The Heart of the Mind

Revised Edition

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Introduction

This book is called *The Heart of the Mind*, not only because those words are found in the text but because in our educational culture of the heartless (objective) mind, the paradoxical phrase disrupts the false dichotomy between the mind and the heart that has misguided our pedagogical thinking. At the highest levels of intellect, there is no dichotomy between the heart and the mind. The two are one. School children, however, are often subjected to cold, cognitive lives, to endless pages of sober, declarative sentences.

The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once wrote that he wanted to escape from "the dust of the scholars." He meant, in part, that much scholarship is heartless, cognitive without being affective, and that a mind must be passionate. We must not study things without caring about them. In educating gifted children, we want no dusty scholarship, and we desire no artificial separation between the cognitive and the affective aspects of intellect.

It is not a cold, cognitive regard that fuels the highest levels of intellect. No one ever won a Nobel Prize after a course of indifference to the subject of discovery.

At the forefront of every great discipline, the world's finest thinkers live, not in a state of sedate and arid erudition, but rather in passionate and fervent exploration. They are transfixed by the thrill of neutron stars, or battle strategies, or subatomic particles, or polyphony, or sonnets. They are face to face with their knowledge, and it is this thrill of bringing great academics alive, of snatching intellectual joy from the pallid jaws of tedium, that is behind the essays in this book.

Some of the essays are a bit scholarly, but I hope not too many. They are as likely to be satires or to project a voice that I wish I could really speak. Some of them are supportive of popular ideas, and some of them will ripple the equanimity of a reader or two. Thoreau said that his equanimity was rippled but not ruffled; I'd like these essays to do both—both for readers and for myself.

Chapter One

Motivational Content and the Art of Motivational Teaching

The most intense argument I ever had with my colleagues occurred at a summer institute for gifted education, where I casually said, assuming that it was obvious, that one of a teacher's primary responsibilities is to motivate the students.

Well, let me tell you, a responsibility to motivate was by no means obvious to my fellow teachers. They not only disagreed with me; they disagreed absolutely, confidently, and loudly. And they were angry; they were mad as hell, and they weren't going to take it anymore. And they were united, unanimous. I was alone. In a room of a dozen teachers in a training program to teach gifted students, I was the only teacher who thought that we had a responsibility to motivate.

I felt like a blitzed quarterback having to eat the ball. Sack the motivator! I practically saw stars orbiting my broken face mask. Fourth and sixteen; punt.

The thing is, after all these years, I still think it is our responsibility to motivate our students, and I still think that scene at the summer institute is one of the strangest and most mystifying of my career. You should have been there.

But then, maybe you are there. Maybe you understand the indignant teachers' point. Or points. Or pointsssss.

What they said—*said* is a nice word for it—is, "I don't have TIME to motivate my students; I can NOT be responsible for motivating my students; it is the PARENTS' job to motivate my students; it is the STUDENTS' job to come to school with motivation; I don't even have TIME to cover the material; I don't NEED this anxiety; I don't get PAID to put up with this stuff; I don't get home until FIVE-THIRTY as it is; I am not a PSYCHOLOGIST; and if you say *motivate* again, I'll punch you right in your sanctimonious attitude."

Well, I adopted a mollifying profile.

They got over it, and we're still friends. But I hope that none of them is reading this essay because...I still think that we have a responsibility to motivate our students. Shhhhhh.

The truth is, anyone with any real teaching experience would have to sympathize with these teachers' feelings. They are, without question, overworked, underpaid, blamed for every damfool thing, held accountable, disrespected, inspected, neglected, rejected, and detected. You can't blame them for feeling that my responsibility-to-motivate straw was a camel-back-breaker. You can't blame them for saying that motivation is not our responsibility. It's just that...it is.

Stop that. I can't even hear you.

Think of it this way: Yes, it is the students' responsibility to be motivated in a general way—to care, to try, to long for success and understanding—but if the calculus teacher rejects the problem of teaching students what is wonderful

about calculus, who else in the community will do it? Is there anyone left? Except for exceptional exceptions, parents cannot teach their kids why calculus is fun, or beautiful, or filled with problem-solving suspense. And the students cannot show this to themselves. Only the calculus teacher has the special knowledge to do that.

