

RUNNING HEAD: Book Review

Book Review: Five Minds for the Future

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Our rapidly globalizing world and increasing reliance on information technology alongside an emerging knowledge-based economy pose intriguing challenges for practitioners of nearly every profession. Howard Gardner posits that our ability to remain relevant and competitive requires developing new ways of learning and thinking, and he examines these new ways against the backdrop of our fast-approaching future in his book *Five Minds for the Future*.

Of the five minds Gardner proposes, the first three, the disciplined mind, the synthesizing mind, and the creating mind, are more cognitive in nature. The last two, the respectful mind and the ethical mind, are more relational in nature. Although Gardner asserts that these minds take immersion in one's chosen field in order to fully develop, he also maintains we should be cultivating these minds in today's children in addition to encouraging them in the workforce in order to nurture and support their development.

The disciplined mind is concerned with mastery of a scholarly or professional discipline, such as art, history, economics, law, medicine, architecture, and a host of others. Gardner acknowledges that mastery should be constantly honed through lifelong learning and application, but balanced with cultivating outside interests to avoid obsession with one's craft. The synthesizing mind pertains to "[t]he ability to knit together information from disparate sources into a coherent whole" (p. 46). Gardner discriminates between simply acknowledging multiple perspectives on an issue and fully incorporating them into one's personal and professional repertoire. The creative mind poses new questions and solutions within one's domain(s) of expertise, and develops new products, practices, or projects that transform that domain. The respectful mind

appreciates differences among people and groups, seeking to work effectively with all. The ethical mind is principled and encompasses “a conviction that one’s community should possess certain characteristics of which one is proud and a commitment personally to work toward the realization of the virtuous community” (p. 129).

The implications for the workplace as well as parenthood, leadership, and education are many. For parents and schools, greater attention to children’s ways of relating to people and information as well as nurturing their literacy and their affinity for specific fields is warranted. Additionally, greater emphasis must be placed on critical thinking, questioning, collaboration, and problem-solving, and less on cookie-cutter, Scantron approaches to education and inquiry. In the workplace and academe, what is called for is greater freedom to engage in innovation, prototyping, risk-taking, teamwork, and reflection without fear of reprisal. One example he mentions is Google’s policy of allowing employees one day per week to work on projects that are not directly attached to revenue.

By his own admission, Gardner states his proposals are “ambitious, even grandiose” (p. 153). Unfortunately and ironically, the very nature of his explanation in some of the chapters, at times both pedantic and abstruse, makes practical application of *Five Minds* seem at the very least contrived and at worst unattainable or elitist. Additionally, Gardner seems to assert that, while all five minds are present in their latent form at a very early age, mastery of one’s discipline - the disciplined mind, is the pivot point around which some of the other minds continue to evolve from their nascent forms to their mature form. For instance, he claims that to develop the creative mind, one must, in part, have already mastered a discipline and be recognized in his/her field. In another

section of the book, however, he proposes an order of development, beginning with respect.

While *Five Minds for the Future* offers a contribution to the conversation of how best to position individuals, schools, and enterprise for the future, it may be better suited as a small treatise comprised of the first and last chapters. In its current format, it is an oft inaccessible, disappointing, and confusing entry in the forward-looking literature.

References

Gardner, J. (2007). *Five minds for the future*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing.