

A “Friendly” Look at Multiple Intelligences

BY SANDRA PETH

I am a Quaker whose chosen profession has been the field of education. Having taught for over twenty years, I have seen many changes. When I first began teaching, the educational terms team teaching (more than one teacher in a classroom), and teacher aides (persons who assist teachers) were new. That was twenty years ago and the concept of multiple intelligences was just being talked about. Now, team-teaching is co-teaching and teacher aides are paraprofessionals. Not only is the multiple intelligence theory still here, but an additional intelligence has been added to the original seven. At this point, to avoid confusion, I need to explain what I mean by the terms “Friendly” and “multiple intelligences (MI).”

My “Friendly” outlook in writing this article is to look at the concept of multiple intelligences through the eyes of a Quaker and to consider possible applications in a First Day School setting. There comes a point in the life of a Friend when the realization comes that the inner and outer lives are connected. It is this inner light felt by individuals in the sense of “daily living” that we can present Friends social testimonies of peace, simplicity, equality and ecological witness to children in our classes.

Now, let’s look at the theory of “multiple intelligences” which turned 20 this year. Howard Gardner published *Frames of Mind* in 1983. It was the first book to lay out his theory of multiple intelligences. Although Gardner’s book was not aimed at parents or teachers, it is this very population who has taken his theory to heart! Here is a quick review of the theory for those not familiar with multiple intelligences. People are endowed with eight separate, equally valid, forms of intelligence.

1. Linguistic: sensitivity to words, reading, speaking, writing, listening, storytelling, debates, and discussion.
2. Logical-Mathematical: likes numbers, patterns, order, formulas, and technology.
3. Visual-Spatial: capacity to perceive the world accurately through drawing, building, designing, creating, colors, and pictures.
4. Musical-Rhythmic: ability to produce and enjoy sounds, singing, use of music, and rhythm.
5. Body-Kinesthetic: likes moving touching, role plays, and field trips.
6. Naturalistic: likes outdoors, animals, plants, nature, and details.

7. Intrapersonal: enjoys self reflection, pursuit of own interests, wait time, goal-setting, ethics, and morals.

8. Interpersonal: enjoys interaction, collaboration, social relationships, and being empathetic to others.

What does all this mean? Each child will have different personalities and abilities. Some children are jokesters and comedians while others are quiet, reserved, and serious. Although the intelligences are anatomically separated from each other, Gardner claims that the seven intelligences very rarely operate independently. Rather, the intelligences are used concurrently and typically complement each other as individuals develop skills or solve problems. For example, a dancer can excel in his art only if he has (1) strong musical intelligence to understand the rhythm and variations of the music, (2) interpersonal intelligence to understand how he can inspire or emotionally move his audience through his movements, as well as (3) bodily-kinesthetic intelligence to provide him with the agility and coordination to complete the movements successfully.

There is a natural temptation for the educator to teach using his or her own preferred intelligence(s) and style of learning, for this is most comfortable. This approach, however, is not the most effective in the classroom. The wise educator will not limit lessons to only one intelligence, but will vary both the approach and the pace, offering a variety of ways to engage the learner. Besides increasing the interest level, utilizing a variety of intelligences activates more parts of the brain and facilitates learning. In the end, all the intelligences utilized work together to make for more fruitful lessons.

First, keep in mind that you are already off to a great start! The mere fact that you care and are willing to share your time with the students is already a good thing. Also, take time to get to know your students and their strengths. This will not happen in one or two classes. However, if you listen carefully to what they share with you in the class, you will begin to have a sense of your students and their particular intelligence strength. Also, don't take lack of attendance personally. I found that after the opening few weeks of classes, I might have only one or two students in First Day School. Families begin to travel, illnesses occur and attendance in general can decrease.

Here is a simple lesson on "sharing" which could be taught to a first or second grade class. You could begin by asking students their ideas on and experiences of sharing (interpersonal MI). After sharing an appropriate Bible or Quaker story about sharing (linguistic MI) you could ask students to respond to the story through art (visual spatial MI). The class could share a healthy snack (kinesthetic MI) and the children could be invited to reflect on how they might share something with someone when they get home (intrapersonal MI).

As a second example for further clarification, consider an intermediate First Day School lesson on racial justice. It would not only be beneficial to have learners hear and write about racial justice (linguistic MI), but to reflect (intrapersonal MI), create (visual-spatial MI), and possibly interact (interpersonal MI) on the same topic.

In review, the "theory of multiple intelligences" allows First Day School teachers to look for and teach to a broader range of talents and skills as they approach lessons. Remember, students will have

strengths in more than one intelligence. Therefore, it is important to consider all intelligences and use variety when planning curriculum for classes, intergenerational activities, or overnight retreats.

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