

THE THEORY OF MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

In the early 1980s, developmental psychologist and educational researcher Howard Gardner articulated his Theory of Multiple Intelligences that identified different ways of being smart. He initially defined seven kinds of smart, but stated that there are probably others as well, developing criteria with which to measure various abilities to classify as intelligence. The first seven included Logical-Mathematical, Verbal- Linguistic, Visual-Spatial, Bodily-Kinesthetic, Musical-Rhythmic, Interpersonal, and Intrapersonal intelligences. Since then, two more have been identified, fulfilling the criteria he established. These include the Naturalistic intelligence and Existential intelligence.

Although the definition of intelligence may be controversial, defenders of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences believe that the traditional definition is too narrow, and, therefore, a broader definition is needed to truly reflect the different ways that people think and learn, and that acknowledges a broader scope of inherent abilities. This may include one's ability, aptitude, or talent. Another main criticism of his theory is that the criteria he used for intelligence is subjective and arbitrary, and that there is not an objective test or algorithm that could determine if someone met the criteria. Therefore, it is considered "artistic judgment" rather than "scientific assessment." Be that as it may, this information broadens our scope for understanding human development, and is very useful to expand self-awareness. Furthermore, the concept of intelligence has cultural bias built in, and there are contextual ramifications to take into consideration as well. Who is to say which human abilities are considered intelligence and which are not? For a long time, only linguistic and logical-mathematical abilities were called intelligence, and often determined if one was successful in school because, traditionally, education has been focused around these two intelligences (i.e. curriculum and standardized testing). However, schools that have a broader scope and honor Multiple Intelligences, teaching to the whole child, have been met with much greater success helping children learn in the ways that are best for them. Life encompasses much more than formal schooling, which necessitates a much broader definition of intelligence. It is this variety of intelligence, known as different kinds of smart that enable people to be successful in their very divergent lives.

Howard Gardner's observations and research led him to publish Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences in 1983. Since then, much has been written about Multiple Intelligences, which applies to people of all ages. It is helpful to identify one's own strengths and stretches, along with our children's. This understanding of Multiple Intelligences informs both curriculum (what is being taught) in educational programs, as well as methodology, which is how the curriculum is taught. The fundamental assertion of this system is that there are different ways of manifesting intelligence, that different people approach learning in different ways, and that children learn better in school when their individual strengths are acknowledged and utilized, while addressing and supporting the development of those areas of

challenge. A well-rounded educational program incorporates all of these intelligences in what will lead to the development of the whole child.

THE NINE INTELLIGENCES

Logical-Mathematical: This is evident in someone who is interested in numbers, and may often think about numbers and other mathematical relationships (geometry, for example), someone who likes to solve math problems, and has the ability to do mental math and abstract reasoning. This is someone who sees the logic in problem solving, or can identify, create, and extend patterns in the world.

Verbal-Linguistic: This is someone who is strong with language, learning languages, with an interest in and facility with words, someone who likes to read and is good at reading, or someone who likes to express themselves in writing.

Visual-Spatial: This is someone who sees things in three-dimensions, like a builder or an engineer, such as a child who likes to work in the block area creating buildings and other structures, or someone who is good at putting puzzles together. It has to do with the ability to visualize with the mind's eye.

Bodily-Kinesthetic: This is someone who has very good gross-motor control and coordination, who enjoys moving their bodies. This is the athlete or dancer among us. This is also someone who is very good with his or her hands (fine motor control and coordination).

Musical-Rhythmic: This is someone drawn to music experience and sensitive to sound, rhythm, and melody. This person might be a natural singer, matching pitch easily, recalling melodies, or someone who enjoys playing a musical instrument, someone who can keep a steady beat or follow rhythm patterns, someone with a good ear for music.

Interpersonal: This is within someone considered a people-person, and very social. This is someone who is sensitive to other people's feelings, empathetic, someone who is able to work well with others, someone who is an effective communicator. Gardner equates this with Emotional Intelligence (refer to Daniel Goleman).

Intrapersonal: This involves a deep understanding of the self and self-awareness, the ability to be introspective and self-reflective, someone with a rich inner life. These may be the introverts among us.

Naturalistic: This refers to the intelligence of the naturalist, those among us who are readily able to identify plants and animals, or have a keen interest in the natural world. These are the scientists among us. This intelligence was proposed later, in 1995.

Existential: Although Gardner is less certain about this meeting all of the criteria, he recognizes this ability as a spiritual or moral intelligence, within those philosophers among us,

or that ability to think globally, or ask deep questions. Gardner wrote about this in his 1999 book.

Intuitively, many parents and educators know that different children have different strengths and challenges, and learn in different ways. I have known lots of young children who love to look at books about nature and other nonfiction books, or be read aloud to way above their own reading level, and they can remember all kinds of facts about the natural world. Furthermore, these children have really good eyes and may be the first to find little creatures outside. However, they might struggle to learn the alphabet, but I know that these children are very smart in their own way. This is an example of children with Naturalist Intelligence. Another example is those children who exhibit Interpersonal Intelligence, and have very good social skills, but may struggle academically. They get along very well with others, and can effectively negotiate peer relationships and solve conflicts independently, a crucial life skill. These children may take on leadership roles, and do very well working in cooperative learning groups. They learn best when interacting with others. It remains vitally important to highlight and build upon children's strengths in order for children to develop a positive sense of self, and the self-confidence to face challenges. Studies have also shown that building upon a child's strengths helps them to develop resiliency, which is a subject for another day.