

Stephanie Skinner
October 2, 2011

ED 800 – Unit 3 Writing Assignment

As I viewed *Spellbound*, I focused on the differences between the eight spellers that this documentary focused on, and more specifically, Nupur, Ted, and Ashley. In Florida, Nupur, a previous National Spelling Bee participant, was shown practicing her words at home with a computer and dictionary, and her parents were portrayed as putting pressure on Nupur to succeed. In Missouri, Ted prepared for the spelling bee, but we also learned that he was a lonely, yet intelligent, student with few friends. He described the students he went to school with as “simple” and only had forty students in his class. His parents showed encouragement, although they were not directly shown assisting Ted in preparing for the bee. Ted seemed like a “natural” speller. In Washington, D.C., we met Ashley, who spent what seemed like after school hours preparing for the spelling bee with her teacher by playing scrabble and looking through a dictionary. Ashley’s mother was supportive, although her community did not show the support she hoped for. Having only met Ashley’s mother, it may be assumed that she comes from a single parent household.

Gardner spoke of “beyond cognition” in writing *The Disciplined Mind*; that is, looking past cognition into what motivates students to learn. There is no doubt that the students participating in the documentary were motivated to some degree to win the National Spelling Bee. Gardner mentions that emotions also play a role in motivation. Nupur, Ted, and Ashley were all emotionally involved in some way: Nupur felt competitive among her peers, and her parents put pressure on her to win; Ted, although quiet, exhibited confidence and excitement at the thought of winning the bee; and Ashley wanted to win the spelling bee for her family’s and community’s benefit. Most human activities, including the National Spelling Bee, have both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation for participants. When focusing on these three participants, it is obvious that they share in the goal of winning the spelling bee and becoming the champion (extrinsic), but that they also have internal motivations that are driving their endless hours of practice. Gardner states that “researchers now believe that learners are best served when their motivation is intrinsic...rather than because someone has promised them some material benefit” (*The Disciplined Mind*, 76).

Cognitively speaking, each of these students participating in the spelling bee had their own mental processes and methods for remembering the complex words they would potentially have to spell. Each person had their preexisting ideas, images, and languages in their mind-brains, with which they would build upon to prepare for their upcoming challenge. Nupur, Ted, and Ashley each had their own methods of studying, as well. Gardner calls attention to the importance of thinking about one’s own thinking process, representations, and memory. Gardner writes, “...aids to our memory, or vehicles that enhance our capacities to ponder our own representations, can be of singular help as we seek to master and keep up with expanding knowledge” (75). These adolescents each had their own method to expand their knowledge and master new spellings, however rote the process. In the end, each student did manage to learn enough to compete in a rigorous competition.