

## Professional Practice Issues

### Teaching EFL to Multiple Intelligences<sup>1</sup>

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Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences, which he presented in the *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. New York: Basic Books, 1983, has become somewhat of a fad. It has been cited in several journals and teachers' magazines. Methods workshops, seminars and a variety of publications that claim to cater to the various intelligences have proliferated across the curriculum. The theory is picking up almost at the same speed as the whole language theory. But just as the whole language concept, the MI concept has been widely misinterpreted, and appears in many instances to be nothing more than decorative frames around the same old instructional picture. This paper outlines some of the common misconceptions of Gardner's theory as identified by Gardner himself, and then presents a sample lesson where some of the multiple intelligences are addressed within the context of story reading in an EFL/ESL class.

According to Gardner, "intelligence is a biological and psychological potential that potential is capable of being realized to a greater or lesser extent as a consequence of the experiential, cultural, and motivational factors that affect a person" (p. 202) and should not be confused with a domain or a learning style:

*any domain can be realized through the use of several intelligences (domain of musical performance involves bodily-kinesthetic, personal and musical intelligence) a particular intelligence can be put to work in a myriad of domains (spatial intelligence can be applied to sculpture, dance, sailing, neuroanatomical investigation) (p. 202).*

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Reading comprehension may involve, in addition to linguistic intelligence, spatial, logical, and personal intelligence while grammar may draw on mathematical/logical intelligence. Gardner (p.202-203) further notes that

*the concept of style designates a general approach that an individual can apply equally to every conceivable content. In contrast, intelligence is a capacity, with its component processes, that is geared to a specific content in the world (such as musical sounds or spatial patterns)*

For example, an analytical learner, as described by McCarthy, will approach all learning tasks in this style, or will do better if allowed to learn using this style. On the other hand, an individual high, for example in musical intelligence, does not approach Gardner (1995) has criticized the applications of his theory in the classroom context that are based on several common misconceptions of his theory. He lists six misconceptions that have resulted in classroom activities being portrayed as catering to multiple intelligences when they, in fact, do nothing of the sort.

1. *all concepts or subjects can be taught using all the 7 intelligences.*

It is a waste of time to try and use all seven ways in all situations. For example, trying to teach a grammar rule through bodily-kinesthetic activities is not an example of application of MI theory; it is an example of learning style-based approach. A learner whose learning style preference is bodily-kinesthetic will benefit from activities presented through movement, regardless of the lesson content, while bodily-kinesthetic intelligent will not be very useful in learning grammar, for example. Similarly, musical intelligence will not be very useful in learning verb tenses, but will be of use in, say, learning intonation patterns or pitch.

2. *going through the motions of a certain intelligence is sufficient*

In many classrooms, teachers are having children march in circles, chant rhymes or paint pictures, in the belief that they are addressing the intelligences. However, unless the concepts to be learned somehow relate to the particular intelligence, these activities are just like any other activities, albeit entertaining to the children.

3. *materials associated with an intelligence used as background will address the given intelligence for learning*

Listening to background music while doing spelling exercises does not in any way help a musically intelligent learner to become a better speller, just as marching around

the room clapping one's hands does not help the bodily-kinesthetically intelligent learner to acquire vocabulary. It might, however, help an individual whose preferred learning modality is kinesthetic.

4. *using intelligences as mnemonic devices is equivalent to 'teaching to multiple intelligences'*

Singing grammar rules or vocabulary words, for example, might help learners remember the items better, but they are not an example of teaching to multiple intelligences.

5. interpersonal intelligence implies cooperative learning and applies to outgoing, extroverted people

Needless to say, individuals high on interpersonal intelligence will do well in cooperative activities because they can use that particular intelligence, but that is not necessarily be equated to teaching to interpersonal intelligence. Also, not all extroverted individuals are necessarily high in interpersonal intelligence. Interpersonal intelligence, which implies awareness and understanding of the feelings and concerns of others can be tapped, for example, when learning conflict resolution skills and when writing literary journal entries that require a change in point of view.

6. intrapersonal intelligence suggests self-esteem programs or applies to people who are introverts or loners

As a matter of fact, individuals high in intrapersonal intelligence are individuals who 'know themselves' and are able to make decisions based on their self-awareness. Not all introverts and loners are high in intrapersonal intelligence. Examples of appropriate classroom applications of intrapersonal intelligence will be giving learners choices in assignments and incorporating a self-evaluation component as Campbell (1994:51-52) suggests.

