

Session 4

Different Kinds of Smart Multiple Intelligences

The Theory of Multiple Intelligence Continues to Improve Educational Methods

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Since Gardner published his theory of multiple intelligences three decades ago, the theory has improved test scores for multiple academic subjects and provided a rationale to continue to include music, art, dance and physical trades in school curricula. The theory is also more compatible with modern views of education than preceding theories that held intelligence capacity to be innate and fixed.

Gardner's theory introduced the concept of value to the secular definition of intelligence, and hence indirectly cultural mores. His introduction of value to the definition makes it more difficult for the education establishment to pretend that a secular education is value neutral and thus that comments by those who wish education to include their own morals are irrelevant. Gardner (1983/1993 as cited in K&S 1998) "defines an *intelligence* as the ability to solve problems or fashion products that are **valued** by at least one culture."

It has been 30 years since Gardner published his groundbreaking work "Frame of Mind" which articulated his theory of multiple intelligence to a lay audience. Further work by he and his successors at Harvard, notably Ron Ritchart, make the role of transmission of cultural mores by education even more explicit. In his book *Creating cultures of thinking The 8 Forces We Must Master to Truly Transform Our Schools*, Ritchart calls on teachers to shape culture and manage messages to enable students to solve problems.

Cultural mores influence which problems the teacher focuses the children on. For instance, the teacher can focus the students on treating health problems that afflict the most well-to-do members of society in their final years or on changing how cultures distribute grain surpluses to prevent the health problems that handicap malnourished children for life. In the decades since I graduated from high school, many teachers have focused their students on environmental problems and the result is cultural mores that value clean air, safe water and natural landscapes and fauna.

Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences develops the student dispositions essential to Ritchart's view of a quality education. In Ritchart's view, rather than defining education as the transmission of knowledge measured by a test, a quality education is the acquisition by the students of the "dispositions needed for students to become active learners and effective thinkers eager and able to create, innovate and solve problems." Ritchart defines dispositions as "an enduring characteristic or trait of a person that serves to motivate behavior ... Our dispositions define who we are as people, as thinkers, as learners. In previous writings, I've argued that the dispositions that define us as thinkers make up our intellectual character." (Ritchart 2002 as cited in Ritchart 2015).

Many teachers have found Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences useful for engaging and motivating students to learn. Searching the web recently, I found that every major book seller still carries teachers' handbooks for activities to engage and develop various intelligences of children. One edited by Gardner (Chen 1998) has sections devoted to activities for each of the seven intelligences Gardner identified in his classic book *Frame of Mind*, and these sections contain several activities that develop naturalistic intelligence, his eighth intelligence. In my classes, I plan to use observational and questioning methods described in a 1998 paper by Mara Krechevsky and Steve Seidel to assess the effectiveness of these activities for developing the various intelligences of early elementary age children.

References

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