

Language, Broadly Defined

Several years ago, the Friends School Haverford faculty read *The Basic School: A Community for Learning* (1995) by Ernest L. Boyer. This book focuses on school as community; the framework for a coherent curriculum; the optimal climate for learning; and the commitment to intentionally model and develop the ethical and moral dimensions of life. In many ways, Friends School Haverford is the kind of school that Ernest Boyer had in mind. This is not surprising because Boyer was a fellow traveler with Quakers and was a founding committee member of Princeton Friends School.

I turned to this book to confirm the experiences that we are enjoying through the *Spring Celebration of the Arts*. The School is alive with wonderful manifestations of our students' creative talents, demonstrated in the Spring Concert, the art show, the upcoming Spanish assembly, and frequent poetry readings. We know that these experiences are central to the education of children.

Boyer writes about the core commitment to language and literacy and the important role of the creative arts in the Basic School:

... literacy is the first and most essential goal. All children are expected to become proficient in the written and spoken word. But language in this school is defined broadly to include words, numbers, and the arts – the essential tools of learning which, taken together, help create a curriculum with coherence. ... language is defined broadly to include not just words, but also mathematics and the arts – three symbol systems that have their own unique characteristics and, at the same time, relate intimately to each other. (p. 65)

Through research conducted by Howard Gardner (*Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (1983); *Art, Mind, and Brain: A Cognitive Approach to Creativity* (1982) and others, we are aware of the many “intelligences” that humans possess and that these intelligences work together and reinforce each other. Nick Page writes in *Music as a Way of Knowing* (1995):

New research in the field of learning is showing what ancient cultures have known all along – that music is much more than recreational filler. Music brings brain power! Music strengthens attention spans, aids memory, and provides creative outlets. Music is good for us – it's good for our brains, our bodies, and our spirits. (p. 9)

At Friends School Haverford, as we fine tune the schedule and the curriculum, we keep before us the essential balance that Ernest Boyer and others describe. We know that integrated opportunities for music, movement, and artistic creativity are central to the education of the whole child. We also confirm that this approach helps us fulfill our mission “to foster a lifelong love of learning, grounded in an appreciation of that of God in everyone. We provide a learning environment which challenges and stimulates our students to achieve their full potential. We strive to be a diverse school family, practicing the Quaker values of integrity, equality, service, community, simplicity, and peaceful problem solving.”

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