### **Promising possibilities**

Gardner (1995:207-208) himself has identified the following three promising possibilities for the application of MI theory:

1) *cultivation of desirable capabilities/skills*

Multiple intelligence theory can, for example, be tapped to nurture inter/intrapersonal skills to further the aims of peace education (Ghosn, 1997, 1999).

2) *approaching concepts and subject matter in a variety of ways; spend time on key concepts, generative ideas, essential questions, but examine them from various angles*

This approach will not only draw on the diverse intelligences of the learners in the classroom, but will also make learning more meaningful and transferable and is in line with the constructivist theory of learning (see Grennon Brooks and Brooks, 1993). Examination of essential questions from various angles, for example, will nurture skills required of the global citizen of the 21st Century (Ghosn 1998).

3) *personalization of education*

Learners in any given class are individuals and vary in their aspirations, intelligences and skills, and thus approaches to teaching should cater to these differences. In practical terms that implies a variety of approaches and strategies, choice and learner participation in all aspects of the learning and assessment process.

### **Developmental sequence of M I**

Lazear (in Christison, 1996) has identified a developmental sequence in multiple intelligences that can serve as a useful guide for a classroom teacher wishing to nurture multiple intelligences.

- I. Awakening the intelligence: use activities and exercises that make use of sensory bases, intuition, and metacognition.
- II. Amplifying the intelligence: use and practice the intelligence.
- III. Teaching for / with the intelligence: structure lessons for multiple intelligences, emphasizing and using different intelligences in the teaching / learning process. (However, bear in mind Gardner's cautionary notes outlined above!).
- IV. Transferring of the intelligence: go beyond the classroom, integrate into daily living, into challenges and problem solving.

The following sample lesson for intermediate/ advanced level EFL class takes into consideration Gardner's cautionary notes and advice that he has put forth in his 1995 article in the Phi Delta Kappan, "Reflections on Multiple Intelligences. Myths and Messages" (1995; 200-209). It is also in line with Lazear's developmental sequence notion

The sample lesson uses whole language approach (as I interpret it in an EFL context), which seems to be more 'learner-friendly' than some of the traditional methods, especially because it does allow for the different styles, learning preferences and intelligences. It is also an approach that I personally find easy to work with. In this respect I tend to agree with Diane Larsen-Freeman (1995), who said that "the best

method is the one that the teacher believes in.”

The objectives for the lesson are somewhat flexible and the final outcome depends on the individual students and their needs and interests.

### **Sample lesson with some Multiple Intelligence components**

**Level:** Intermediate/ advanced

**Age:** 8 to adult

**Objectives:** Flexible, depending on learner interests and needs

**Language:** modals/ conditionals (could/would/should; if would); past tense; descriptive words

**Reading comprehension:** inferential thinking; critical and creative reading; change in point of view.

**Writing:** letter writing; change in point of view; persuasive writing; quoting/ paraphrasing.

**Themes:** Peace education; empathy; displacement; conflict

**Story:** *The Old Key* by Irma Ghosn. (1999) Beirut: Dar El-Ilm Lilmalayin

**Music:** Any music evoking images of Middle East and/or presenting the following thematic sequence: dreamy hopefulness ~ building excitement ~ sudden crashing of hopes.

#### **Produce:**

1. Begin by raising curiosity about the story by inviting students to think about the title and ask: “*What do you think the story will be about?*” “*Where do you think this key fits?*”
2. Then, play the tape: “*Close your eyes. Imagine the place where this music is playing* This might be what Lazear refers to as *awakening the intelligence* by making use of sensory bases. Discuss students’ images. If time and resources permit, allow students to paint or draw images evoked by the music.
3. Read the story, using directed reading and thinking approach (DR-TA) described by Stauffer (1969). Although an old and less used approach in L1 reading classes, this approach is useful in the L2 class in that it enables the teacher to introduce and reinforce vocabulary and pertinent structures in a natural, meaningful context.
4. Allow for discussion during and after reading. Use ‘reflective listening’, repeating student comments in English and extending questions to the class. For example: *Carla thinks that Walid’s uncle will not come, after all. Does anyone else think that? ... Rhea, do you also think that he will not come? ...*



*Carla and Rhea think that... What do the others think?* And so on. This will provide ample input without the sense of a drill while also opening opportunities for student output and negotiation of meaning, both identified with second language learning (Swain and Lapkin 1995; Pica 1994).

**Reading responses:**

Allow students to choose the assignments they are most comfortable with. This is a meaningful application of the multiple intelligence.

