand why the mechanical universe operates the way it does. But words and abstract ideas, forget it!"

The fact that she can take her structural and artistic abilities as seriously as other people take their abstract problem-solving abilities floored Jessi. She had defined intelligence and success entirely in terms of abstract thinking. The implication that she could succeed in an artistic field was difficult for her to fully grasp. It required a major change in worldview and self-concept.

A year later, Jessi is loving her art classes and developing many skills. A new world has opened up to her. Her concept of herself has shifted from "I'm dumb and lazy," to "I'm smart in my structural way and as I apply myself, I can become a successful artist." Art is no longer a cute hobby. It's a whole world of marvelous work. She has found her home.

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Jessi Responds

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Dear Jill,

Thank you very much!!!! I feel that you clearly identified the things that I was dealing with in my life prior to and following the Highlands tests. I let my mom read it too. We think that it's great. I got my grades back for this semester and I am soooooo excited! In Art history, my most difficult class of the semester, I finished with a B-!!!! In 3-D design I got an A-, in 2-D design I got an A, and in my Drawing I class I got a B. Pretty good huh? This is the best that I've ever done! I feel like I've found my niche. I have the confidence that I was lacking previously. I feel like since I understand myself and my abilities I can make further progress by using techniques that are unique to my learning style, instead of measuring myself against others who are very different than me.

Although taking the Highlands tests were very helpful, if I didn't have someone like you, Jill, to help me understand it and figure ways to incorporate what I learned into my school and life, I wouldn't have grown as much as I did. I understand that for me, reading class material won't make me absorb the information. I need to make cards, put them in categories, and actually see and touch the material in front of me in a way that I, personally can remember. I now understand that just because things are not naturally easy for me does not mean that I can't do them nor that I should stay away from those kinds of subjects... Instead of avoiding things that would be difficult or making excuses for their difficulty, I am more inclined to accept their difficulty and work harder....because I know that I can succeed. I understand now that my success is not a gift, it is something that I work for. If I understand myself, I can succeed in many things whether they are presented in a way that I am comfortable with, or in a way that is difficult. Thank you for helping me understand that!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

LOVE, JESSI

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