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Incorporating Multiple Intelligences into Advisement of Theatre Students

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Abstract: If, as Gardner maintains, education is the development of understanding: a way of thinking about and solving problems within the disciplines and domains being studied (Gardner, 2006), faculty advisors need to guide students into courses within their curriculum which provide access to the thinking skills necessary for success in the workplace and allow them to understand and function within the wider global community beyond their 9 to 5 jobs. The global workplace is currently undergoing a major paradigm shift into what Daniel Pink calls “The Conceptual Age,” which will require a new way of functioning on the job by incorporating the ability to understand and use design, story, synthesis, empathy, play, and meaning (Pink, 2006). The Multiple Intelligences developed by a general undergraduate theatre curriculum incorporates all of these abilities, positioning theatre majors to become potential leaders in the 21st century workplace whether they end up as theatre artists or in other professions. Our job as theatre faculty is to communicate our curricular strengths as embodied in the intelligences of our discipline not only to our students, but to the entire university in order to position ourselves in the central hub of education. We have more to offer our institutions and the wider culture, than we previously acknowledged.

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The Purpose of Education: Understanding

We are educators and that common focus brings us to this symposium. But what is the purpose of education? Is it about the accumulation of facts, the acquisition of a set of skills, or the development of understanding, a way of thinking about and solving problems within the disciplines and domains being studied?

Different approaches to education focus on one or a combination of those purposes. School systems that drill students in memorization of names, dates, theories,

literary passages, and equations of an identified core set of material value the accumulation of facts method. Proof of successful learning is evidenced by the passing of tests that elicit the one correct answer to each specific question. There are many educational systems which value this from high powered Asian schools where students study and drill daily to Mid-Eastern madrassases where students memorize religious texts to our own U.S. public schools where much instruction has become focused on teaching to standardized tests in order not to lose federal funding under the regulations required by “No Child Left Behind.”

Many classrooms in technical academies, business schools, and even artistic training programs for artists, actors, and designers focus on teaching students a process or series of processes through which they will develop skills and an approach to create a product or work of art. The basic knowledge and facts of the discipline are learned and then scaffolded with the required skills which are practiced until they become part of the student’s procedural memory. Whether an acting student is learning Stanislavsky or Viewpoints or another approach to creating and performing a role, the elaboration and internalization of the process is the focus, so that in the end the student can take the techniques and apply them to different characters in different performance situations.

Education as the development of understanding in a scholarly area asks something more of educators and students. In his book *The Unschooled Mind* (1991), Howard Gardner defines understanding as the ability to apply knowledge, concepts, and skills acquired through education to a *new* situation in which that knowledge is applied for solving a problem that has never been solved before. It requires an ability to recognize patterns, to hypothesize a new application of old knowledge and then test that hypothesis

to see if it holds up, and often to synthesize information from one discipline to another, applying it in a new context. In a sense this kind of education is the ultimate version of “If you give a man a fish, he eats for today, but if you teach him to fish, he can feed himself for a lifetime.” It is a form of education that ultimately frees the student to become an initiator, a creator, and his/her own teacher once formal schooling is done.

Once we leave school, we are no longer asked to perform tests in order to demonstrate mastery; we are given real-life projects to complete on our own or with others. Some of these projects may require knowing certain facts or following a specific process, but others may not. Those unique projects require thinking and applying information in new ways and, therefore, will be accomplished by those who have achieved a true understanding of the domain. As Gardner aptly says in *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons*, “In life, most problems are not presented ready-made to the solver but must be shaped out of events and information from the surrounding environment...we need a deeper understanding to delve into these problems” (2006, p. 210-211). If we have not achieved an understanding of our discipline, we are stuck.

Gardner suggests in his book *Five Minds for the Future* that with the globalization of the economy and the immense growth of information, technology, and science, the valued cognitive abilities will grow beyond the requirement of an educated person achieving a mastery of his or her own domain or discipline; those who lead and excel will also need to develop cognitive abilities to **synthesize** understanding from different disciplines, to **create** new knowledge and solve brand new problems and invent heretofore unknown products, to **respect** and appreciate others and their contributions, and to approach work and life responsibilities from a stance of **ethics** – keeping oneself

working within and towards recognized standards, principles and values, above and beyond personal gain, for the greater good of all humanity and the planet.