- Write a journal entry from Walid's point of view a) when he is dreaming about the house; b) the day after uncle Hani's visit. (intrapersonal intelligence; inferential thinking)
- Write a dialogue between Walid's mother and father after they have seen him sitting and looking at the key and heard him talk about the house. (interpersonal intelligence; creative reading)
- Write a letter from Walid to his cousin in the occupied territory. (interpersonal intelligence; letter writing)
- Write a letter to Walid, expressing your feelings about his situation. (interpersonal intelligence; intrapersonal intelligence; letter writing; 1st person point of view)
- Write a letter to the Israeli Prime Minister, expressing your thoughts about the Israeli/ Palestinian issue. (interpersonal intelligence; modals; conditionals)
- Imagine that you would have to leave your home and the town/village where you have grown up. What are things that you would miss the most and why. (This activity can be done orally, or in writing, depending on the needs of the class.) (Verbal/linguistic; intrapersonal; visual / spatial if graphic organizers are used)
- Draw / paint the scene that you would miss the most if you had to leave your home. (Visual/spatial )
- Write a poem, or compose a song, that Walid might write about his grandparents' home. (Verbal/linguistic; musical. Note that music here is not used as background, or 'extra', but reflects the emotions expressed in the story and thus is directly related to reading comprehension objectives.

- Discuss how the music you have listened to reflects the events in the story. (Musical)
- Plan a mime presentation of the story mood / Walid's feelings throughout the story either individually or as a group. (Bodily/Kinesthetic)
- With older learners (10+), you can discuss the background of the situation and the conflict. A good objective source is:  
Invite learners to brainstorm for possible, viable solution to the problem. They will begin to develop an understanding that some problems cannot perhaps be solved so that all parties would be fully satisfied. The notion of compromise and priorities can be discussed. You should remain an objective moderator regardless of your personal view about the subject. As soon as the learners realize that you hold a fixed opinion about the controversy, they will be inclined to express agreement with the teacher, and a good opportunity for critical thinking and problem-solving will be lost.
- If time and learner interest permit, organize a simulated debate between the parties in the conflict. This will be a good opportunity to teach older learners to conflict and conflict resolution vocabulary in a meaningful context. (Verbal/linguistic intelligence; Interpersonal intelligence; conditionals)

### **Follow Up**

The work that learners will produce in the above activities can be used for language development activities. For example, learners can brainstorm for words that describe their hometown, dictate their letters to each other, and explain their artwork to the others. Language Experience approach (Van Allen, Allen 1996) can be adapted to one of the above activities, the class dictating their description of the activity to the teacher and then revising their writing. This type of group writing offers opportunities for grammar review, word study, and development of editing and proofreading skills. Pull the most common problems from the individual assignments for group revision. (Re-write student passages to avoid drawing attention to individual student errors.) Analyzing sentence structure errors as a group can be very effective, especially if you invite the students to examine the possible options and their implications. For more details on how to generate language activities from student reading responses, see Ghosn (1999).

### **Conclusion**

The approach described above offers a more complex experience for learners than the traditional bottom-up approach to EFL. It allows learners to engage in dialogue

with their peers, and it allows them to express themselves and their understanding of the story, not only orally and in writing, but also through other creative means. It appreciates "the genuine distinctiveness of individuals who have different but equally valid ways of doing things" (Grobstein in 'Understanding the Brain'). According to Grobstein, a professor of biology at Bryn Mawr College, underlying effective learning "is strong motivation to create and make sense of things". An integrated approach to EFL is also in line with other recent research into the workings of the human brain. Robert Sylwester (in 'Understanding the Brain') suggests that skills such as reading, which

**Note:** This paper is expanded/ adapted from a presentation by the author at the 31st Annual TESOL Convention in Orlando, Florida, March 1997

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### **Suggested sidebars:**

#### Multiple Intelligences in EFL

Tap into the existing individual intelligences and aim to 'awaken' or foster development of all the intelligences.

##### Verbal / Linguistic

- listen to lectures/stories
- read/write/tell stories
- translate present material orally

##### Logical / Mathematical

- analyze grammar
- create categories for spelling/ vocabulary words
- construct Venn Diagrams / flow charts to demonstrate relationships
- write story problems with numbers
- use logical support for answers / opinions (in oral and written work)

##### Visual / Spatial

- use graphs and charts to present concepts (story maps / socio-grams) express ideas / concepts by drawing, painting, sculpting create pictorial representations of vocabulary words

##### Bodily / Kinesthetic

- hands-on activities field trips simulations

##### Musical

- associate music to story mood
- associate music to story plot / patterns

use rhythm to learn / present intonation patterns

Interpersonal

conflict resolution skills intercultural awareness literary journals with a change in point of view

Intrapersonal

activities with self-evaluation component choice in assignments personal journals / learning logs

Adapted from:

Campbell, Bruce (1994)

Christison, Mary Ann (1996).

