

Anna Marie Walters  
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Final Paper # 2

“I will tell you not what I believe, but how I came to hold that belief, and bring you with me, along the same path of learning. I will tell you not who you ought to be, but how I became a particular kind of person and perhaps you will emulate that process of becoming.”

Sometimes I feel my beliefs regarding education and my habits of teaching, learning, and leading is constantly changing. I am always reading theories and even teaching magazines trying to grasp what is the best way to become a better and more effective teacher. However, there were a few things from the course really challenged me and made me step back and reevaluate my outlook on classroom teaching.

During my undergraduate years it seems that Howard Gardner was always talked about and put on a pedestal. His work with multiple intelligences is highly regarded and pushed during teaching courses. As a teacher, former student, and parent I firmly believe that Gardner’s multiple intelligence theory is right on and should be incorporated into all lessons being taught in schools. We should be showing all students that they are smart and capable of learning even if their strong points are outside the norm. Some students excel in math and science while other students may excel in music or art. However, there is one of Gardner’s beliefs in The Disciplined Mind that challenged my outlook on the education system.

I find one belief of Gardner’s that makes me rethink my understanding of teaching and that is his idea that students should focus on four major disciplines: science, mathematics, the arts, and history. Within these four disciplines the teachers should engross the students in only a few major topics. On one hand I can see and understand Gardner’s argument. Sometimes schools seem to hurry and shove an immense amount of information down students’ throats. Schools want kids to regurgitate useless information and make them memorize dates and names that when compared to the overall scheme of things, is useless. I feel, especially in the middle grades and high school years, that students should be exposed to a variety of subjects and multiple topics within those subjects. Would if a teacher went into depth about the Civil War or Rocks and Minerals, for that matter, and the students whose multiple intelligences did not coincide with that topic became bored and disinterested? Wouldn’t that turn the student off to school? Shouldn’t we, as teachers, uncover multiple ideas and topics so the students have a chance to grasp on to a subject that they find passionate about and want to learn more about?

In The Disciplined Mind Gardner uses the Holocaust as an example that can be taught extensively in schools. The Holocaust provides a perfect opportunity where students can discuss and dig deeper into the past minds of individuals and events that bring up moral issues and the historical significance on the present. I agree wholeheartedly Gardner’s stance that, “...a deeper understanding of how humans acted—or failed to act—can have some influence on what we ourselves do,” (TDM pg 184). However, I do not feel that concentrating in-depth on one aspect of history is the only way an individual will fully grasp the enormity of that lesson. I feel that students can still gain the deeper understanding of what is “implied by these names, terms, and concept,” (TDM pg184) even if it is just taught for one semester in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

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Another piece of literature that I found interesting was A Passion for Learning. I think A Passion for Learning really hit home for me. I believe schools are just the starting point; test scores and student averages aren't the end all be all of education. Gardner feels that standards and assessments are important and should be used regularly (TDM pg 39) but I feel that that should not be used to discourage or turn kids off from learning. Giving out too many tests and measuring a student's intelligence on test scores, I feel, will deter students from developing their love of learning. However, that is not to say that I want all testing to be thrown out. Teachers need a tool to help them gauge where their students are in the lesson and they need to figure out what areas need to be re-taught to their students. At the end of the day what I want my students to walk away with is a passion to learn more about a certain subject and a love for learning.

One reason I feel that teaching a broad range of subjects is important is because it will introduce students to a variety of topics and subjects. I want to uncover an interesting event in history or an interesting topic in science and spark a curiosity in my students that will make them want to investigate more. Mary Catherine Bateson states, "Most of life's learning takes place outside and beyond the classroom, continuing through old age. Those of us who have spent our lives as educators often have fond memories of our own schooling, yet even a career in higher education depends on informal as well as formal learning," (Lives of Learning). If I teach my students the tools of learning and open doors to an assortment of topics and ideas then I am allowing them to venture out on their own to discover more. I want to make learning interesting and vary the topics so my students will constantly be engaged in new information and have a broad knowledge base that will help them layer life with information.

What is important is making students passionate about learning and letting them, as an individual, take the necessary steps to learn more about a topic. I think that is why I think the breadth approach works best. As you introduce, teach, discuss certain topics you try to instill in the students a love of learning more. Then if that passion grows they will research the topic more and go more in depth. That way the students whose 'multiple intelligence' fits best what is being taught they can further learn more about it as long as the teacher provides the tools and motivation to help the student research the topic more.

However, how do you get the students to develop a passion for learning? How can you teach young kids that it is their responsibility to go the extra mile and learn something on their own? Right now we are living in a time where knowledge is at our fingertips but a lot of the time people just want to be told instead of discovering. But even I am lazy. I just want someone to show me and tell me how. We want to teach our students that they should not be lazy; they need to do some learning on their own and let their passion for obtaining knowledge grow.

Even though I feel this way about Gardner's idea of limiting the subject matter, maybe if you ask me ten years from now, after I have a few years of teaching under my belt, whether or not I still disagree with Gardner I may say no. If I take away anything from this course it would be the idea that inquiry provides the opportunity for teachers and students to evolve and become better at what they do as long as they keep the doorways to learning open and are open to change.