This need for understanding as a primary outcome of education has been acknowledged by others. In his book *A Whole New Mind* Daniel Pink (2006) identifies a paradigm shift in the global workplace which has already begun to impact every worker in the 21st century. He believes we are moving into what he calls “The Conceptual Age,” a time when the workplace will demand a different, more holistic set of skills from workers than were required in previous work paradigms. These skills require employees to use their knowledge and skills at a much higher level than previous paradigms – at the level of understanding. How we advise students as we guide them through their courses of study will determine whether they will be employable when they leave school, but also if they will be able to change and grow along with the world.

I want to first describe this new work paradigm so its different requirements are clear and explain how they interface with the Multiple Intelligences. Then I want to share how courses already offered in our theatre curriculum naturally embody the Multiple Intelligences. Theatre faculty as advisors can build an academic course of study for our majors that will open up opportunities for dynamic careers for our graduates, whether they end up employed within the discipline of theatre arts or in another area of endeavor. But we do not want to limit our vision to our own departments. These same courses – taken by students from other disciplines in the university – will prepare them for success in the Conceptual Age as well. We have the ability to become a general resource to the entire university community.

The New Paradigm

Humanity has experienced a number of workplace paradigm shifts in the 7 million years we have been on this planet. Early humans were hunter/gatherers focused on foraging and hunting for survival. Then 11,000 years ago – only 11,000 years ago! – our now Homo Sapien ancestors learned how to cultivate crops so they could stay in one place. In the shift to the Agricultural Age, hunter/gatherers were transformed into farmers, and later, with domestication of animals, into herders (Diamond, 1997).

150 years ago the Agricultural Age gave way to the Industrial Age. With the advent of machines, manufacturing, and the assembly line, many farmers became blue collar laborers who followed routines and took specific repetitive actions in order to move the product from one station to the next in the assembly process. Rank and file workers did not need to problem solve, as much as to follow orders and be “part of the machine.” Even management fit into the well-oiled engine of the corporation. While managers might be called upon to solve problems, they really were encouraged to think inside of the box. In the second half of the 20th century the workforce began to shift again.

To get a more specific handle on the seismic change in workforce employment, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2001) show that at the turn of the 20th century (when the paradigm shift to the Industrial Age was building steam) approximately 38 percent of the workforce was involved in farming, 38 percent was involved in mining, manufacturing, and construction, and 31 percent was involved in service. (If you add those numbers up they actually come to 107 percent, but those are the figures the U.S. Bureau of Census reports in *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, Part 1, Series D 152-66, p.138). By the end of the 20th century less than 3 percent were farmers, 19

percent were involved in manufacturing, mining, and construction, and 78 percent were involved in service and information processing (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2001, p.3).

What happened? By the 21st century the farmers are in insignificant numbers and the industrial workers have declined, too! What happened was the fourth paradigm shift – to the Information Age. As computers and technology exponentially advanced in the second half of the 20th century, workers left the factories, moved into the office place and the service sector, and became “knowledge workers” who spent their time entering and manipulating data. Information Age jobs asked workers to acquire facts and apply them theoretically and analytically. This definitely called upon understanding knowledge in a different manner than workers laboring in factories; it required left-brained manipulation of knowledge and technical savvy. However, many knowledge workers were employed in the storing and transfer of old information rather than the creation of new.

The instant availability to information has changed the way we all function. In the last ten years we have become so accustomed to clicking on the internet to bring up facts, statistics, news, gossip, whatever information we need in order to do our work or entertain ourselves, that it is hard to remember the long hours we spent researching for those items in the library years ago.

Now just as we’ve accustomed ourselves to the speed and glut of the Information Age, Daniel Pink says another change is coming. With the growth of technology, the automation of so much information and operations (done much faster and more cheaply by computers) and the ability to move many knowledge operations overseas to less expensive, but more plentiful knowledge workers in Asia, workers who access, enter, and manipulate knowledge are less and less necessary here in America. Pink says that high-

tech, left brained abilities are still needed, but they are no longer enough; workers in the Conceptual Age must be able to master six aptitudes to make them competitive:

Conceptual Age workers must be able to **Design**. They must be able to communicate through **Story**. They must be able to see and work with the whole picture, not just the parts – in other words be able to **Synthesize** (Pink calls this “Symphony” as he likes the image of many parts playing harmoniously as one). They must be able to forge relationships through **Empathy**. They must learn how to **Play** in order to access their creativity. And they must be able through all of these skills to pursue **Meaning**.

