**We are all smart … in different ways.**

(JHH ’09)

How ironic it was today, after a true friend sent me the following, about a student who prevailed, after she had spent years feeling “dumb” in school. Please read the attached. It is quite a story.

Why have I shared this with you?

First, because we are all *gifted* in some ways and *limited* in others. My late friend Eric Tennis, the happiest man in Watertown and one of the smartest about remembering people, was bound to a wheel chair his whole life. People frequently underestimated his real gifts. The gifted athlete may be an ineffective reader. A proficient reader may not be able to replace a spark plug, fix a flat tire, replace a door, or read a blueprint. One student may not need pictures in the text, while the other may learn 90% of what she knows from the pictures in the text. There are at least five different ways people learn, from tactile and graphic to getting info out of a book by reading it ourselves.

You have to wonder about why schools have spent the past 150 years using the “book” method, when there are so many other ways “smart” people learn.

Teachers know we have to get beyond feeling dumb for students to learn. I tell all of my students on the first day of class, “You are all smart at something; maybe smart at lots of things. It’s my job and my privilege to figure out how you are smart and teach to that. You can help me figure it out.”

Remember the ACT test from high school? I got a 99+% on the reading comprehension part and a 19% on that impossible part where they had pulleys and ropes or boxes that were unfolded. It was like a foreign language to me.

So it was with a student of mine today.

He dropped out of school because he “… didn’t do well on tests.”

That’s sad because he was a very “hands on” young man, a gifted musician, and a learner who excelled when he could “picture” what he learned. Yet he felt “dumb.”

So, I invite you to read the following, and consider whether there are ways we can teach to the “smartness” of all our valuable students and assess their true skills and abilities.

**Teaching Philosophy**

*To understand who I am as a teacher, I must explain my history as a learner.*



In 2nd grade, after taking the California Achievement Test, I learned that I was not as smart as my friends.  My test results labeled me “below grade level.”  This low achieving label was reinforced throughout elementary school by experiences such as being sent to the second grade classroom for reading when I was in fourth grade.  I was diagnosed with a speech impediment and was “taken out” of the regular classes multiple times during the school week.  I felt different.  I lost interest in school.  I stopped trying.  In middle school, I often repeated courses.  When I entered high school, the label came with me.

In 11th grade, as a dare from my friends, I signed up for advanced placement history.  Because of my poor academic record, my parents had to sign a release form so that I was allowed to attend. When I entered the class, instead of being labeled, I met the first teacher who told me I was smart!  I discovered I was not “stupid”, rather I just learned differently than my peers.  Learning how to learn, not only turned me into a successful student, but it motivated me to help other students who were struggling in traditional classrooms.  As a result of hard work, my grades improved and I was accepted into university.  I earned my teaching certificate, and began teaching high school students.  Unlike many teachers who wanted to teach advanced placement learners, I hoped to teach the low achieving students.  Although I no longer teach high school I continue to work hard to help struggling students in my university courses.

I believe every student should be acknowledged as individuals who have something important to contribute to class.

I believe the best teaching I have done is in cooperation and collaboration with faculty, staff, and students. There is an old Latin proverb, which states, *by learning you will teach; by teaching you will learn*.  I believe this proverb reflects myself as an educator.  As a teacher, I am always learning from my students and colleagues. I try to model teacher as learner to my own students.  Particularly since my students are going to be teachers one day, I want them to understand that learning never stops.  I also want them to understand that a test score cannot define one’s ability to learn.  I am not ashamed that I had a failing academic record for many years, because I think those experiences have made me a better educator.   I consider every teaching opportunity a great privilege, a privilege that as a “low achieving” 2nd grader I never thought I would be able to have.