If the grammar teacher declines the opportunity of teaching his students why grammar is cool, who is going to do it? As in the case of calculus, neither the parents nor the students can disclose the thrill of grammar's magic lens; only the grammar teacher can do that.

General motivation is the students' responsibility, but teaching the excitement and love of the subject, in addition to the so-called content of the subject, is the responsibility of the specialist, the teacher who has made a life and career out of teaching algebra, teaching literature, teaching biology.

Yes, it is threatening, at first, to feel responsible for motivating students. After all, how can we expect ourselves to do something that is not in the textbook, not in the curriculum guide, not taught in any education course, not objective, and not conveyed to every student in the same way? Motivation is at the highest level of the teacher's art; it is complex, individual, advanced, human, and intellectually profound.

How can we begin to understand the art of motivating?

First, consider the intellectual side of the problem. Every great field of study has its formal content and its motivational content. Yes, motivational content. The beauties, the dramas, the sad parts, the incredible footnotes, the continuing mysteries, the best stories of each subject—these things are part of the subject. They are the things that are often last seen, that are finally understood by professionals who have devoted their lives to understanding their subjects. But they are there. And they can be taught, told, shown.

Second, consider the research on effective teachers of the gifted. If you read between the statistics, you will find the telltale characteristics of the motivator. Effective teachers of the gifted, study after study shows us, are:

- enthusiastic
- intelligent
- curious
- personally involved in education
- caring
- broadly cultured
- appreciative
- creative
- funny
- interested in open-ended questions

See, it isn't just the knowing; it's the caring. When we learn as human beings, and care about what we learn, we are being intellectually deep. To learn—for all appearances—a

great deal about a subject but to be unmoved is, and must be, suspect. If you really see it, you will be moved; if you are not moved, you haven't really seen it. For in the end, every great field of study is profoundly moving and exciting and has been the obsessive life's work of a host of brilliant people. When we know our subjects well enough to love them, then we become like the ideal teacher of the gifted: enthusiastic, curious, personally involved, open-minded, appreciative. Brightly human.

Third, consider what we have learned about higher-order thinking and whole-brain learning. What is the effect of applying Bloom's Taxonomy and Barbara Clark's research into the affective domain to a subject such as American history? The effect is electric. We begin making synthetic comparisons, generating divergent possibilities, evaluating famous decisions, analyzing different causes, sympathetically feeling emotional responses, imagining vivid scenes, being receptive to intuitive hunches...; we become intellectually alive. These forms of thinking and feeling are inherently motivational; they lead students past the glossaries and the workbooks, past the boldfaced terms and chapter questions, past the textbook of the present to the past of the past—the real past that is really gone but that has left tantalizing traces.

The more we consider the art of motivational teaching, the more we realize that motivating is not an onerous, undesirable burden; it is a gift, an invitation to enjoy what

is best in knowledge, an invitation to enjoy what is best in helping our students learn.

In order to be motivational teachers, we must simply be unafraid and take the risk of caring—about ourselves (self-confidence, the research says), about our students (care about the students, the research says), and about our knowledge (enthusiasm and involvement, the research says). In order to be motivational academics, we must be academically human.

In gifted-teaching terms, cognitive depth is a function of affective depth; the more we care, the more we will learn, and see, and say, and smile, and let our voices rise and fall, and look again. The more human we are as learners, the more motivational we will be as teachers. To be motivational teachers, we must teach from the heart of the mind.

Chapter Two

Multiple Intelligences: A Case of Bad English

The manifestly intelligent Carl Sagan reminded us that no one's say-so is evidence. This would also apply, I take it, to everyone's say-so.

Everyone's say-so, in our dark epoch of gifted education, is that there are multiple intelligences. To be a say-no is to confess oneself a theoretical Neanderthal, clinging with brute knuckles to the dumb dictum of intelligence as a complex but coherent phenomenon.

But think, fellow theorist, that there have been many moments in intellectual history when everyone said so, and it was not so. Everyone said that the earth was the center of the universe, that the earth was flat, that you could sail from Spain directly to India, that there was phlogiston, that Newtonian physics solved the problem, and that men were better than women.

So much for truth as a democratic function.

Not long ago, I went to a bookstore and bought Howard Gardner's books. Not all of them, probably, but all I could find—about fifty pounds worth. These did not cost a dollar a pound.

I spent weeks rummaging through Gardner's books, reading everything to do with Gardner on the internet (including listening to his extensive interview on "Book Talk"), and trying to understand why I was not immediately conveyed to a state of enlightened ecstasy, as I was supposed to be.

Not that I didn't enjoy Gardner. Heavens, who wouldn't? Gardner is obviously brilliant, and his books are compelling for their wide range of ideas and references, as well as for their ostentatious flavor of revolt. We all, of course, like a good revolt. And Gardner warms to the task, prominently juxtaposing his new discoveries with the unfortunate mistakes of the past.

Reading Gardner for an evening, we don't know why we didn't see it ourselves: each individual has separate intelligent functions that operate separately, can be damaged separately, and can be at a high or low level separately. In other words, we do not have a single intelligence; we have multiple intelligences.

This, many feel, is very good news indeed, for it is a much more inclusive view of ability than our former unified-intellect view. Individuals who are by no means gifted, say, in their verbal intelligence might be highly gifted in interpersonal intelligence or in naturalistic intelligence.

Suddenly, a wide range of human characteristics can be celebrated and admired, and many students whose abilities would have been undiscovered in the past can now be

recognized and have their particular form of intelligence developed.

For many, this has meant a revolution in gifted education, and even leading theorists in gifted education have proclaimed a major theoretical change in the field and have welcomed in the new era of MI and talent development.

The Trojans, too, were pleased with that big horse.

Ambrose Bierce defined a cynic as a "blackguard whose faulty vision sees things as they are, not as they ought to be."

Everyone ought to be gifted.

But as Françoys Gagné has noted, some ninth-grade children have first-grade reading levels, while some first-grade children have ninth-grade reading levels.

And between these two children stands a contrast—one that obligates us to adjust our educational practice.

Reading Gardner's MI theory is fun, and it is encouraging, but blackguard that I am, I cannot find the sense of it. It appears to be good science, accurately identifying areas of ability and demonstrating that they can be damaged or developed independently of one another.

Good science, though, is not necessarily good English. MI theory is, at its specious heart, bad English. It is the kind of word misplacement that the modern logical positivist philosopher Wittgenstein would have plucked from the context for lucid rebuke.

Look at it this way: What if I suddenly announced the discovery that each individual has not one head but multiple heads? The previous misunderstanding that we each have one head is now superseded by the enlightened realization that each individual has an auditory head, an olfactory head, an osteological head, a visual head, a strigous head, an epidermal head, a vocalizing head, and a cogitating head. These eight heads operate through independent organs, have independent centers in the brain, can be damaged independently of one another, and can be treated or developed independently of one another.

This is all fine, but as an expression of the English language, it is a misuse of the noun *head.* It is a solecism. Yes, the functions are separate; yes, they have different names; yes, they can be damaged independently. But the noun *head* is what we call the collected organs of the bulbous fleshy complex that balances on the neck. No one would hear it for a minute if we seriously tried to announce the discovery of multiple heads.

The noun *intelligence* is what we call the collected abilities that are integrated into the mental self of an individual. A child who is discussing a geometry problem with a small group of friends is simultaneously using mathematical ability, verbal ability, spatial ability, interpersonal ability, kinetic ability, and so forth. These are not separate intelligences but are integrated into a coherent, interdependent, overlapping, mutually influencing whole. In order for the child to complete

the task, all of these abilities must be present together. Take away one, and the others cannot finish the job. Zero out any one of the individual functions, and the project stops.

The word *intelligence* is best used to refer to the mental system that integrates the various abilities. Multiple intelligences is a solecism whose vogue is waning.

MI is bad English.