Obviously, the skill set required of workers in the 21st century will be different across the board. These are much more complex skills and I believe they require what Gardner would identify as an Education focused on Understanding. Interestingly enough, they are all aptitudes that we incorporate into our theatre curricula.

How Multiple Intelligences Fit the Conceptual Age.

Before moving on to identify how to use MI Theory to inform advisement in this new Conceptual Age, I want to spend a few minutes making more connections between Pink’s six required aptitudes and how they dovetail with Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences. To make sure we are clearly defining terms, I want to go back to Gardner’s definitions. An intelligence is “a capacity to process a certain kind of information that originates in human biology and human psychology,” which leads naturally to the solving of certain kinds of problems that are valued by society or the making certain kinds of products used by society (p.6). Each intelligence relates to a specific domain of knowledge – which we could also call a discipline or a craft – and is processed in certain pathways in the brain (p. 31). All intelligences can be symbolized in some way and have

a unique developmental profile. **Verbal-Linguistic Intelligence** deals in working with words and language; **Logical-Mathematical Intelligence** deals in working with numbers, sequences, and logic; **Visual-Spatial Intelligence** deals in working with images and dimensions; **Bodily Kinesthetic Intelligence** deals in the use of the body in practical and artistic ways; **Musical Intelligence** deals in working with music, sound, tempo, rhythm, and silence; **Interpersonal Intelligence** deals in understanding and working with other people; **Intrapersonal Intelligence** deals with understanding and managing oneself; **Naturalist Intelligence** deals with the patterns and the cycles of nature or biology; and **Existential Intelligence** deals with ultimate meanings, of finding our place in the universe.

Three of Pink's aptitudes directly require the application of a team of intelligences: **Design** requires understanding of Visual-Spatial and Logical-Mathematical, as well as Naturalistic Intelligence, particularly in regard to our current need for green solutions, taking the survival of our natural world into the solution of our design problems. **Story** relates directly to Verbal-Linguistic as well as to Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Intelligences, since stories communicate complex human behavior through narrative. **Empathy**, connecting to and understanding what others are thinking and feeling, requires both Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Intelligences. Empathy can only happen when we experience within ourselves the emotion, situation, idea, or attitude of another, and in that moment put ourselves generously and non-judgmentally into someone else's shoes to imagine what their experience is like.

Symphony/Synthesis requires students to begin thinking interdisciplinarily, making connections between the patterns, knowledge, and skills that derive from a

variety of domains and learning how to incorporate more than one intelligence into the development of a product. This is an aptitude that can be intrinsically found in all of the arts, but particularly in the dramatic arts where we incorporate many elements and ideas seamlessly into a harmonious whole. Theatre itself is a synthesis – of acting, design, music, dance, and poetry. The perfect example of a theatre artist who used symphony or synthesis in his approach to his craft is Shakespeare. Shakespeare's plays call upon a rich use of Verbal-Linguistic Intelligence in order to create dialogue and story, and his expert employment of rhythm and iambic pentameter in that dialogue (plus his inclusion in some plays of song) makes full use of Musical Intelligence. His deep understanding of human behavior, demonstrated through the plays' plots and the characters' actions, present a skillful understanding of Inter- and Intra-personal Intelligences. Naturalist Intelligence is pulled into the mix through his frequent use of symbols from nature to express and represent the human actions in his plays. Deep themes and meanings, expressed in all of his plays explored and analyzed for centuries by artists, critics and scholars, testify to his employment of Existential Intelligence.

Daniel Pink talks about the aptitude to **Play** as another important skill for successful workers in the Conceptual Age. Play involves an approach to learning that brings into the mix safety, structure, experimentation, joy, creativity, imagination, humor, stress-release, distance, and multiple perspective-taking and through which relationships and trust can be built with other workers. Play allows everyone to be on the same team and join together in a positive creative process. All of the intelligences can be played with – and are played with joyfully by those who have had crystallizing or positive experiences with them. Most of us chose a career in theatre because of our love for Play,

plays, and playing. Our jobs provide us with not only permission to play and imagine, but demand it!

