

Unit 3: Writing Assignment

Howard Gardner's *The Disciplined Mind* offers several key themes including motivation, student inquiry, and appreciation of cultural perspectives. First, Gardner discusses the equal importance of motivation as cognition. In chapter 4 of *The Disciplined Mind* he states, "If one is motivated to learn, one is likely to work hard, to be persistent, to be stimulated rather than discouraged by obstacles, and to continue to learn even when not pressed to do so, for the sheer pleasure of quenching curiosity or stretching one's faculties in unfamiliar directions" (p.76). As he discusses motivation here, spellers from the movie *Spellbound* easily illustrate this idea. When introduced to Emily, for example, she explains that she does not want to disappoint other people in the spelling bee and that it is because of her competitive side that she wants to show off. It is clear by listening to Emily, that she has the kind of motivation Gardner discusses in order to learn and work hard enough to succeed. She is therefore persistent and seems to get extreme pleasure out of succeeding in this competitive activity. Gardner continues his discussion on motivation when stating, "...researchers now believe that learners are best served when their motivation is intrinsic: when they pursue learning because it is fun or rewarding in itself, rather than because someone has promised them some material benefit" (p.76). Again, one can turn to the spellers in *Spellbound* to illustrate this point. Although there was a money prize for winning the spelling competition, all eight students seemed to have this intrinsic motivation, where they were pursuing learning of spelling because it was fun and rewarding for them. Gardner even references Darwin when explaining virtues of intrinsic motivation, "It may be more beneficial that a child should follow energetically some pursuit...and thus acquire perseverance..." (p.76). Neil's family, his father in particular, seems to exemplify this idea of acquiring perseverance and striving for something that is difficult in order to feel successful and happy. Finally, Gardner states, "...that any portrait of human nature that ignores motivation and emotion proves of limited use in facilitating human learning and pedagogy" (p.77). All of the spellers in *Spellbound* developed this passion and motivation and one cannot fail to recognize this.

Gardner also discusses the importance for students to inquire themselves when stating, "I want all students to develop a sense of high standards; I want all students to strive for accuracy and to use evidence properly; I want all students to respect a range of groups and cultures, but not to do so uncritically" (p.58). One piece of this idea can be illustrated through the spellers of *Spellbound* that is, developing a sense of high standards and striving for accuracy. Neil is a particularly strong example of this type of precise inquiry and aim for accuracy as his family has created specific strategies and techniques to aid in his goals. They hired various language tutors to assist in developing these high standards and have a systematic use of strategies as they practice words. However, Gardner wants students to be skeptical, critical, and use evidence properly. The act of the spelling bee itself does not align with this idea of inquiry.

Finally, Gardner discusses the urgency to "...appreciate another culture's perspective and, perhaps, in making one's own perspective clearer to others" (p.101). He continues, "Such efforts are essential, particularly if one wants to develop a sense of truth, beauty, and goodness that is not hopelessly parochial" (p.101). When viewing *Spellbound* one can find all of the spellers illustrating this point. For example, Nupur is from India where a high value is placed on educational success and perfection. Her teacher made a point to say that it is important to understand that culture in order to better their educations. It is also important for all to understand other perspectives, even the perspective of spelling bee supporters, in order to help us explain learning and experiences.