

INTRODUCTION: AN ENDURING DILEMMA

Millions of students will struggle in school today. Just as they do every day.

In classrooms in your school, these students will feel discouraged, misunderstood, and alone. Not because they can't learn, but because the way they learn doesn't align with the way they are taught.

Thousands of teachers will struggle today. Just as they do every day.

In your school and district, these teachers will feel discouraged, inadequate, and alone. Not because they can't teach, but because they have not been able to target their teaching strategies to the varied learning profiles of their students.

Too many of our schools are unequipped for the diversity in learning that unfolds in classrooms. District policies are hampered by traditional notions of ability and unvarying approaches to meeting the high standards of curriculum, instruction, and required annual standardized testing. Educators often lack the know-how that's emerging from the latest research on the mind, brain, and learning to adequately respond to individual student needs.

When students are taught in a way that is incompatible with how they learn, the natural strengths of their minds are neglected. This failure to reach a student's abilities is too often portrayed as a deficiency of the individual, resulting in low self-esteem, high levels of anxiety,

and disengagement with learning and school. Or we point to the inadequacy of the teacher and local schools, driving many promising educators from a profession that needs their dedication and commitment at this unprecedented time for education in our nation.

Without effective and nurturing intervention, both student and teacher may give up on school—and learning—altogether. The resulting loss of productive individuals who contribute to our society is unfathomable.

One Educator's Story

My career in education began in 1975 as a teacher of “exceptional needs” students. These were individuals who had struggled mightily in their previous classrooms or had been considered to have handicaps to such an extent that new special education classrooms were the first stop for their free and appropriate education.

Every year, children and adolescents came through my door accompanied by data and numerous other descriptors designed to help them obtain an array of special support and to help me figure out the kind of instruction they needed. Gregory, at age twelve, had not spoken words, leading me to begin to design alternative communication strategies. This provided a starting point, but our journey together as teacher and student progressed successfully when I concentrated on finding answers to one simple question: I wonder how he learns?

What I loved about that challenging period of my teaching career was that this simple question drove everything I did in the classroom. I became an astute observer of each of my students, looking for clues as to what made them tick when they were successful at something and how they were different at home than in a school environment. Paula never spoke in the classroom and led me to believe that she was nonverbal, but she answered the phone when I had to call her home. James understood humor—from the physical play of clowns to the more sophisticated wordplay of jokes—revealing a level of conceptual

understanding I may have missed by simply looking at his work or relying on his expressive language weakness. Shack could not do simple mathematical procedures in a workbook but could point out recurring mathematical patterns found with numbers and shapes in the physical world.

I sought a variety of perspectives, always hoping someone might see something that I missed. I thought of myself as a combination ethnographer and archeologist. I was pulling pieces from my “dig” into a child’s life and trying to understand a new culture of learning so I could create the right script for very unique roles that each student and I as teacher would play in our educational journey. The only way I knew to approach this unfamiliar range of learning differences was to think about using science in its richest sense—embracing wonder, a culture of inquiry, the quest for rich data and evidence-based practice. It worked. Searches yielded observable phenomena leading to patterns that led to insights into how students’ minds worked.

I was not to become an expert in a subject matter area during my education career (although I have developed a strong background in literature and social sciences). But I did become a “learner” expert, developing the know-how and tools to figure out how to successfully reach some of the most complex and puzzling students who attended the schools where I worked.

One Organization’s Mission

I lead All Kinds of Minds to continue this work on a large scale. I am driven by a belief that our nation will not achieve the results we desire in stopping the persistent and chronic underperformance and disengagement of so many students unless we build expertise in our education workforce to better understand the variety of ways students learn. Currently this knowledge about learning and its normal variation is primarily the domain of the clinical and scientific communities. While there have been recent efforts to broadly communicate the benefits brain research can bring to learning,¹ it is unacceptable that we have

not figured out how to move this body of knowledge into the world of education.

That is what All Kinds of Minds does. Since 1995, this organization, working with renowned learning expert Dr. Mel Levine, has translated the latest research from multiple disciplines into a framework to understand learning and its variations. We have shared that knowledge and how to use it to target specific teaching strategies to learners with thousands of educators through our programs and resources. With twenty-three independent studies to date that have investigated what happens when educators use this approach, we've gathered evidence that more students, teachers, and schools are finding success in the core business of education: learning for all kinds of minds (see Appendix C: The Effects of the Schools Attuned Program: A Snapshot of Research Results).

All Kinds of Minds seeks to work with others who realize that by harnessing these new insights from the sciences on how people learn to the tools, processes, and strategies used by expert practitioners, we can make two critical contributions to education. First, we will prevent needless struggles in school for thousands of students hoping to find success at learning and life. Second, we will be the leaders who seize the opportunity to do what many national voices are suggesting America must do: create the future of learning. There is a growing and powerful argument that we must transform the educational landscape from a world of schooling to a world of learning. Educators in today's schools need to have learning expertise in addition to content knowledge. They need this expertise not only to reach the students slipping through the cracks in schools today but to transition into the new roles that will emerge as the *teaching* profession becomes a *learning* profession in this twenty-first century.

Getting from here to there requires that those of us in current education leadership positions—principals, district administrators, coaches, mentors, and teacher leaders—reshape our role to that of a “learning leader.” It is a role that requires a dual focus of school leadership, nurturing the student and teacher struggling within today's classroom while laying the building blocks for a new way of education that creates

the personalized, customized learning journeys students and parents are beginning to demand. Learning leaders model the characteristics of this role for their faculty and make creating the conditions for teacher learning on behalf of student learning a high priority.