Meaning, of course, is over-arching. We are all – as conscious, meaning-making creatures – existentially on a journey to discover the meaning of life and to make a meaningful life. As theatre artists, we have taken on that task as part of our artistic purpose. To make meaning requires synthesis of all the intelligences in the service of Existential Intelligence.

As I read Daniel Pink’s book *A Whole New Mind* I recognized myself and my theatre training. Each course I had as a theatre student worked at a symphonic level to teach me about design, story, empathy, symphony, play, and meaning. I realized that not only was I cross-trained for life *and* art, but that I was passing the same kind of aptitudes on to the students in my classes that I am teaching now whether they are majoring in theatre, psychology, social work, business, or agriculture!

School as Preparation for a Career and for Life

When high school students and their families set out to choose a college and curriculum of study, most are focused on choosing a course of study that will get them a degree that will lead to a secure, well-paying job, and ultimately, a career. We have all encountered students who love the arts and wish they could major in them, but are told bluntly by their parents that if they major in theatre or music, they are on their own. On the other hand, say the parents, if the student will choose a more “realistic” major, the parents will willingly underwrite a Bachelors of Science in education, business administration, chemical engineering, or pre-medical studies.

Over the course of the last 20 years, with more emphasis on running higher education on a business model, students are more and more seen in the role of consumer rather than scholar. The luster of an education focused on the development of understanding the world has dimmed in the eyes of our potential consumers and their parents. They see themselves as paying for a product; that product being a degree that will guarantee them a job – one that pays very well. Academic programs, feeling the pressure of this business model, have begun focusing their curricula more narrowly on developing a limited set of skills that will prepare students rigidly for a small, specialized field so that graduates can step directly from the classroom into the office.

I have experienced this shift just in the nine years I have taught at Kansas State University. When I first started teaching, my creative drama and drama therapy with special population classes consisted of one half to two thirds education majors. They had an open slate of electives from other disciplines outside the College of Education that they could pick from in order to learn hands-on skills for motivating children to learn. They chose courses in music, art, drama, sociology, psychology, and other areas that related to their natural abilities, interests, and crystallized intelligences which could enrich their future teaching in a wider sense. Within three years all the education students in my classes disappeared. The state of Kansas mandated a change in the education curriculum, replacing electives from other disciplines with more required education courses that focused on regulations and standards to help future teachers attain achievement levels on testing mandated by the state and No Child Left Behind. Instead of gathering new skills and materials to bring into their classrooms for enriching and

inspiring their students, education majors' vision and skills as educators has been restricted.

If students are being steered away from Gardner's vision of Education that values deep understanding toward the more practical goal of finding of a job by parents, state boards, and university administration's new business model, does this mean we, as educators, should be advising students away from courses in the arts? Away from exercising many of their intelligences that may or may not be obviously involved in what will become their day-to-day job description? Not if Daniel Pink is right about the paradigm shift to the Conceptual Age! The Conceptual Age requires the development and interaction of all of the intelligences for not only employment, but for sustained success and mastery in the job place. Theatre departments are actually on the cutting-edge of the new paradigm.

A fully rounded, grounded curriculum in theater that includes acting, dramatic literature, design, tech, directing, playwriting, theatre management, and criticism already entails training all of the intelligences and can incorporate ways of connecting many different disciplines and domains through creative understanding. Acting courses address bodily-kinesthetic, verbal-linguistic, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences. Set, costume, and lighting design as well as technical theatre courses mine logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, naturalist, and bodily kinesthetic intelligences. Management requires logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, and interpersonal intelligences. Playwriting, dramatic literature and criticism develop verbal-linguistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, existential, and even the sequential, logical aspects of logical-mathematical intelligences. Dance/movement classes develop bodily-kinesthetic,

visual-spatial, and musical intelligences. Directing courses, which teach how to put it all together, perhaps call upon the widest variety of intelligences as students learn to form an overall artistic vision for a production and communicate it with all the other artists in the theatre.

