

I believe that the resources we used for this class, including the books, articles, unit information, hyperlinks, videos all contributed to giving me a much more wide-ranging understanding of inquiry, especially as it relates to education, and allowed me to challenge my previous thoughts, ideas, practices and understanding of education and learning. I think that as teachers teach over time they develop a sense of what works and what doesn't, and continually strive to become better teachers, but we also tend to get "stuck in our ways" a bit and continue to do things the same way because they're comfortable and "easy." I know that there are times when I do this and I think that this course helped me open up a bit and recharge my battery of ingenuity and the desire to do things differently. I wouldn't identify myself as a particularly traditional or old-school educator, but I have always thought that some of the traditional methods of teaching, like lecturing, are effective and "good" ways to teach. Maybe it's because that's how I was taught, or because of my age, but I think that many times we have moved beyond the type of teaching that can really help students in the name of using the latest methods or the newest technology. I taught elementary school for a few years in North Carolina at a low-achieving school out in the tobacco fields near Raleigh. The students at this school had not scored well on the many state and nation-wide reading and math assessments they were required to complete so the school decided to adopt the curriculum designed by Hirsch and his organization. The students I taught lacked many of the basic reading and comprehension skills necessary to do the assessments they had been given, but by using the Core Knowledge curriculum they finally began to make some progress and climb the achievement ladder. At the beginning I was not a big fan of using such a prescribed curriculum and felt that I had lost a bit of the freedom and control I had had in terms of what, and how, I taught, but after using the CK materials for a few months with my students, I quickly became a convert. It really seemed to work for them and they quickly began to close some of the big gaps in their learning. I still didn't like the fact that I didn't have the time and ability to "do my own thing" in the classroom because the CK materials took up a large portion of the day, but I wanted to put my students first and if this material got the job done then I was all for it.

When we came to the units dealing with Howard Gardner I was very intrigued. I really liked the information, ideas and methods he explored in The Disciplined Mind and I quickly came to think that his philosophy sounded spot-on and a wonderful way to approach education and teaching. I really enjoyed reading and learning about the ways students think and process information, but in an easy-to-read format that wasn't so technical or abstract that only someone with a psychology degree or background can make heads or tails of it. I remember reading the book very slowly and carefully and shaking my head in agreement very often while reading. I think his theory of multiple intelligences, for instance, is an amazing concept and idea. I had long disliked the way the CK materials, and many others of its sort, basically treat all students the same. There are things that you can do with the materials to make them more useful and appropriate to whatever kind of student(s) you're trying to reach, but to me the basic concept underlying them is that all students learn the same. Gardner makes clear his ideas about the multitude of

ways students learn and gives teachers an idea and way to identify and reach students in different ways. Any teacher who's been in the classroom knows what kind of broad spectrum of backgrounds and experiences our students have, and come from. You cannot teach them, or reach them, the same way because they are different people who learn in different ways. I think Garner's approach puts this key element of reaching and educating students at the core and builds an approach and philosophy that will make it possible to educate every student. I have long been bothered by the vast amount of students who fall through the cracks in our educational system and I think that his approach would help lessen that number and give many more students a chance of actually succeeding.

One nagging "problem" or concern did stand out while I was reading the Gardner-related material - the vast and imposing amount of time, effort and work this would take in order to do correctly. I really liked his ideas and thought they would be great to introduce, but I wasn't sure if it would work in a real classroom of thirty students where teachers already have so much to do and so many demands on their time and energy. This new information I was confronting from Garner made me very curious and inquisitive about how it could work in a typical classroom and led me to do some reflecting and journaling. I think that by using an inquiry-based approach to this problem, I can hopefully come up with some hybrid or suitable combination of methods and approaches that can work for me in my own situation. I'd really like to incorporate it into what I am already doing, but we'll see what I come up with over time. I really enjoyed being able to take something I learned in this course and think, in a concrete way, about how to apply it to my own situation. It's not only interesting from an intellectual perspective, but practical and possible in real life which really makes it stand out.