

# Prof. Rex Li's Writings

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**Title:** Summary and Review of Howard Gardner (2008)  
*Five Minds for the Future*  
Chapter 2: Disciplined Mind in Brief

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**Summary/ Abstract:** A summary of his notion of *Disciplined Mind*, based on his book 9 years before.

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**Summary and Review of Howard Gardner (2008)*****Five Minds for the Future*****Chapter 2: Disciplined Mind in Brief**

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*Disciplines* represent a radically different phenomenon. A discipline constitutes a distinctive way of thinking about the world. Scientists observe the world; come up with tentative classifications, concepts, and theories; design experiments in order to test these tentative theories; revise the theories in light of the findings; and then return, newly informed, to make further observations, redo classifications, and devise experiments. Individuals who think scientifically are aware how difficult it is to ferret out causes; they do not

(p.27)

Gardner quoted “signature pedagogy” of Lee Shulman (p.29), in medical, business, law and design schools. He proposed four steps:

- (1) Identify topics/ concepts of a discipline (p.32)
- (2) Spend years on it
- (3) Plurality of approaches/ entry point

of the variety of ways in which individuals can learn. Any lesson is more likely to be understood if it has been approached through diverse entry points: these can include stories, logical expositions, debate, dialogue, humor, role play, graphic depictions, video or cinematic presentations, embodiments of the lesson in question in the ideas, behaviors, and attitudes of a respected person. This is not to say that every topic ought to be taught in three or thirty canonical ways—but rather that any topic worth studying is open to a plurality of approaches.

A variety of entry points achieves two important goals. First of all, the teacher reaches more students, because some learn better through stories, others through debate, works of art, or identification with a skilled practitioner. Second, such an approach demonstrates what genuine understanding is like. Any individual with a deep under-

(4) “Performance of Understanding” for students

(5) My View:

R: Gardner shows his breadth and integration in quoting physics (forces, p.22), biology (evolution, p.23), law (p.23) and business (personnel, p.24). Below is Gardner’s summary of what the history of education is about – mastery of traditional / sacred text:

Seven hundred years ago, in both its Chinese and its European guises, an educated elite was expected to master a set of performances. Upon completion of his education, the Confucian scholar could distinguish himself in calligraphy, archery, music, poetry, horsemanship, participation in rituals, and mastery of important texts. His counterpart in Europe was able to exhibit the performances of the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) as well as the quadrivium (music, geometry, astronomy, and arithmetic). Instead of being asked to understand and apply, the apt student would simply repeat—indeed, often memorize verbatim—the wisdom of the intellectual ancestors: Confucius or Mencius in the East; Aristotle or Aquinas in the West. Perhaps this is what that Chinese teacher of psychology, mentioned in the previous chapter, had in mind when she impatiently told me, “We have been doing it this way for so long that we *know* it is right.”

This is a reasonable but simplistic view. My further reconceptualization comes to the following:

- (i) The sacred texts serve the purpose of preserving tradition and justifying authority of the status quo.
- (ii) Objectively, it is a selective tool to establish/ identify a “knowledge” elite, who can handle symbols, concepts “knowledge”, rituals and who support the ruling class.
- (iii) But it also identifies intellectually capable people; some of them display creativity (eg. the Chinese scholars in writing poems and prose, men of letters), some further develop a tradition (朱熹、陸九淵、黃陽明), and some challenge the tradition in times of social upheavals (清初四大家、民初知識份子、如章太炎、蔡元培、陳獨秀、胡適).