Multiple Intelligences

Our classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse. Approximately 14 percent of the current school population does not speak English as home, and an increasing number of children with disabilities are being placed in general education classrooms. This change requires a shift in educational strategies if we are to reach the students in present classrooms. Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) has offered educators a comprehensive framework within which fundamentally different solutions can be implemented. A tenet of MI theory is that people learn, represent, and utilize knowledge in many different ways. These differences challenge an educational system which assumes that everyone can learn the same materials in the same way and that a uniform, universal measure suffices to test student learning. According to Gardner, "the broad spectrum of students—and perhaps the society as a whole—would be better served if disciplines could be presented in a number of ways and learning could be assessed through a variety of means" (Gardner, 1991).

The Seven Intelligences

- **Linguistic Intelligence**—the capacity to use oral and/or written words effectively. Students who have strong linguistic intelligence are likely to benefit from traditional teaching strategies, such as lectures and note taking.
- **Logical-Mathematical Intelligence**—the ability to effectively use numbers and to reason. Students strong in this intelligence succeed in traditional math and science classes. Learning is enhanced through use of calculators, quantification, classification, critical thinking and problem solving across all subjects.
- **Spatial Intelligence**—the capacity to accurately perceive the visual/spatial world and create internal mental images. Useful teaching strategies include giving students opportunities to create visualizations, using color cues on worksheets, chalkboards, drawing and graphic symbols to represent concepts.
- **Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence**—the ability to skillfully move one's body and to move and manipulate objects. The use of gross motor activities which include using body movements, the classroom as a theater to "act out" content in textbooks, and learning with hands on materials reinforces learning for those with strengths in this area.
- **Musical Intelligence**—a sensitivity to and grasp of the elements of music. Students strong in this area are not necessarily gifted singers or musicians, but are likely to learn through rhythm. The following ways are ways to incorporate music into the entire curriculum: using rhythms, sounds, raps, chants to teach concepts using musical selections that represent or reflect the content of the curriculum, and using musical selections to depict the events and feelings within a story or book.
- **Interpersonal Intelligence**—the capacity to perceive and distinguish moods, intentions, and feelings of others. Students with strong interpersonal intelligence are often outgoing and empathetic. Positive teaching approaches include peer sharing of materials, using cooperative groupings, and using simulations to learn about events, feelings, and alternative strategies for behaving.
- **Intrapersonal Intelligence**—the ability to know one's self and act on the basis of that knowledge. Intrapersonal intelligence is manifested in students who are more likely to learn when given the opportunity to learn on their own. Using reflection activities, connecting the curriculum to students' personal lives and/or future experiences, and giving students choices of what to do, when, and how are successful strategies for students with strong intrapersonal intelligences (Falvey & Givner, 1995).

"If the kids aren't learning the way we teach them, then we better teach the way they learn."

Richard Villa

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the STATEWIDE PARENT ADVOCACY NETWORK, INC. (SPAN) is to empower families, professionals, and other individuals interested in the well-being and educational rights of children. SPAN's special commitment is to those children with the greatest need due to disability, poverty, discrimination based on race, sex, or language, or other special needs. SPAN's goal is to enable all children to become fully participating and contributing members of society. We work towards this goal by providing information, training, technical assistance, support and the exchange of ideas.

SPAN's multi-faceted program is carried out by a bilingual, multiracial staff, primarily parents of children with and without disabilities.

Individual Advocacy and Technical Assistance: SPAN assists over 15,000 families and students each year in resolving education problems free of charge.

Parent and Professional Development: SPAN conducts extensive workshops on educational rights and advocacy and collaboration skills for almost 4,500 parents, educators, community-based organizations, and other professionals annually. We also publish materials for parents, professionals and advocates for children and youth.

Research and Administrative Negotiation: In conjunction with other advocacy organizations, SPAN conducts action-oriented research on issues identified by our work. Our research and reports are the basis of reform-directed negotiations with public officials.

NATIONAL AFFILIATIONS

SPAN is a member of the National Coalition of Advocates for Students and the National Parent Network on Disabilities.

