

## Intervista ad Howard Gardner

a cura di Marco Piccinno<sup>1</sup>,

<sup>1</sup>*Associato di Didattica e Pedagogia Speciale – Unisalento*

---

Prof. Howard Gardner needs no introduction. He is a professor of cognitive and educational sciences and psychology at Harvard University and is known, not only in the scientific arena, for his theory of multiple intelligences. In this interview, he delves into the construct related to the "disciplinary mind," emphasizing how it is not traceable to a form of intelligence, but rather consists of a resource of a "mental" nature. In this respect, the interview provided an opportunity to focus, precisely, on the difference between mind and intelligence, as well as to note translation problems that, instead, use the former term to refer to the latter .

Il prof. Howard Gardner non ha bisogno di presentazioni. E' docente di Scienze cognitive e dell'educazione e di Psicologia all'Università di Harvard ed è conosciuto, non soltanto in ambito scientifico, per la sua teoria delle intelligenze multiple. In questa intervista, egli approfondisce il costrutto relativo alla "mente disciplinare", sottolineando come essa non sia riconducibile ad una forma di intelligenza, ma consista piuttosto in una risorsa di natura "mentale". Sotto tale profilo, l'intervista ha rappresentato l'occasione per focalizzare, appunto, la differenza che intercorre tra mente e intelligenza, nonché per rilevare problemi di traduzione che, invece, usano il primo termine per indicare il secondo<sup>1</sup>.

---

*Dear Mr. Gardner, thank you for this interview.*

**My first question to you concerns disciplinary intelligence. Could you outline, albeit briefly, its essential characteristics? Also, this form of intelligence doesn't appear among those described in "Formae mentis". When and how did you come to identify it?**

importantly i don't use the phrase disciplinary intelligence. when i speak about intelligence, I refer to a computational capacity in the mind/brain. rather than having just one computer and one intelligence (as psychologists traditionally claimed) i believe that we have several semi-autonomous computers which i call the multiple intelligences.

when I use the phrase disciplined mind, I am not writing about kinds of intelligence. I am referring to different uses of our mind, our intelligence. we can use our intelligences to synthesize information, to create new ideas or works of art or science, or to master scholarly disciplines.

when i refer to the disciplined mind, i intend discipline in two senses: 1) learning a discipline like history, or geometry, or chemistry 2) to do so in the manner of a good student, working hard and regularly, monitoring one's progress, and if one is not progressing, trying another approach

sorry to have to be in a definition mode, but it is very important not to confuse intelligences (like musical or logical mathematical computers) with disciplines like ancient history, or aesthetics or astronomy, which one master using different mental computers or intelligences.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ci si riferisce, in modo specifico, alla traduzione italiana del testo *Five Minds for the Future*, che traduce con la locuzione "intelligenza disciplinare" la risorsa che consiste, invece, nella "mente disciplinare"

**Prof. Gardner, in your writings, has repeatedly referred to the distinction between subject and discipline in school contexts. In an essay written with Boix-Mansilla, you state that " while school subjects can be considered groups of contents that students must learn, the disciplines imply particular ways of thinking or interpreting the world, which students must develop".**

to use the example of history, that is a subject matter or scholarly discipline. To master history one must work hard, in a disciplined organized way for an extended period of time. and one must also use relevant intelligences, which would certainly include linguistic intelligence, but also logical intelligence (understanding causality) and personal intelligences (the motives of leaders, crowds, propogandists etc).

**Now I would like to ask you a more complex question, and I sincerely do not know whether I will be able to formulate it clearly. In your opinion, how can this distinction represent a paradigm for the organization of high school studies?**

In one sense, one need not do anything different than before. You can teach the standard disciplines (history, biology, music) and do so in a disciplined way (hard work, study, testing etc). Where my work is innovative is that the same topic can be approached through a variety of intelligences. In my book *The disciplined mind* I take three topics — theory of evolution, the holocaust of world war II, and the music of Mozart (per *Le nozze de Figaro*) and show how these topics can be addressed through several intelligences.

**And for the organization of university and academic courses?**

The same reasoning takes place. But of course in higher education, one is often being prepared for a career — teacher, nurse, lawyer, doctor — and of course one needs the appropriate subjects, teaching methods, and modes of assessment.

**Based on your scientific and personal experience, to what extent is the teaching staff aware of this distinction and its implications in terms of planning and teaching?**

In my experience, most teachers understand the nature of their subject matter or discipline and the importance of steady work \*(discipline in the second sense of that term). but teachers are less aware that one can teach a topic in several ways and there are several ways in which students can demonstrate their learnings. this is where “mi theory” represents a pedagogical advance.

**One last question on this subject. Disciplinary intelligence is linked to a particular scientific domain. Does it remain limited to that domain, or can it face problems solicited by the multiplicity of the real or by the contiguous scientific domains?**

as I have tried to explain, many intelligences can be used to learn a discipline, and it is always good to approach learning in a steady, serious, disciplined way. disciplines and intelligences are independent of one another—the good teacher and the good student seek to align them in the most helpful way.

**Prof. Gardner let’s change the subject. In the fifth chapter of *A synthetic mind*, you talk about the collaboration with Prof. Geschwind and the research conducted with him on metaphorical knowledge. Can you describe what this is about?**

The standard teaching in neurology was that all language processing took place in the left hemisphere in righthanded people. Ellen Winner and I showed that the right hemisphere of the brain plays an important role in the production and appreciation of metaphor and other forms of non-literal language.

**In the same book you say that you have deepened this form of knowledge starting from your interest in the processes that regulate artistic knowledge. Is the sphere of metaphorical thought only that of art, or can it also be extended to other domains? How does it relate to different forms of intelligence?**

metaphors can be used in any domain, discipline, or dialogue where language is used. so if i refer to this interview as a ping-pong match with the interviewer, I am using a linguistic metaphor. i believe that there are metaphors outside of language but that's a complex philosophical and lexical question. in Picasso's famous painting Guernica, can we speak of the bull as a metaphor — and, if so, is it a metaphor for the spanish loyalists?

**Is it possible, in your opinion, to hypothesize a "metaphorical intelligence" that meets the eight criteria that you identify in the sixth chapter of the same book?**

This is an interesting idea, but to qualify as an intelligence , metaphor would have to exhibit a # of different properties and on my analysis, metaphor does not qualify—just as chiaroscuro or good manners do not qualify

**Dear Mr. Gardner, thank you very much for the honor you have given me to accept this interview. I greet you with sentiments of esteem and gratitude and I wish you an even more brilliant period of success than you have already achieved.**

I hope that this clarifies rather than confuses. these are difficult issues of language and conceptualization and they are hard to discuss even in one's native language!