Teachers have long been aware of individual differences among children in any given class, and they rightly recognize the importance of addressing the needs of each individual learner in order to maximize learning potential. The great challenge lies in how to best reach and teach students with different strengths and aptitudes.

The Theory of Multiple Intelligences, developed by psychologist and Harvard professor Howard Gardner, seeks to describe intelligence as much more than the traditional standard represented by IQ tests, which focus on verbal and mathematical aptitude only. Instead, intelligence is described as a multi-faceted phenomenon of nine separate but interrelated areas that, taken together, provide “the capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural settings.” According to Gardner, both a biological base anchored in neuroscience research and a cultural base anchored in anthropology and sociolinguistics research support the concept of multiple intelligences.

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MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

Verbal-linguistic intelligence
Learners strong in verbal-linguistic intelligence exhibit the ability to use language to express their thoughts and to understand other people. They comfortably and easily manipulate words and language to express themselves creatively, and use language as a means to remember information. They engage in active listening, fluent speaking and reading, enjoy storytelling, explaining and persuading, using humour and word play. They have the capacity to analyze language use and language elements in their first language as well as in second and other languages. These learners tend to think in words more than in images.

Logical-mathematical intelligence
Students exhibiting strong logical-mathematical Intelligence have the capacity to see and understand the concepts and principles behind causal and numeric systems. They are able to use both deductive and inductive reasoning and logic to analyze and solve problems, and they enjoy manipulating numbers in number puzzles, calculations, and formulas. These learners can skillfully make connections among pieces of information, as well as recognize cause and effect and other patterns. They tend to employ classifying, sequencing, questioning and experimenting, and computing as strategies for analyzing and retaining information.

Visual-spatial intelligence
Learners with high visual-spatial intelligence have the ability to recognize, create, identify and contemplate deep questions about human existence; use mental questioning as a means to situate and remember information and use images and patterns of wide space and confined space. Using images as a means to remember information, they can easily visualize and orient their bodies and other objects in space and understand maps, charts and graphic organizers. They enjoy puzzles and board games, appreciate detail and color, drawing, painting and plastic arts. They tend to think in images more than in words.

Naturalist intelligence
Learners strong in naturalist intelligence exhibit the ability to discriminate among, care for, and appreciate living things and other features of the natural world. They are able to understand and manipulate the environment, plants, and animals, and use nature-related analogies as a means to remember information. These learners are keen observers of the characteristics, behaviors, and habitats of living things as well as the characteristics of nonliving things. They enjoy gardening, hiking, and exploring nature, as well as caring for animals.

Existential intelligence
Those exhibiting strong existential intelligence have a tendency to question and reflect upon the great human concerns of life, death, the universe, and other ultimate realities. Of philosophical mind, they identify and contemplate deep questions about human existence, are sensitive to the interrelatedness of things and people. These learners enjoy engaging in abstract thinking, analyzing and problem-solving, as well as investigating paradoxes and mysteries. Self-motivated, they tend to use mental questing as a means to situate and remember information.

Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence
Students with high bodily-kinesthetic Intelligence have the ability to use their whole bodies and parts of their bodies in optimal ways to retain information through touch and movement, to solve problems, to build, take apart, and make something, or to put on a production. They manipulate the body through controlled fine and gross motor skills and handle objects with dexterity. These learners enjoy dancing, playing sports, acting, miming, expressing emotions through body language, and hands-on experimenting. They use their mental abilities to coordinate body movements as a way to process and retain information.

Intrapersonal intelligence
Learners strong in intrapersonal intelligence exhibit perceptive understanding of the self, and are knowledgeable about who they are, what they do, and their motives for doing so. They can consciously identify and control their own inner emotions and thinking processes, recognize their own strengths and weaknesses. Self-analyzing, they dissect their roles in relationship to others, are conscious of their desires, dreams and inner feelings. These learners tend to work independently, they use their strengths and self-reflection as a means to remember information.

Interpersonal intelligence
Those exhibiting strong interpersonal intelligence have the ability to understand other people and social relationships. With a facility in communicating with and relating to other people, these learners engage in active listening and are skilled in receiving and identifying body language and facial expressions as signals. They enjoy working collaboratively, social organizing and managing discussions and projects. They can sustain motivation in others and have the capacity for empathy. They often work more effectively with others, rather than individually, to learn and retain information.
Musical-rhythmic intelligence
Learners with high musical-rhythmic intelligence have the capacity to hear, recognize, and manipulate patterns found in music and rhythmic structures. They are skilled at composing, playing, or conducting music, recognizing tonal patterns, and utilizing the structure and rhythm of music and rhythms. They are good at remembering melodies and chants, and enjoy playing musical instruments, singing, whistling, and identifying environmental sounds. These learners use sound and rhythm to learn and remember information.

MI applications in the primary classroom
Some teachers may fear that applying multiple intelligences in the classroom will require a complex and time-consuming transformation in the way they teach, but this is not the case. Many techniques and activities primary teachers are already familiar with mesh happily with MI theory. Which teacher has not on occasion led the class in a rousing song or chant (musical-rhythmic intelligence)? Who has not involved students in role-plays or readers’ theater (verbal-linguistic intelligence)? Who has not invited learners to participate in TPR, race games, card games, or board games (bodily-kinesthetic intelligence)? Who has not used picture cards and posters for presentation, practice, or review with the class (visual-spatial intelligence)? And, of course, a comprehensive and effective primary series such as Backpack by Herrera and Pinkley supports the multiple intelligence teacher even more, as it incorporates a wide range of multiple intelligence activities and suggestions in both the Student Books and Teacher’s Editions.

References