

Multiple intelligences, national music standards and professional beliefs

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I've been examining how Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory has been applied in education. In the course of looking for answers I was struck by an issue more profound: instead of concerning ourselves with creating lesson plans that comply with an accurate interpretation of Gardner's theory, we might do better to concern ourselves with strengthening our existing music programs by examining the purpose of music education within the broader framework of education. We should be aware that by ignoring the larger context of education we behave exactly as we accuse general educators of behaving when they ignore the purpose of the arts. Consequently, through a more purposeful and reflective lens we will be better equipped to answer demands that are made on us by the public and administrators to include MI activities in our music program.

Something even more fundamentally professional is at question: The issue resides with the teacher worrying (mistakenly) about what students know or don't know in respect to what the teacher has "transmitted." This speaks to the heart of one of the MayDay tenets: We tend to ignore and dismiss what students bring to the learning table. Instead of concentrating on specific skills and/or content and transmitting through the discrete intelligences what students can or can't know, perhaps it is the process of learning and understanding that should drive the teaching/learning construct. For me, this is what the National Music Standards discount.

I would not hope to link the specific Standards to the MI theory. For me, that kind of specific linking takes the focus away from the deeper meanings constituent to the learning process and the place of music education within Education (with a Capital E). When we focus on solutions or activities that answer the question, "Are you teaching to the Standards," and even worse, "Are you teaching the standards,"—thus linking everything we do in the classroom to the Standards—we abdicate responsibility for engaging in reflective practice and consideration for what our students bring to the classroom as well as what we as teachers and—more importantly—learners also bring.

One of the points Michael Apple makes is that the need for using “systems language” might be a need for prestige (Ideology and Curriculum, 1979/1990, p116). I would like to posit that the music standards are a manifestation of that need to incorporate the systems language of Education as our own lingo. They are not, however, the only solution for the way in which we examine and place ourselves within the broader purpose of education. Again, Apple, “It may very well be the case that the often unequal and problematic activities and consequences of schooling will not be fundamentally altered until we cease searching for simple solutions to our problems (p. 108).