

Comparison between the Educational Visions of Howard Gardner and E.D. Hirsch Jr.

EAD 800 Concepts of Educational Inquiry

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Howard Gardner believes in designing educational content or curriculum toward understanding with the end result being that students will be able to apply the knowledge learned to any new situation. He believes what should be taught are the disciplines of science, math, arts and history in order to understand and pass down cultural values of what is truthful, beautiful and good. He believes in the idea of depth over breadth of study of the disciplines, yet feels it is not necessary to study every category of each discipline, rather “students should probe with sufficient depth a *manageable set of examples* so that they come to see how one thinks and acts in the manner of a scientist, a geometer, an artist, an historian,” (The Disciplined Mind p. 118).

How one teaches this curriculum involves an “understanding approach” of the disciplines which includes: learning from “suggestive institutions” such as apprenticeship and museums; confronting and correcting misconceptions learned culturally; building a framework of assessment which includes individual performances and/or exhibitions; and allowing “multiple entry points to understanding” based on his theory of multiple intelligences.

He stresses the process of teaching should follow the format of multiple entry points to disciplinary topics including: narrative, numerical, logical, existential, aesthetic, hands-on, and interpersonal lessons. The teacher then should engage analogies and metaphors to enhance understanding of key issues. Then, finally, “converge upon multiple representations of the core idea,” (p. 209).

The success of this outcome for understanding depends upon having enthusiastic, well trained teachers, prepared and motivated students, technological tools, and a supportive community. Here lie ideas which are disputed by no educational theorist!

E.D. Hirsch Jr. on the other hand, believes we should teach “a diversity of subjects that will lead to broad general knowledge, and we should also teach in some depth a moderate number of specific examples,” (Core Knowledge: Breadth Versus Depth: A Premature Polarity, p. 2). He believes you need a foundation of broad knowledge in order to process new information, and that this mastering of broad knowledge is the “best entrée to deep knowledge,” (p. 2).

Hirsch’s Core Knowledge Foundation stresses a good general education in literature, sciences, history and the liberal arts in the K- 12 system with a “set

curriculum” for each grade level which prepares students for the next level of instruction. The core curriculum should include topics with “the greatest potential for developing general competence and narrowing the test-score gap between groups,” (p. 2). Also, what is taught is modeled after what knowledge is “characteristically shared in American society by those at the top of the socioeconomic ladder,” (p. 2). He doesn’t name specific topics, but generalizes that this “cultural literacy” is information taken for granted and therefore not formally passed on to the masses. Therefore, by teaching the same curriculum to all we make education more equitable for students from any socioeconomic background.

Gardner believes “cultural literacy lacks an epistemological home, amounting to a hodgepodge of concepts and facts waiting to be used somehow, somewhere, sometime,” (TDM p.118) and believes these facts are soon forgotten. Hirsch would argue that these ‘facts’ provide the foundation for building learning in a “coherent and cumulative way [that] enhances student achievement and narrows the test score gap,” (p. 3).

Hirsch and Gardner’s vision of education differ in other ways. First, Gardner is more interested in individual differences, stressing multiple entry points for different learners, whereas Hirsch advocates for set lesson plans for all students. In the NPR broadcast, Gardner says Hirsch’s core curriculum is only giving students one mental representation of a particular topic, whereas his method allows for many. In my opinion the greatest difference between these two educational thinkers is that Gardner’s vision is to develop minds which can think so they can apply what was learned to any new situation in our ever-changing world. Hirsch seems more concerned with American students “keeping up” with the test scores of comparable students in other developed countries in order to compete in any new world order. However, it seems to me, high test scores do not indicate a predisposition for higher thinking processes.