Julie Steward/EDIT 704/Spring 2011

**Howard Gardner (1943-?) –** Currently theHobbs Professor of Cognition and Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education, adjunct professor of psychology at Harvard University and senior director of Harvard Project Zero.

He was born in 1943 in Scranton, PA to middle-class Jewish parents who providentially left Germany in 1938, thereby escaping the Holocaust. Although his parents were not college educated, as it may be assumed, and his family had few books at home, he regarded his extended family the greatest influence on his growth. He considered going to Notre Dame or Georgia Tech for their football teams and fight songs, but after reading about Harvard on the back of an issue of *Classic Comics*, he applied and was accepted there. Once at Harvard, he found as his mentors Eric Erikson and Jerome Bruner, which encouraged him to intellectual curiosity. His dissertation was on artistic sensitivity in children, which caused him to become “an outsider in his chosen discipline” (Berube, 2000, p.74). After passing his written doctoral exams, he nearly flunked his orals because one of his examining professors did not consider “the topic of artistic development” a psychological “field”. His interest in multiple intelligences was informed by twenty years of study of once-normal or gifted individuals who have some sort of traumatic brain damage (his morning study) and the research on cognitive development of children in the afternoons. The original book published in 1983, *Frames of Mind*, was funded by a grant from the Bernard van Leer Foundation to study how human potential could best be realized. The book was not intended as an educational tome, but was written from the perspective of a cognitive and neuropsychologist.

**Overview of Theory**: There is no single intelligence, or “g” as it is known (general intelligence), but rather, there are multiple intelligences that vary in degree and in their development. A single IQ test that measures for general intelligence disregards other intelligences that are not testable by a pen-and-paper test. Assuming that there are multiple intelligences, or multiple ways of thinking, we can also realize that there are multiple ways of learning. Gardner initially suggested seven types of intelligence (which he calls “useful fictions”), basing his choice on “an identifiable core operation or set of operation” and those also those capacities that are “susceptible to encoding in a symbol system---a culturally contrived system of meaning that captures and conveys important forms of information” (Gardner, 2006, pp.7-8). At this point, the list of intelligences is up to “8.5”. They are: Linguistic, Musical, Logical-Mathematical, Spatial, Bodily-Kinesthetic, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, Naturalistic, and Existential (the last one of which he is half-hearted in his recommendation).

**Similar or Related Theories**: Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky and Chomsky.

**Contribution to the Field of Learning Theory**: “With this brief aside to the perpetually perplexed, I shall turn first to a component of special import in this book---the particular *intelligences used in an educational encounter*. Even this component turns out to be multifaceted: for example, the abilities entailed in an intelligence can be can be used as a *means of acquiring information*. Thus, individuals may learn through the exploitation of linguistic codes, of kinesthetic or spatial demonstrations, or of interpersonal bonds. Even as various intelligences can be exploited as means of transmission, the actual *material to be mastered* may itself fall squarely within the domain of a particular intelligence. If someone learns to play an instrument, the knowledge to be acquired is musical. If someone learns to calculate, the knowledge to be gained is logical-mathematical (even if the means is logical in nature). And so it turns out that our various intellectual competencies can serve both as means and as message, as form and as content” explains Gardner. (1983/2011, p. 350). Initially suggesting the variety of intelligences as: Musical, Bodily-Kinesthetic, Logical-Mathematical, Spatial, Interpersonal and Intrapersonal, Gardner later suggested two additional intelligences: Naturalist and Spiritual (or as he would rather call it, Existential – “the intelligence of big questions”). Although an unproven theory, new brain research and tools to study neuroscience tend to affirm it.

**Interesting Facts about Howard Gardner**: His older brother died in a freak sledding accident when his mother was pregnant with him; like Dewey and Van Gogh, Gardner became somewhat of a “replacement” child. On his honeymoon he attended a lecture of Piaget in London because he wanted the master of his chosen field to “Bless our union” (Berube, 2000, p. 73).

**Points Regarding Teaching/Learning of Adults and the Design of Instruction for Adults**:

1. If there are multiple intelligences, (not just verbal and logical/mathematical as most IQ tests test for), there are also multiple aptitudes.

2. Learning can be accessed by multiple “Entry Points” – different means to understand and handle the material.

3. An educator should “Individualize and Pluralize” - Know as much as possible about the learner, and present the topic in a variety of ways.

4. Intelligences are not set in stone, but are strengthened or lessened by the available resources and even the person’s perception of his or her own potential, making the expectations of the teacher important to the success of the learner.

**References:**

Berube, M. (2000). *Eminent educators: Studies in intellectual influence.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press*.*

Gardner, H. (2011a). *Frames of mind*. New York: Basic Books. (Original work published 1983).

Garner, H. (2011b). *The unschooled mind: How children think and how schools should teach.* New York: Basic Books.

Gardner, H. (2006). *Multiple Intelligences: New horizons*. New York: Basic Books.

Schaler, J. (Ed.). (2006). *Howard Gardner under fire: The rebel psychologist faces his critics*. Chicago, IL: Open Court.