### **Reading comprehension with musical, verbal linguistic and kinesthetic intelligence**

Write a poem, compose a song that Walid might write about his grandparents' home and about his dream of seeing it.

Discuss how the music you have listened to during this lesson reflects the events / mood in the story.

Plan a mime or dance presentation to show Walid's feelings as they change during the story.

### **The Old Key**

1997, Irma K. Ghosn

Permission given to teachers to reproduce for classroom use.

Walid looked at the big old key on the wall above his great-grandfather's picture. The picture was in a beautiful old frame, with an embroidered velvety border, which his great-grandmother had made when the picture was taken.

The heavy iron key fitted in the door of the family house in a village in Palestine, a house his great-grandfather had built of the white stone of the mountains. He had also made the wooden shutters and the massive oak door. The village blacksmith had made the lock and the key for the door.

Walid had never seen the house. The family had fled Palestine long ago, but his mother still remembered the house where she was born. She often told Walid about the

olive grove where she had played with her friends, and the vine that climbed to the roof of the house, a vine with the sweetest grapes in all of Galilee. She had described the big lemon tree that stood in the paved court yard of the house, filling the air with the scent of its blossoms. His mother had shown him the deed to the house that she kept in a drawer in the small apartment in the Borj El Barajineh refugee camp in Beirut. Walid's grandmother used to say that, one day, they would go and re-claim the home. That's why it was important to have the deed, and the key.

And now Walid finally might be able to see the house! There had been so much talk about a peace settlement and signing of documents on the even\*ng news that Walid had begun to dream about going to see the\* house. He could play under the lemon tree and climb the hills covered in sage! There weren't many trees in the camp where Walid lived. And certainly no sage covered hills!

If Walid closed his eyes, he could see the house. He could see his mother and his uncles help collect olives and then have a picnic under the biggest old olive tree. He could smell the lemon blossoms and the jasmine. He could hear his grandmother beat the first olives for pickling with tasty summer savory. He could see the sun-drenched hills surrounding the olive grove and hear the happy laughter and singing of the children.

Walid imagined how he would carry the big old key when they went to see the\* house. When they would drive around the bend on the road leading to the house, he would finally see the lemon tree. And in its shade, the house, shimmering and glistening white in the hot sun of the summer. He would get out of the car, walk up the paved path to the door. The old door, weather beaten and gray, would have a big key hole next to the big iron door knob. He would turn the key and open the door to the family home, his home!

Every day Walid dreamt his dream about the house and the door where the key fitted.

One day, there was much excitement at home. His uncle Han~ was coming to visit with news from Palestine. He had been to see how things looked like now that peace was being signed.

Walid could hardly wait! He had a hundred and one questions about the house, about the lemon tree, about the grapevine, and the olive grove. But it was not polite to interrupt the grownups' conversation. So Walid listened and tried to understand. There

was talk about 'settlements', 'projects', 'confiscations' and many other things that Walid could not understand.

Finally, his mother was preparing the after-dinner coffee, and the sweet aroma of cardamom and freshly ground coffee waffed from the tiny kitchen. His father and uncle were settling down in the living room with their hubble-bubbles, and Walid could not contain his excitement any longer.

"Uncle Hani, uncle Hani! When can we go and see our house? Look, we have the key and mama has the deed in her drawer! When can we go, when?!" His uncle did not answer, but looked at him, with his eyes suddenly glistening strangely.

"Mama, mama! Show uncle Han~ the deed and the key! Can I please carry the key when we go see the house? Can I? Can I?"

Walid could not understand the strange expression on the faces of his mother, father and uncle. They were smiling at him, and yet they looked sad.

"Walid, *habebe*," said his mother very softly. "The house is gone. Many houses were torn down to make way to the new settlements. Our house was one of them. I am sorry, *habebe*, but all we have now is our memories".

Walid's world began to spin as his eyes were fixed on the big old key on the wall. Through the hot tears that suddenly welled in his eyes, he could see the old house with the grapevine climbing up to the roof and the big lemon tree shading the children who were playing in front of the house. He could see the door open and the children run into the house.

Then the door closed.

Note: *habebe* is a common Arabic term of endearment and means the same as 'my dear'.