

***Different Learners, Different Learning Styles***  
**By Diane Bramble**

Friends' School abounds with active learning—head, hand, and heart. Peek into a classroom on any given day and you will see evidence of this learning—a child arranging colored tiles into groups of five as she begins to understand the rudiments of multiplication, or find a focused artist painting a replica of a stained glass roundel from the Chartres Cathedral, or witness the genesis of a friendship as a child learns a new way to ask a friend to play.

All this, and much more, takes place everyday as the children go about their important work of exploring the world, satisfying their innate curiosity, and growing their brains. At the same time, the teachers are going about their important work of discovering how each child's brain works best, how to access and boost each child's aptitude and skills, and find the best methods to shore up and bolster each child's challenges.

The key to this important work at Friends' is that we move with the cadence of care. We care deeply and have abundant respect for the cognitive, creative, and emotional needs of every child. From this care and respect comes connection, which evolves into understanding the learner, which then determines further and future instruction.

Our instruction is based on formal and informal assessments of each child in every academic area—reading, writing, and math—in order to understand what the child already knows and can already do. Once we know the child, we do our best to design each lesson to meet the needs of that child, differentiating to ensure as much individualization as possible. Our goal is to meet each child at his or her current cognitive and social/emotional level. Our methods for assessment are varied, from giving timed reading fluency tests to keeping anecdotal records of our observations of children interacting with their peers. At Friends' School we consider developmental stages, state and national standards and measures, and we know that every child's process and product will be and look different because each child's brain is unique. Mel Levine's quote is apt, "Everyone is expected to be highly productive... but they do not all need to be turning out the same product."

The teachers at Friends' aspire to best practice and to stay informed regarding the latest research about brain development and innovations in teaching and learning. We subscribe to the principles of a few forward-thinkers in the field of education. We are strongly influenced by Howard Gardner's theories about multiple intelligences because this system facilitates a more expansive view of the child. The intelligences Dr. Gardner outlines are linguistic/language, logical/mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist, and existentialist. We also believe in *All Kinds of Minds* (Dr. Mel Levine), which lays out eight neurodevelopmental constructs into a framework for teachers to "better understand how students learn and vary in their learning," using the strengths and weaknesses of the student's brain functions ([www.allkindsofminds.org](http://www.allkindsofminds.org)). The constructs from *All Kinds of Minds* are

attention, memory, higher order cognition, social cognition, language, neuromotor function, and two ordering systems

At Friends' School we consider specific intelligences, neuromotor constructs, and learning styles when we plan lessons to further the impact and effectiveness of the instruction and to help children make as many brain connections as possible. Brain research has found that learning is most potent when incorporating every modality, so whenever possible there is an auditory, visual, and kinesthetic component in our lessons (*Teaching With Multiple Modalities*, [www.readwritethink.org](http://www.readwritethink.org)). We also integrate across the curriculum whenever possible. For example, the teaching of the seven continents may include reading, writing, math, science, music, art, problem solving, and cooperative games.

Here are a handful of possibilities for an integrated mini-study of the continents: write the names of the continents on poster paper in seven different colors (visual), sing the continents; songs (auditory, musical), make a world map using an old bed sheet and have children "fly" from one continent to another as they visit landmarks like the Great Wall in Asia (kinesthetic, neuromotor function), invite the children to draw pictures of these landmarks and place their illustrations on the map (spatial), have children write about trips they've taken (or want to take) to these locations (linguistic, intrapersonal), using the world wide web the teacher and students could find a school on another continent that's eager to start a pen pal/Skype exchange (social cognition, interpersonal, linguistic), study the key on a map and measure mileage from top to bottom of a continent (mathematical, spatial), and research animals found on each continent (naturalist). The information is accessible for everyone in some form, or multiple forms, and the information moves into long-term memory through a myriad of connections, links, and associations by way of head, hand, and heart to grow the brain.

Barnett Berry, founder of Center for Teaching Quality writes, "Twenty-first-century learning means that students master content while producing, synthesizing, and evaluating information from a wide variety of subjects and sources with an understanding of and respect for diverse cultures. Students (will) demonstrate the three Rs, but also the three Cs: creativity, communication, and collaboration." At Friends' School, we are working hard in the present but also looking forward. We are looking forward in order to imagine what the future holds for our children as we prepare them to be active agents in their own learning and advocates for their particular learning styles and needs.

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