



NAGC receives similar questions from teachers and parents; however, rarely is there an opportunity to explore how the “other side” might be facing the issue. Interestingly, both groups benefit from the same information even though they look at it from different perspectives and have different roles to play in helping gifted children reach their potential. Our ongoing goal is for teachers and parents to develop a broader understanding of children’s potential and thus create stimulating learning environments.

Topic for this issue: “Learner Preferences and Teaching Strategies: Finding a Perfect Match”

A Teacher’s View

One of my students came to me yesterday and asked if I would consider allowing her to tape record some of my lessons for reference later on, especially in anticipation of quizzes and tests. She claims that her retention and recall of information is more efficient when she listens to it. Her repeated attempts to copy over notes, create flashcards, and “quiz” herself have proven to be unsuccessful. I’m not sure if I should welcome the idea or not. I mean, everyone else has to study and prepare the old-fashioned way, so why should I make an exception.

I’m in the midst of a long term project that requires students to work in groups at some point. The last time I tried this method was a disaster. I had each member of the group pick a role (writer, speaker, researcher, etc.) from a hat. They were not happy. Turns out, the young girl who picked writing is actually a great public speaker, and of course the writer picked the speaking card. I’d love to find out how to find out what my students like to do. I know I could simply ask them, but what if they don’t even know. And interests change, right?

A Parent’s View

My 9-year-old daughter’s teacher recently shared an interesting experience. In trying to demonstrate that being able to see information as well as hear it is helpful to learners, she quickly rattled off a lengthy set of directions. She reassured the class that she would never expect them to remember and be able to repeat the directions from just that one, quick speech. She was astonished when my daughter eagerly shot her hand in the air and accurately restated it in detail! Is this that unusual? Is there something I should be doing about it? I am glad she has that skill, but does it mean she might not be as strong in other ways of learning.

My freshman son is not making a successful transition to high school academics. He did well in elementary and middle school, but it seems the high school is very heavy on lecture and taking notes, with the teachers having moved away from textbooks and activities. When it comes time for tests, he finds he doesn’t have the information he needs to answer the questions on the study guide, much less be prepared for the test. It sounds like many of the high school courses will be like this, and I can’t imagine that college is much different. How can we help him adapt?

The wonderful thing about human beings is that we are all different. However, while these differences are sometimes easily valued and accommodated in the real world, they can be more of a challenge to meet in the classroom. Imagine that a future artist, athlete, scientist, naturalist, musician, and politician can all be a part of one class. What does learning look like for each of them? Without differentiation of instruction, it likely looks the same for all, but does not necessarily reach them equally. The business of school, after all, is to foster learning and thinking across a balanced curriculum and set of expectations. Consideration of how an individual learns and is best able to demonstrate mastery is a great way to support achievement.

This idea is also helpful at home. The more our children understand who they are as learners, the better equipped they will be to successfully use their strengths to navigate the world around them, including career choices and relationships. When focusing on learner preferences, there are three approaches to consider. Learning modalities set the foundation by focusing on visual, auditory, and tactile-kinesthetic processing components. Dr. Howard Gardner’s theory of Multiple Intelligences goes



further by suggesting one or more of eight intelligences to consider (math/logic, verbal, visual, musical/rhythmic, naturalist, bodily kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal). Rounding off this triumvirate are Dr. Anthony F. Gregorc's Mind Styles, which present a continuum of perceptual (concrete, abstract) and organizational (sequential, random) abilities.

While there are many ways to think about how we learn and produce, it is important to remember that everyone possesses some ability in each area, although they may have stronger ability in or preference for some over others. Additionally, these facets are flexible over time and may vary according to topic or depth of mastery. Finally, it is important to emphasize that there is no right or wrong when it comes to these differences. Understanding who we are is meant to empower, not label or limit.

1. Awareness

AT SCHOOL

- Try starting a new quarter, trimester, or class off by utilizing a Learning Styles Inventory (LSI). The instrument is research based and was actually developed in order to guide teachers in planning educational experiences for students. The LSI provides a quick and accurate picture of the current learning style of the individual student. I say current because, as mentioned above, learning styles are fluid. There is a great online LSI that is free to access and use. Visit <http://www.personal.psu.edu/bxb11/LSI/LSI.htm> for access.
- You can also use an online Multiple Intelligence (MI) Survey. As with the LSI instrument mentioned above, the MI survey is research-based and provides a quick analysis. Access it here - <http://bit.ly/XLVMWY>

AT HOME

- Investigate the types of learning modalities <http://bit.ly/10SWTwR>, Multiple Intelligences <http://bit.ly/152cjvi>, and Mind Styles <http://bit.ly/15P1ZsR>
- Child and adolescent development may play significant roles in learner preferences and abilities. As their motor and cognitive skills evolve, so, too, will their preferences and abilities. <http://bit.ly/XABFrq>
- Formal testing may be warranted if you have questions about how your child's learning profile affects their cognitive, social-emotional, or behavioral development. Consult your pediatrician for more information and resources.
- Take note and discuss examples of people and their hobbies and careers that reflect differences. This can be especially helpful when people with different strengths contribute to a particular success. <http://bit.ly/10SWp9V>

2. Opportunities

AT SCHOOL

- Once you have gathered "data" you can proceed in a multitude of ways to provide differentiated instruction for the variety of learning styles and intelligences.
- Provide a variety of teaching instruction through strategies that include lecture, games and simulations, role-playing, independent study, and class discussion. This will ensure that you are catering to a broad range.
- Continue this planning and instruction when forming groups for either short or long term projects. You can form groups of 3-6 students in a way that ensures a variety of learning styles and cognitive abilities.
- PBS has a great article about using learning styles to guide instruction. Access it here. <http://to.pbs.org/15P23sI>

AT HOME

- Provide a range of different experiences and discuss which modalities, intelligences, and styles are involved when participating.
- Celebrate strengths, but also be proactive about strengthening other areas. Set the model by being reflective about who you are as a learner and by sharing your insights in the process.
- Develop strategies for using this knowledge to advantage in assignments and activities. Help your children find ways to use their strengths for support when instruction is not a match. For example, a visual learner would benefit from graphic organizers or adaptive technology (recorder, smart pen, laptop, etc.) in a lecture. <http://bit.ly/Zr6Dtj>

3. Support

AT SCHOOL AND AT HOME

- Communicate with each other regarding what they see at home versus at school and use this information to provide support for the child's development, engagement, and performance.
- Involve children in the process of understanding their preferences, developing ways to use them to his or her advantage, and strengthening areas of weakness. Those weakness may become strengths later on.
- Revisit efforts to uncover learning modalities and style preferences as often as possible.

"I never teach my pupils; I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn."

--Albert Einstein

Please copy and share this with other parents and teachers in your community who may find this useful.

This issue of *Connecting for High Potential* was compiled by Jeff Danielian, NAGC Teacher Resource Specialist, and Susan Dulong Langley, Parent Representative to the NAGC Board of Directors.



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