

Nicole Nolan  
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## Spellbound

The stories of the adolescent children preparing for the national Spelling Bee illustrated some of Gardner's principles in how people learn and what variables affect students' success in academics. While the film showed the rigorous study habits that are involved in the process of learning and memorizing spelling patterns, the main focus it portrayed was the importance of motivation, perseverance, and even self-confidence in working toward your potential and acquiring higher knowledge.

There were three characters that really interested me in the ways in which they talked about their abilities to spell and how they prepared for the national competition. Both Nupur and Neil were from India and saw America as a place of great opportunity. Both of their parents were extremely involved in their lives and in the preparation for the Bee. Nupur was very motivated, had a lot of confidence and determination, which helped her succeed at the national Bee. As she said, "You don't get any second chances in India, the way you do in America." Her family's mindset about working toward a goal was clearly instilled in her. This relates to Howard Gardner's belief that students should be taught the theory of evolution in order to gain an understanding of truth. America is seen as a place of great opportunity, especially to families like Nupur's and Neil's, who moved here from another country. Succeeding in the national Spelling Bee didn't necessarily mean survival, although it did prove that they had the ability to succeed in life.

Similar to Nupur's family, Neil's parents were also supportive and possibly even more involved with his preparation. His father was a bit intense and seemed to place a lot of pressure on Neil to work hard. They had a rigorous system in place for how Neil should study and learn each word. Like Nupur, the values instilled in Neil were, "If you work hard, you'll make it." Although Neil did not seem to have quite as much confidence as Nupur did, he realized that intuitive spelling was a talent he possessed and knew that in order to gain high cognitive functions, he had no choice but to study and basically revolve his life around preparing for the Spelling Bee.

April interested me, as she was a student who lacked self-confidence even though she was extremely bright and talented when it came to spelling. Like Nupur and Neil, she worked hard, sometimes centering her life excessively around the Spelling Bee and not allowing herself breaks or time with friends. Her mother commented that April would get teased at times. Other kids would say things like, "Oh April, why don't you get a life?" Even April admitted to having a pessimistic attitude. Nevertheless, April was persistent and never gave up studying to become a better speller.

The motivation of all three of these remarkable spellers backs up Howard Gardner's point that when "one is motivated to learn, one is likely to work hard, to be persistent, and to be stimulated rather than discouraged by obstacles, and to

continue to learn even when not pressed to do so, for the sheer pleasure of quenching curiosity or stretching one's facilities in unfamiliar directions (Gardner, 76)." The Spelling Bee was most definitely an opportunity for these students to push themselves to gain higher cognitive functions. All of these students, no matter how self-confident, knew they had a talent and the Spelling Bee offered them the chance to use their motivation to persevere toward their goal. In the end, Nupur was the winner at the Bee, however, each of these adolescents left feeling proud and satisfied with their efforts, proving that the motivation inside them was intrinsic.

*Spellbound* exemplified some of the main themes discussed in Howard Gardner's *The Disciplined Mind*. When students are able to pursue their unique interests, talents, and motivation, they acquire an exemplary work ethic and achieve at higher levels than ever thought possible. "Darwin's testimony on the virtues of intrinsic motivation quotes, 'It may be more beneficial that a child should follow energetically some pursuit, of however trifling a nature, and thus acquire perseverance, than that he should be turned from it, because of no future advantage to him.' (Gardner, 76)." The documentary *Spellbound* focuses on the power of motivation and perseverance, showing that educational methods such as Gardner's multiple intelligences have the capability to help students reach their potential.