

A whole new mind

Profession, Teacher



A Whole New Mind Almarene Lowndes EDL 546 — Summer 2012 May 31, 2012 A whole new mind is a must read for ALL teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders. This book has inspired me to seriously think about my own teaching practices as I strive to prepare my students and I for professional success. After reflecting on the concepts in Daniel Pinks' book I have asked myself if my school District and I are effectively preparing my students for the future? With budget cuts, high stakes testing, and pressure to raise student test scores have we failed to foster activities that enable students to utilize their brains right hemisphere ultimately, leaving them unequipped for our future? We have reduced the amount of time elementary students spend in Art, Music, and PE. In my own Kindergarten classroom I often struggle with allowing my students to build their creativity because of the pressure of time constraints and adhering to learning schedules/pacing guides. In the introduction, Pink gives background knowledge on the functions of the left and right hemispheres of the brain and clears up misconceptions that many people hold. Pink tells us that the left and right hemispheres of the brain work together. However, the left hemisphere is sequential which gives it the capability to analyze details and the right hemisphere is simultaneous which aids in synthesizing the bigger picture. This information can easily be related to teaching. When teaching my kindergarten students concepts of print, phonemic awareness, and phonics I am tapping into my students left hemisphere. For example, teaching my kindergarteners that we read from left to right, learning the alphabet, and decoding are activities that utilize their left hemisphere. The use of lower to higher level questioning requires students to utilize their left and right

hemisphere as well. For example, after reading a story to my class, we discuss and answer questions about the texts we have read. When I ask my students to recall information from a story the left hemisphere is more active. However, when I ask my students higher-level questions that require them to think beyond the story their brains are eliciting help from the right hemisphere. Examples, of these types of questions are: how do you think the character feels, what is the most important part of the story, and what personal connections can you make to the story? Even things such as speech, fluency, and cadence of a story require students to utilize their brains right hemisphere. In a cleverly titled section called: Fear and Loathing in My Amygdala's Pink describes, " the two almond-shaped structures that serve as the brain's Homeland Security. " They are called amygdala's. The function of these structures is to process emotions particularly fear. He explained that the left hemisphere is more active in processing this information. I found it interesting when he stated that the right amygdala is stimulated when processing faces. It is able to analyze the parts of a face as a whole to come to a conclusion about how one feels. Pink mentioned that this idea transcends to any culture. As an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) certified teacher, I most often receive students who do not speak the English language. One strategy that I use is facial expressions to convey meaning which I now know requires support from our brains right hemisphere. According to Pink our culture has always held L-Directed Thinkers such as lawyers and engineers in high esteem. He points out that now value is being placed on the R-Directed Thinkers such as artist, counselors, and inventors. While I would argue, that both types are thinkers

are needed. In my own classroom I would like to make a conscious effort to foster both types of thinkers so that my students can successfully integrate both ways of thinking into their lives. According to Pink teachers live R-Directed lives. However, in my organization I feel our way of thinking is not supported in the way that the school system is currently structured. There are some key points that I feel our school system should adopt. Furthermore, these same themes can be used in my own classroom to produce learners who are L and R-Directed Thinkers. The themes that resonate with me the most are: Symphony, Empathy, Play, and Meaning. "Symphony... is the ability to put together the pieces. It is the capacity to synthesize rather than to analyze; to see relationships between seemingly unrelated fields; to detect broad patterns rather than to deliver specific answers; and to invent something new by combining elements nobody else thought to pair." Empathy is defined as putting yourself in someone else's shoes. Play is the idea that work is not just about being serious it is about play as well. Meaning focuses on seeking purpose and the greater good. I would like to think of myself as a sympathetic teacher like Mr. Bomeisler. I am very encouraging as I touch every child while I am working. In my own classroom I strive to help my students reach the highest level of learning, which is synthesizing. Conversely, I have fallen short because while I help my students see relationships between related fields, I need to strive to help them see the relationships between unrelated fields. In many ways I have missed those opportunities to help my students develop their powers of Symphony through simple tasks like drawing, listening to classical music, and celebrating amateurism. I feel that many K-12 teachers struggle with

this in their teaching. An example of this is in team teaching. In team teaching a group of teachers, working together, plan, conduct, and evaluate the learning activities for the same group of students. In practice, team teaching has many different formats but in general it is a means of organizing staff into groups to enhance teaching. Teams generally comprise staff members who may represent different areas of subject expertise but who share the same group of students and a common planning period to prepare for the teaching. To facilitate this process a common teaching space is desirable. Team teachers and teachers alike must begin to see the connections between subject areas themselves in order to help students to achieve this. Most often you will hear someone who teaches Science say, " I do not teach Reading. " This as you may of guessed is untrue since teaching Science is teaching the components of nonfiction text. I also feel, that most schools don't allow teachers the opportunities to plan together and discuss the relationships between their fields. Many administrators are not empathetic to the idea that if we really want students to be successful they must allow us the time to engage in conversations and planning with each other. Most often team teachers as is the case at my school do not even have the same planning time. We can improve this at my school by allowing time for us to plan together not only as teammates but as grade levels. In our mailroom it would be cool if we had an inspiration board. This simple idea will help us to expand our minds. Lastly, I suggest that we read and discuss books as grade levels such as: Dialogue, Metaphors We Live By, and No Waste. We always are given professional development books to read when we are given the time to get together. How powerful would it be for the