Hamlet tells us, the central purpose of theatre is “to hold, as ‘twere, the mirror up to nature,” making theatre a mirror for all of life (Hamlet, III, ii, 24-25). Drama can be said to be the study of human behavior embodied and reproduced for an audience to reflect on – which means that all the skills in all the domains required in life must be learned by the theatre student for that mirroring to be valid and true. Besides tapping into multiple intelligences, what does a theatrical production do, but provide us, the audience, with all of the Conceptual Age’s required elements: Design, Story, Symphony, Empathy, Play, and Meaning! These intelligences and elements which our students are learning to use skillfully in order to be able to function in this “mirror world” of theatre can be synthesized and transferred directly to the “real world” outside the theatre’s walls. Beyond their theatre coursework, young theatre artists must be cross-trained outside their department in all the domains – humanities, social sciences, biological sciences, philosophy, ethics, and so on – so they can bring that knowledge back to the stage with understanding. In our approach to teaching within our departments we would do well to also teach our students how to weave what appear at first to them to be independent disciplines together symphonically (in a synthesis), so they can make these connections across the entire academic curriculum.

But beyond advising our own students to develop their intelligences in as many domains and disciplines as possible, we, as faculty of the university, need to be

proactively reaching out to faculty advisors of the rest of the student body to communicate with them about how the aptitudes of the Conceptual Age can be accessed so directly through our discipline. The case has not yet been made to the university at large and needs to be. Theatre departments offer invaluable resources to the entire student body. If students majoring in math, science, psychology, sociology, education, business, agriculture, and architecture were advised into a variety of theatre courses, they could develop a deeper understanding of design, story, symphony, empathy, play, and meaning and find new ways of accessing their intelligences.

I am starting to make this case on my campus. While I have lost the education majors who used to take my courses, I have actively connected with advisors from many different departments to explain the intelligences and aptitudes my courses can offer their students – and they have responded positively! My Creative Drama class which includes units on play and improvisation, storytelling, story drama, and puppetry, has been approved as a professional elective for Speech Language Pathology students who need (among other skills) to learn how to engage their clients through play, for Graduate Accounting majors who need to be able to work with others creatively, think outside of the box, and tell stories effectively in order to sell their ideas, and for Leadership Studies Minors who need learn how to lead and participate creatively and positively in groups. It has also been approved for University General Education because it offers a structure for active learning, self-reflection, and interdisciplinary thought.

My Drama Therapy with Special Populations class, which brings in people with disabilities from the community once a week to participate in drama activities with K-State students, has become one of the most popular fine arts electives for pre-medical

profession majors (This includes students who wish to be doctors, dentists, nurses, speech pathologists, nutritionists, physical therapists, and occupational therapists) because in addition to learning how to effectively, actively communicate understanding of important concepts through action to future clients who will need to know how to follow healthcare instructions, they learn empathy for others who are not like them, who are often stigmatized and dismissed from society, and they learn how to break down the barriers of communication through dramatic, playful means.

The psychology, family studies, and social work professors have realized how drama provides valuable skills their students need, but which they do not teach. They regularly send their students to our department to take creative drama, acting, improvisation, drama therapy with special populations, and other courses. I currently have two students in educational psychology who have opted to take graduate drama therapy courses as an integrated part of their doctoral program.

The word has gotten out to the professional world. I have been told that K-State Business School graduates who can say they have taken Creative Drama often get preference in hiring at certain Kansas City business firms who have been impressed with the flexibility and creativity of previous hires who were creative drama alums. I have also heard that a nursing school in Kansas City looks for applicants who have taken Drama Therapy with Special Populations at K-State.

I have even brought drama to the K-State Office of Evaluation. The Evaluators are researchers who handle the statistics and evaluation component of research projects run by professors in different departments across the university. Typically they have the logical-mathematical know-how while the professors they work with have the naturalist

know-how. As in any working team, interpersonal miscommunications can happen on many levels, but none of the team members knew how to evaluate the social situation and develop more effective approaches. The Evaluators got so excited about learning how to deal with social issues through drama that they created a role-play presentation for their national conference last November to teach *other* evaluators a dramatic new way to access communication problems on teams. These statisticians have expanded their intelligences through drama, added to their employment skills, and bravely joined the Conceptual Age!

Our American culture has long been suspicious of the arts and our fine arts programs at the university level often languish from lack of funds, interest, and support. Instead of being on the “outs” of academia, our theatre programs have the opportunity to be in the center of education, to be providing the very educational components that are necessary for not only survival, but success in the 21st century. We as theatre educators need to use our highly developed multiple intelligences, as well as our aptitudes for story, empathy, play, design, symphony, and meaning to communicate our value to the new Conceptual Age both on campus and off.

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