

Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom

Anahita Lee

Do not train children to learning by force and harshness, but direct them to it by what amuses their minds, so that you may be better able to discover with accuracy the peculiar bent of the genius of each. – Plato

In his seminal book, “Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences” (1983), Dr Howard Gardner challenged the widely held notion that intelligence is a single general capacity possessed by all individuals in greater or lesser degree. Instead, as Dr Gardner shows through well researched evidence, each of us has a unique cognitive profile – in simple terms, each of us is intelligent in a unique way.

According to Dr Gardner, all of us have nine intelligences in varying amounts. Here is a table showing the nine multiple intelligences:

INTELLIGENCES	CHARACTERIZED BY	LEARNING ACTIVITIES RELATED TO A PARTICULAR TOPIC
Intra-personal <i>(Self Smart)</i>	The capacity to understand oneself and one’s feelings, values and beliefs and to use such knowledge in planning and directing one’s life	Create a bulletin board on the topic - create a personal analogy that relates to it - describe related qualities that you have - explain why you want to study it - do an ‘if I were...’ exercise - write a journal/diary entry about it – describe your personal values related to it
Inter-personal <i>(People Smart)</i>	The ability to understand and interact with others; to identify and respond effectively to motivations and desires of others	Conduct a mock press conference/meeting/debate/ discussion to address the topic – participate in a collaborative project to learn more about it – conduct an opinion poll or a survey on the key issues of the topic – give a presentation on it – teach someone the concepts of the topic – use it to bring about change needed in your school or locality
Bodily/ Kinesthetic <i>(Body Smart)</i>	Good motor skills; the ability to control one's body movements and to handle objects skillfully; to give trained responses and engage in physical sports or dance; a skill in handicrafts and building	Choreograph a movement or sequence of movements to explain the topic – plan and build a model based on it - take a field trip to learn more about it - bring hands-on materials to demonstrate it
Verbal /Linguistic <i>(Word Smart)</i>	The ability to think in words and use language to express and appreciate complex meaning; sensitivity to the sounds, meaning and rhythm of words	Write letters, poems, stories, descriptions based on the topic – give an oral presentation – write or give a news report on it - develop questions for, and conduct an interview based on the key issues of the topic - present a

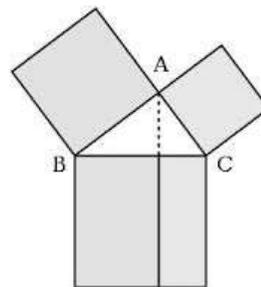
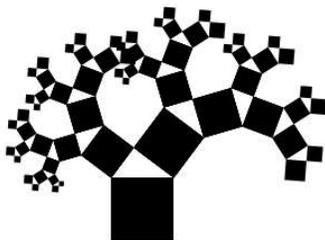
		radio drama - create a slogan - write a verbal defense – discuss and debate key issues of the topic
Mathematical / Logical <i>(Math Smart)</i>	The ability to calculate, quantify, consider propositions and hypotheses, to discern logical or numerical patterns and carry out complex mathematical operations	Categorize information and facts about the topic - create a timeline - express learning points using graphs - create a venn diagram to show similarities and differences - translate information into a formula – show patterns, symmetry and trends - create a pamphlet of information - create and conduct an experiment - create brain teasers or develop a game using the theme of the topic - draw up a calendar based on its theme – make up analogies to explain its key concepts
Visual/Spatial <i>(Picture Smart)</i>	The ability to think in pictures, to create mental images, to imagine and visualize abstractly	Draw up a chart, map, cluster, or graph based on the topic – represent the key points in a mind-map or any other graphic organizer - create a slide show, videotape, collage or photo essay based on it - draw and design a comic strip - create a piece of art to demonstrate the key issues - invent a board or card game based on the topic
Musical <i>(Music Smart)</i>	The ability to recognize, create, reproduce, and reflect on music; to produce and appreciate rhythm and pitch	Give a presentation with appropriate musical accompaniment on the topic - create music and lyrics for a song or a poem – find ways in which music can relate to the topic – demonstrate principals of the topic using music – find songs or pieces of music based on it and conduct an appreciation of the same – create a concert based on its theme – use music/ musical instruments as a metaphor to explain its key issues
Naturalistic <i>(Nature Smart)</i>	A sensitivity and appreciation for nature; a concern for conservation; the ability to recognize and categorize plants, animals and other objects in nature	Create a display/visual on the topic with objects from nature - find challenges/identify problems in nature related to the subject - find examples of things in nature related to it - plan an outdoor classroom - find global concerns based on it
Existential <i>(Life Smart)</i>	The capacity to tackle deep questions about human existence and the meaning of life	Relate the topic to existential issues of life

Our dominant intelligences determine the ways in which we learn. If our bodily kinesthetic intelligence is stronger than our linguistic intelligence, then we would rather be climbing a mountain than reading a lofty description of it. As each person has a unique intellectual composition, as educators, we can strengthen learning by addressing the multiple intelligences of our students.

How can we, as educators, assimilate this knowledge into strategies for empowering children to learn? It is important to understand that we learn best if we are taught through our dominant intelligences. Traditionally school education has focused on *linguistic* and *mathematical* intelligences and the non-traditional intelligences like *spatial*, *musical*, *kinesthetic*, *interpersonal* and *intrapersonal*, have generally been overlooked or placed in the category of co-curricular activities or extra-curricular activities, as if implying that they are in some way less important. But activities centered around music & dance, art & craft, and games & sports are vital gateways to learning. Tests show that students who do unsuccessfully in conventional examinations become more interested in learning and considerably improve their grades when classroom experiences incorporate these activities.

As a young student, I went through agonizing mathematics lessons. Nothing that the teachers painstakingly explained on the board made much sense to me. The marks and grades on my report cards showed that I was not good at mathematics and I began believing and saying that I was *bad* at mathematics. The teachers who taught me mathematics were people whose dominant intelligence was mathematical-logical and so they taught in a style that largely used rational explanations. My dominant intelligences, as I now know, are verbal-linguistic and visual-spatial. Had my teachers used stories and art to teach me the mathematical concepts, I would have learnt faster and better.

Look at these images:



Each of them is a representation of the Pythagorean Theorem. People who are more dominantly bodily kinesthetic would relate to the first image, those who are more dominantly visual-spatial would relate to the second and those with a more dominant mathematical-logical intelligence would relate to the third.

Had I been allowed to express mathematical concepts through art or storytelling, I would have certainly strengthened my mathematical-logical intelligence. It is important to weave activities that cover the spectrum of intelligences in our lesson plans and also to allow learners space to express the subject concept through the preferential activities of their dominant intelligences. Not only will this strengthen and quicken learning, but it will also give the learners invaluable life lessons through a sense of achievement and growing self-esteem.

Give assignments that allow children the freedom to explore and strengthen their intelligences within the parameters of the topic being done in class. With a little thought and creativity it is possible to allow every learner a chance to explore his/her style of learning.

Today we live in an increasingly complex world where a mere knowledge of facts is futile. What is valued today is the ability to synthesize and create. So it is more important than ever to develop ways to teach and learn by engaging all intelligences, so that we create opportunities for student success, and in Margaret Mead's words, "weave a social fabric in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place."

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