



Smart in Different Ways

How do you define the word “intelligent”? Help your students learn better with this radical view of brainpower. **BY RICA BOLIPATA-SANTOS**

Whether we read about it, learned about it in an MA class, or simply experienced it, all teachers know one thing: Students learn differently. Some kids perk up when there’s a physical activity involved; others come alive when they’re called to perform. Still others may enjoy reciting, or being quiet and doing seatwork, or building something with their hands. Why is this so?

THE MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCE THEORY

Traditionally, teachers view students as smart only if they do well in tests, recite a lot to show they understand us, or solve Math and science problems accurately. But in 1983, Dr. Howard Gardner, a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in the US, came up with a new idea.

According to him, this traditional view only recognizes verbal and computational smarts. But there are other types of intelligence that we’ve overlooked, and teachers aren’t being fair to students with these other types of intelligence and learning styles. Over the past 20 years, this Multiple Intelligence (MI) theory has been making waves in curricula, teaching styles, and assessment methods. To learn more about the specific types of intelligences, see the box below.



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The 8 Kinds of Smart

The different intelligence types and how to respond to their strengths

1 Logical-Mathematical (“numbers smart”)
Highly developed in computer programmers, scientists, engineers, accountants. In the classroom, use numbers, graphs, and classifications. Ask students to organize their thoughts by making a chart or diagram. Give them computation or logic problems to solve.

2 Linguistic (“word smart”)
Highly developed in writers, journalists, teachers, lawyers, politicians. In the classroom, use the spoken or written word. Ask students to read, write, or recite. Engage class in a debate, have them summarize the lesson, tell a story, or tutor their classmates.

3 Spatial/Visual (“picture smart”)
Highly developed in architects, interior designers, artists, engineers, mechanics. In the classroom, use visual aids, visualization, color, hand-outs and artwork. Ask students to express themselves by drawing. Work with maps, puzzles, videos.

4 Musical (“sound smart”)
Highly developed in musicians, composers, singers, disc jockeys. In the classroom, involve sounds, music, rhythm, melody. Ask students to analyze, write, or perform a song. Read aloud or listen to a tape.

5 Intrapersonal (“self smart”)
Highly developed in researchers, philosophers, writers, spiritual leaders, policy-makers. In the classroom, evoke personal thoughts, feelings or memories. Ask students make a reflection, remember and write about their dreams, make choices and explain their decisions. Assign independent study projects.

6 Interpersonal (“people smart”)
Highly developed in salespeople, businessmen, politicians, counselors. In the classroom, use group work, interaction and sharing. Ask students to work in pairs or groups, have them share their thoughts with each other. Encourage cooperation and communication. Ask students to

MI IN THE CLASSROOM

Let's say you're taking up Figures of Speech in class (simile, metaphor, personification, etc). In a traditional classroom, Figures of Speech would be taught in lecture mode. Teacher stays in platform, uses the blackboard to write down the different kinds of figures of speech, using examples from classic poems.

In an MI classroom, the teacher plans possible activities for the different types of learners. Perhaps a walk around the campus with instructions to bring back something they found can work, especially for the bodily-kinesthetic learners. The teacher can task them to create metaphors based on what they picked up. A journal-writing exercise and group sharing activity will appeal to inter- and intra-personal learners. Maybe logical learners will want to make a chart of similes listing down what objects *feel like*, *sound like*, *taste like*, and *smell like*. Perhaps finding figures of speech in a popular song will activate the musicians. And if the teacher asked visual learners to look for metaphors in paintings, they may understand the lesson better.

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

What's the difference between these two lesson plans? There's nothing wrong with a tried-and-tested lecture. However, it only engages verbal learners. Other types of learners can get lost in all those words. The second lesson plan might look disorganized at first, but it does try to reach all kinds of students to make sure that the lesson is clear. The difference is that it respects the different methods of learning students have, and tries to make the lesson concrete to each of them.

In the traditional manner, learning was viewed as simple and uncomplicated. A student goes to school, learns a certain number of things. She is tested to see if she has

explain the situation from another point of view or to explain why a person may have felt or acted a certain way.

7 Bodily-kinesthetic ("body smart")

Highly developed in athletes, dancers, PE teachers, actors, builders, firefighters. In the classroom, do something hands-on and active, involve the whole body. Get students into crafts and sports, have them express themselves through dance or body language. Do experiments, puzzles, and offer educational toys.

8 Naturalist ("nature smart")

Highly developed in doctors, veterinarians, environmentalists, biologists, farmers, scuba divers. In the classroom, involve nature, animals, and the environment. Ask students to go explore their surroundings and bring back observations and findings. Have students tend a garden, observe or take care of an animal, or build a nature collection (rocks, butterflies, flowers). Students may also want to adopt a "class pet" and take care of it.

picked up the new knowledge. If successful, she is deemed intelligent enough to move up to the next grade level. New discoveries in brain development and cognitive science are now questioning this method, which has allowed a lot of gifted people to end up mediocre, average graduates who were never able to discover their talents or learn to the utmost.

With the MI approach, we want kids to learn in their own individual styles and using their unique talents and abilities.

Imagine what an intelligent student looks like. We would probably think of a kid who loves going to the library or the science lab. We wouldn't think of the athlete, the dancer, or the popular girl on campus. But according to MI theory, these people are intelligent in their own way. The athlete's bodily-kinesthetic intelligence is just as important as the class valedictorian's. Popular people on campus are often stereotyped as "dumb," but they are probably gifted with interpersonal intelligence. Later on in the workplace, this ability to get along with other people will be a highly valued asset.

BENEFITS OF THE MI APPROACH

What are the benefits of an MI approach in the classroom? First, it allows you to see students in a new light. The student at the back who never talks and is branded as stupid might suddenly look different to you. He may simply not be verbal learner. Is it possible that he's intelligent in another way? The shy one whom you've tried to draw out thousand and one ways might just need to be left alone in her shyness because this is the way she learns. What's important is to see that being active or *madaldal* is not the only sign of intelligence.

In the MI classroom, teachers want kids to be lifetime learners. Of course, we want them to learn addition, subtraction, photosynthesis, and geography. But we want them to learn how to use these concepts for solving life problems. And we want them to learn in their own individual styles and using their unique talents and abilities.

As a teacher in an MI classroom, you'll also find yourself learning more and more, since this theory will force you to be super-creative, to think out of the box and even to be crazy! Your own intelligences will be activated too.

MI KEYWORDS

Dr. Thomas Armstrong, a main proponent of MI theory, says that at the heart of the learning process are the following: creativity, joy, wonder, imagination, humor, playfulness, curiosity, flexibility, inventiveness, wisdom, sensitivity and vitality. It's a list of words I keep tacked on my bulletin board in my cubicle. I see it as my guide when I teach. It's important to me to create lessons that make my students truly feel these words. I've seen the difference in myself and in my students when I take to heart that we all learn differently. ★