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**Multiple Intelligences as a Partner in School Improvement**

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**MI is not a quick fix. But educators who thoughtfully use the theory to support their larger educational goals find that it is a worthy partner in creating schools of excellence.**

The introduction of new ideas in education has predictable consequences. When educators first hear about cooperative learning or performance-based assessment or reciprocal teaching, their curiosity is touched with confusion. "Is there anything really new here? Will it take time—particularly time that I don't have? What's in it for the kids, and for me? Not another fad, please."

In the 14 years since I first wrote about multiple intelligences (MI) (Gardner 1983), all of these reactions (and many more) have surfaced. Multiple intelligences has been praised as one of the most important new ideas on the educational horizon, even as it has been condemned as old wine in new bottles or even a plot against serious education. Various myths have arisen and I have tried to dispel them (Gardner 1995). And my colleagues and I have described various projects to implement MI ideas with which we have been personally involved (Gardner 1993).

My experiences with multiple intelligences in the classroom have convinced me of several things. To begin with, it is not possible initially to understand the theory completely nor to implement its implications effectively. It takes time to absorb the full implications of the theory, because it is more radical than most educators initially appreciate. It also takes time for educators to work out specific practices, whether they focus on curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, or some combination. MI may be appealing, but it is not for the faint-hearted, nor for those in search of a quick fix.

After initial experimentation with the ideas and practices of MI, practitioners realize that MI is not an end in itself. To say that one has an MI classroom or an MI school is not meaningful—one has to ask "MI for what?" As I have come to realize, those interested in MI must first state their educational goals and values. Only when educators clearly state and agree upon these larger goals—to teach for understanding, to prepare individuals for the world beyond school, to develop each person's potential fully, and to make sure that students master core knowledge—does it make sense to ask: "Can MI be useful in pursuit of this goal? If so, how?"

From my perspective, MI can be an extremely useful tool—or better, partner—in the process of creating excellent schools. It can aid in a variety of missions from engaging more children to encouraging deeper understanding to preparing students for work. It has to be a partner, however. MI cannot do the whole job by itself.

A school based on MI is never complete—it is always "in formation": there will always be new opportunities and fresh challenges. Our scientific understanding of intelligence is ever changing, and the accumulation of new information about the brain and genetics will only accelerate the process (Gardner, in press). The cartography of the disciplines is also undergoing transformation and will continue to do so. Most important, each youngster is different, with his or her distinctive (and possibly changing) profile of intelligences, and there can never be a formula for reaching each individual child. Happily, versatile technologies are being developed, and these should eventually make it much easier to personalize education. "Multiple intelligences" fits comfortably with an open approach to education, and such a stance hungers for continuing renewal, rather than premature closure.

Challenges for Practitioners

I am pleased to have the opportunity to introduce several articles in this issue of *Educational Leadership*. Each is written by an individual or individuals with considerable experience in the use of MI ideas in the classroom. In the spirit of the above remarks, I want to say a word about how the authors have used MI as a partner for their work, and then raise a challenge for further work.

Linda Campbell (p. 14) appreciates that MI ideas can influence the creation and implementation of a variety of curriculums, ranging from the arts to sciences to mathematics. She also stresses its power for conveying interdisciplinary content and concepts. My challenge to her is simple to state, though elusive to realize: How can we best demonstrate, to a sympathetic but skeptical audience, that "MI approaches" are actually effective in enhancing student learning and understanding?

Tom Hoerr (p. 43) describes a decade's worth of experience in working with MI ideas at the New City School. He documents the power of these "partner" ideas in the design of curriculum, the assessment of student progress, communication with parents, and growth as colleagues. I issue two challenges to Hoerr and his colleagues: How can multiple intelligences approaches become part of the institutional culture, so that they transcend individual teachers and principals? And how can the New City School most effectively disseminate its ideas and experiences to other educators, in the United States and abroad?

Gayle Merrefield (p. 58) uses MI ideas to guide the education of children with problems in the use of language. She describes innovative practices in the teaching of concepts and the stimulation of linguistic ability. My challenge: Do certain basic principles emerge from this work, so that other special educators can proceed systematically, rather than on a case-by-case basis?

Carol Reid and Brenda Romanoff (p. 71) have developed a program that broadens the criteria by which students are selected for a gifted program. They have also connected MI ideas with promising approaches to teaching for understanding in a thoughtful classroom. My challenge for Reid and her colleagues: If you broaden the criteria for gifted programs, how can you best alter the curriculum so that it also addresses a wider range of intelligences and domains?

Finally, in work that I had not known about, Harvey Silver, Richard Strong, and Matthew Perini (p. 22) attempt to integrate the concepts of intelligences and learning styles. I have to admit that I was suspicious of this partnership, for I have been frustrated by the constant confounding of MI with stylistic approaches (Gardner 1993, 1995). Silver and his colleagues, however, have proposed a quite interesting idea: that the ways in which particular intelligences are deployed may reflect personal stylistic preferences.

My challenge is for Silver, Strong, and Perini to continue this work and to make it more specific: for example, I would like to see an intelligence *x* style analysis of particular domains, disciplines, tasks, and adult roles. Consider, for example, the domain of law practice. If Silver and his colleagues are correct, then different lawyers might use different intelligences (for example, linguistic or interpersonal) or different lawyers might use the same intelligence (linguistic) in different ways—for example, to write a brief, argue a case in front of a jury, or convince a client not to sue. Such a fine-grained analysis would help us to better understand how individuals possessing certain intellectual strengths, and certain stylistic proclivities, make consequential decisions about career and avocation.

Two-Way Interaction Needed

One of the most gratifying aspects of my long-term involvement with multiple intelligences has been the opportunities it has given for fruitful interplay among researchers and practitioners. Everyone pays lip service to straddling the fault line between these two domains; this journal is dedicated to that very goal. In fact, however, it is no easier to link practitioners and researchers than to marry any other randomly chosen domains—inasmuch as norms, values, and rewards are all too domain-specific.

Once the educational implications of multiple intelligences had become apparent, it was equally clear that advances could not occur without regular interaction between these two communities. I know that I have benefited from this contact; I suspect that the practitioners have as well. Most important, I hope that educators working together have enhanced educational opportunities for many students.

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