R-Direct Thinkers in my organizations if we were allowed the opportunity to read and discuss these books? You would think that in my organization everyone is empathetic and in turn teaches students to empathize with one another. I am very empathetic and must say that I do wonderful job of guiding my students as they develop relationships with one another. I model this as I develop relationships with not only my students but my parents as well. On the other hand it saddens me to say that every teacher is not empathetic. My mom always told me that, " students don't learn until they learn that you care. " When you build valuable relationships with students and parents it increases students achievement. In my school environment I feel that we should start with being empathetic with each other. Very few principles show empathy for their employees, which make it hard to foster caring relationships with colleagues at work. Recently, school climates have shifted from working together to competing against each other. As odd as it may sound I would argue that many teachers do not even trust each other. For example, First grade teachers do not trust that Kindergarten teachers have effectively taught their students. Second grade teachers do not trust that First grade teachers have done their jobs. This trend goes from grade to grade. As a result, teachers spend valuable instructional time re teaching information to students. Instructional time should be fun to students. At times I often forget this simple concept. As a teacher I have found it my personal goal to find creative ways to put the fun back into teaching and learning. On my quest to fulfill this goal there are several suggestions from Pink that I will use to do this. One thing that my group members at JU and I are studying is how can we use gaming to increase students' achievement?

According to Pink, gaming plays a significant role in learning. James Paul Gee argues that games can be the ultimate learning machine. I might also add that games are fun and engaging for students. Next year, I plan to bring my Wii to school and allow students to play games such as Reading Rabbit and Sesame Street in my classroom. Another way that my organization and I can foster the idea of play is being humorous with our students and us. The pressures of high stakes testing, time management, and top bottom pressure exerted on teachers have caused us to become less and less humorous and joyful. There are things that we can do to bring humor and joy into teaching. Some immediate ideas that come to mind are simply playing with our students. It is so fun to play on the playground with my students. Not only does this bring me joy but also it brings my students an equal amount of joy and humor in watching me do things that are out of the box for adults. Not only should we play with kids but we should also play with each other. I remember one year some colleagues and I decided to form a kickball team to play on this kickball league one of us had heard about. Not only did allow me to forget about the pressures of teaching it allowed us to empathize with each other through the simple act of playing. Which in turn made us more pleasant at work. Another idea that the educational organization should adopt is getting our " game on. " Not only should we utilize gaming in the classroom we should participate in gaming ourselves. Lastly, I feel that administrators and facilitators should start meetings by dissecting jokes. This is something that I can immediately implement when I facilitate myself. I can also do this with my kindergarteners by using simple jokes starting with knock-knock jokes. Developing happiness through play

can add meaning to not only learning but our jobs as well. It is said, that we "are born for meaning" and live for self-expression and an opportunity to share that which we feel is important. I believe that at some point in time every teacher is passionate about his or her job and are often looking for the opportunity to share his or her expertise. Somehow this passion fades as we stop looking inside ourselves to make meaning out of our jobs. Something that my grade level has done to build meaning is utilizing teardrops. Every teacher on my grade level purchased a small pail to place teardrops in. Each of us was given paper made teardrops that we use to show our gratitude for things that we have done, or modeled, or shared with one another. For example, I was once given a teardrop for staying late to help the people who were new to my grade level fill out student snapshots after I was already done. I gave a tear to another teacher for allowing me the gift of observing her teach a lesson to her students on connections. In my opinion this simple act can add a sense of purpose to our job. This can be implemented on all grade levels and adapted to our students. Pink states that Right-Brainers will rule the future. As teachers we can equip our students for this new era. Administrators can help R-Directed thinkers such as ourselves by creating an environment that is conducive to the way that we think. By implementing simple strategies suggested in A Whole New Mind we can once again find joy in teaching as we strive to increase student achievement. There are many pearls that I have taken from this book. One of the pearls I have taken from this book is that the simple act of empathizing can help to increase student achievement. Another is the idea that play is essential to my classroom and environment as it brings happiness and joy. Also, it is important to look at

things from the bigger picture and lastly, seeking purpose and the greater good seems to define us uniquely as humans. Reference: Pink, D. (2005). A Whole New Mind. New York: The Penguin Group.