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THE THEORY OF MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

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Entry Points

According to Gardner, all humans possess and exhibit these seven intelligences, and individuals possess varying amounts of these intelligences and combine them and use them in personal and idiosyncratic ways. These differences exert profound effects upon the child as a student, determining, for example, which "entry point," (a story, an image, hands-on activity) is most likely to be effective for a given student in encounters with new material, and less happily, which concepts are likely to be confused with one another. We might think of the topic as a room with at least five doors or entry points into it. Students vary as to which entry point is most appropriate for them and which routes are most comfortable to follow once they have gained initial access to the room. Awareness of these entry points can help the teacher introduce new material in ways which they can be easily grasped by a range of students; then as students explore other entry points, they have the chance to develop those multiple perspectives that are the best antidote to stereotypical thinking (Gardner, 1991).

There is no single educational approach based on the MI theory. Gardner has taken the position that educators are in the best position to determine the uses to which MI theory can and should be put. He does not recommend that educators teach all concepts or subjects using all the intelligences. Nor does he recommend the grading of intelligences, without regard to context or content. The *uses* to which children's intelligences are put is the focus, not the *assessment* of each child's intelligence (Gardner, 1995).

Assessments

A major problem with the present school system is the method teachers use to assess the student's knowledge. Many students who appear capable of exhibiting significant understanding appear deficient because they cannot readily reflect their knowledge through the usual means of assessment. "There is a significant population that lacks facility with formal examinations but can display relevant understanding when problems arise in natural contexts....Sometimes students who cannot pass muster on the usual measures of competence reveal significant mastery and understanding when these have been elicited in a different, more appropriate way" (Gardner, 1991).

Our educational system is heavily biased toward linguistic modes of instruction and assessment and, to a lesser degree, toward the logical-quantitative modes as well (Gardner, 1991). Teachers require students to answer preset kinds of problems, to master lists of terms, and to memorize and then feed back definitions upon request. "By minimizing the importance of other intelligences within and outside of schools, we consign many students who fail to exhibit the "proper" blend to the belief that they are stupid, and we do not take advantage of the ways in which multiple intelligences can be exploited to further the goals of school and the broader culture. An education built on multiple intelligences can be more effective than one built on just two intelligences. It can develop a broader range of talents, and it can make the standard curriculum accessible to a wider range of students "(Gardner, 1991). In an effort to make sure the students "cover" the curriculum and are prepared for various milestones and tests, teachers may inadvertently be undermining more crucial educational goals, one of which is that schools should relate to a productive life in the community (Gardner, 1991).

The Implications of MI Theory for Special Education

The influence that MI theory can have on special education goes far beyond the development of new remedial strategies and interventions. If MI theory is implemented on a large scale in both regular and special education, it is likely to have some of the following effects:

- **Fewer referrals to special education**—when the regular curriculum includes the full spectrum of intelligences, referrals to special education classes will decline. Most teachers now focus on the linguistic and mathematical intelligence's, neglecting the needs of students who learn best through musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal or interpersonal intelligences. It is these students who most often fail in regular classrooms and are placed in special settings. Once regular classrooms themselves become more sensitive to the needs of different kinds of learners through MI learning programs, the need for special placement, especially for learning disabilities and behavior problems, will diminish.

- **A changing role for the special education teacher**—the special education teacher will begin to function less as a "pull-out" teacher and more as a special MI consultant to the general education teacher, spending most of his/her time in the general education classroom. In this role, the MI consultants can assist in some of the following tasks: identifying students' strongest intelligences; focusing on the needs of specific students; designing MI curriculums; creating specific MI interventions; and working with groups using MI activities.

- **A greater emphasis on identifying strengths** —qualitative and authentic measures are likely to have a larger role in special education and may perhaps begin to supplant standardized diagnostic measures as a means of developing appropriate educational programs.

- **Increased self-esteem**—with more emphasis placed on the strengths and abilities of children with disabilities, students' self-esteem are likely to rise, thus helping to promote success among a broader community of learners.

- **Increased understanding and appreciation of students**—as students use MI theory to make sense of their individual differences, their tolerance, understanding, and appreciation of those with special needs is likely to rise, making their full integration into the general classroom more likely (Armstrong, 1994).

In what direction would Howard Gardner, who first developed this theory in 1983 like to see MI go? He states that he would "cherish an educational setting in which discussions and applications of MI have catalyzed a more fundamental consideration of schooling," (Gardner, 1995). As a result of these discussions, a more personalized education should be the outcome, and after all that is what an **Individualized** Education Program is all about.

References:

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"The purpose of school should be to develop intelligences and to help people reach...goals that are appropriate to their particular spectrum of intelligences."

Howard Gardner

"All students can learn and succeed, but not all on the same day in the same way."

William G. Spady