This book introduces an approach that today's school leaders, in a new role as learning leader, can use to help greater numbers of students find success while shifting education to a learner-centric enterprise. I refer to it as the All Kinds of Minds model, which involves these components:

- *Expertise in the science of learning*, based on the understanding of eight constructs that form the mind's ingredients for learning and the belief that differences are *variation*, not deviation
- *Evidence gathered from multiple sources*, including using a phenomenological approach as part of the data necessary to understand how specific students learn
- *A problem-solving model* that uncovers the complexity and richness of how a child learns, identifying learning assets as well as weaknesses and discovering passions and affinities that can drive scholarship, careers, and other life choices
- *A set of five core beliefs* about how *all* students are treated
- *A commitment* to align school and educational practices and policies to the way students learn and vary in their learning

How do you get started? The first step is to continue reading. Chapter One provides a larger context supporting the need for the approach presented throughout this book. Chapters Two and Three will help you introduce your faculty to an overview of the science of learning developed from findings from neuroscience, cognitive science, and behavioral science. The research has been translated into insights to help generate understanding about how the adults and students in your school are wired to learn. These findings are synthesized into neurodevelopmental knowledge that creates an overarching framework for diagnosis and informing instruction. The strategies, tactics, and examples described in Chapters Four through Seven demonstrate

how to apply these insights so that the adults in your school have a better understanding of themselves as learners and can then use the approach to make personalized and successful learning plans a reality for those students that your school and district have always had trouble reaching.

We've designed this book to help you at the very beginning stage of implementing this approach. Specifically, you'll find ideas throughout the book for the following:

- *Acquiring and processing new information.* Boxes are included throughout each chapter, and professional development activities conclude each of the chapters. These items are intended to help learning leaders process the concepts presented, reflect on their own practice, and discover alignment with the All Kinds of Minds philosophy and approach. Once you become familiar with the questions and activities, you can consider how to utilize them in your educational setting.
- *Embedding this approach to learning practices into your existing professional development structures.* We assume you have existing professional learning communities, Critical Friends or Lesson Study groups, and other well-established processes around professional development in your school. (If not, that is a critical success factor to put into place before any school-level professional development can start.) The content of this book can easily be part of a formal book study, particularly when supplemented by other resources that provide deeper engagement with the neurodevelopmental constructs. Or, specific activities could be selected to assist faculty in reflecting on their own learning profiles as well as educational practices and school. By using these tools, you will assess the alignment of your current environment with the All Kinds of Minds approach.
- *Testing strategies with selected students who are struggling to learn.* Help teachers try applying strategies with students in your school who are struggling. Consider using the ideas in Chapters Four and Five as an additional component to your Response to Intervention program. Chapters include real-life stories of how

this approach has been used by educators as well as a detailed look at how the learning framework and assessment approach is used to improve writing instruction and evaluation. With this basic foundation, faculty can acquire a deeper insight about individual learning needs and become more adept at understanding and managing learning challenges and opportunities. The result? Over time, with continued pursuit, you will have a school filled with both learning experts and subject matter scholars.

- *Continued learning and advocacy.* As you read through this book, make a personal commitment to embrace the “small wins” approach by identifying your first few actions. Share what you learn with colleagues. Go to the All Kinds of Minds Web site, www.allkindsofminds.org (see Appendix E for a list of resources available on the Web site). In addition to a multitude of resources, you’ll find ways to stay abreast of our growing knowledge base and to connect to other people who are energized by using this approach to support teachers as they help students who learn differently find success.

An Invitation

We hope that because you are reading this book, you are willing to be part of this powerful movement to bring the science of learning to the art of teaching, rescuing those students who are struggling to learn right now while transforming education for generations to come. Leaders know that what matters in learning is what happens in class, in those moments when teacher meets students. Such leaders—like you—find themselves waiting for the larger transformation to learning-driven schools while pursuing the many daily small wins that address the urgency of the struggling student.

Arthur Levine, former president of Teachers College in New York City, stated this eloquently when he wrote that “today’s reformers have one foot in the old world and one in the new, inchoate world of education. Experimenting and pushing, they must sustain our schools

until they can be replaced by the ones we need for the future.”²² While the large, systemic change desired may be beyond our immediate grasp, learning leaders who embrace a science of learning to show that it is indeed possible to match pedagogy to a student’s learning profile will achieve something equally important for our times. They will save the lives of the far too many children we continue to lose in the industrial era, factory-inspired model in many of today’s schools.

Today’s school leaders, willing to work with a foot in each world, are in the best position to harness bring the energy of these pioneering new ideas from the science of learning to the realities of classrooms. They can better meet the needs of today’s students so vulnerable to school failure while accelerating this transformation. We’re inspired by the exciting visions for student learning that so many of you are generating. All Kinds of Minds hopes to harness your genius and enthusiasm and share your stories through our Web site to spark a much larger dialogue that can move the nation from an education agenda to a learning agenda.

We are well aware of the enormously challenging work of changing school culture and practices and are not so naïve to think that picking up a new book is sufficient support for leaders engaged in these efforts. This book is not about leadership nor is it a detailed approach for a school improvement effort. Rather, it is a framework to help all learners—teachers and students—understand how they learn and how they can learn better. It’s a critical first step to discovering how to personalize learning. To that end, this book is intended to provide some starting points for this dialogue for the future, as well as some immediate actions you can take to use this knowledge about learning with some of the different kinds of minds in your school.

We invite you to use the information and strategies in this book to bring success to all the learners in your school—teachers and students—and add to the growing portraits of possibility for educational change.

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ALL KINDS OF MINDS