

## Multiple Intelligences for young learners

Throughout our lives, we are faced with many different learning experiences. Some of these experiences make a stronger impact on us than others because of our various learning styles. As teachers, it is our responsibility to learn about these different learning styles so that we can appeal to every type of learner in our classrooms.

Howard Gardner has elaborated on the concept of learning style through what he calls “multiple intelligences” (1988: 3). Understanding these intelligences will help us to design our classrooms and curricula in a way that will appeal to all of our students. We may even be able to curb negative behavior by reaching students in different ways. If we implement activities that call upon the use of all these intelligences we will get the best out of all of our students (Santrock, 1998: 311). Their English will improve and they will retain more information for a longer period of time.

Traditional teaching focuses on only two avenues of intelligence, verbal and mathematical skills. A person who is weak in both of these will be more likely to do poorly in school. Gardner suggests that there are eight different aptitudes or intelligences. Each individual has the eight intelligences (“existentialist” was later added as an intelligence, but I have yet to see an existentialist pre-schooler in my classroom) in various amounts. Our strengths and weaknesses in each of the intelligences influence how we learn (1988: 3-5).

Verbal-linguistic is the first of Gardner’s proposed intelligences. A linguistic learner thinks in words. This person uses language to express and understand meaning. Linguistic learners are sensitive to the meaning of words, their order, and their inflection. Verbal linguistic learners usually become very skilled readers. This type of intelligence helps the learner to pick up foreign languages with ease (*ibid.*: 24).

Identifying verbal-linguistic learners in your EFL classroom is not difficult, because their ability to express themselves will stand out. As they get older, they also tend to do well at expressing themselves through writing.

Planning lessons for the verbal-linguistic learner is very easy. Some activities that appeal to this kind of learner are storytelling, joking, asking questions, and story problems. These activities allow the student to use words to learn material and express what they have learned.

A child with visual-spatial intelli-

---

*The body-kinesthetic learner can often be a handful in the classroom. It may be difficult for these children to sit still.*

---

gence has the ability to think in pictures. They perceive the visual world accurately and are able to think in three-dimensional terms. Students who learn this way are usually good at art. A person strong in this type of intelligence has a keen awareness of space and objects (*ibid.*: 133).

Students who learn best visually will most often sit near the teacher. They need to see the teacher’s body language and facial expressions to fully understand the content of a lesson. This type of learner learns best from visuals. Activities that this learner excels at include creating collages and posters, storyboarding, and painting.

Body-kinesthetic learners have the ability to control body movements and handle objects skillfully. These learners express themselves through movement. They have a good sense of balance and hand-eye coordination. Interacting with the space around them is the way that the body-kinesthetic learner processes information (*ibid.*: 144).

The body-kinesthetic learner can often be a handful in the classroom. It may be difficult for these children to sit still. They will do best if they are able to work while moving around or standing, for example, in activities that involve acting or movement. They will often excel in TPR type activities.

Logical-mathematical intelligence is also heavily implemented in traditional school systems. It involves the ability to use numbers, logic, and reason. These learners think conceptually, in logical and numerical patterns (*ibid.*: 112). This type of intelligence involves deductive and inductive reasoning skills, as well as critical and creative problem solving (*ibid.*: 122).

Logical-mathematical learners tend to ask a lot of questions. They will often excel in mathematics and science, but finding ways to help these students succeed in language learning can often be a challenge. They will do well if we help them to focus on categorizing information. Grouping concepts together and then finding a relationship between them will help children with this type of intelligence to understand.

Musical-rhythmic learners have the ability to produce and appreciate music. These musically-inclined learners think in rhythms, sounds, and patterns. They tend to respond to music immediately, either appreciating or criticizing what they hear. Many of these learners are extremely sensitive to environmental sounds such as crickets, dripping, bells, and trains (Santrock, 1998: 345). They are also very sensitive to patterns and

pitch in sound. Musical-rhythmic learners are able to recognize, create, and recreate sound using their voice or instruments (Gardner, 1988: 125).

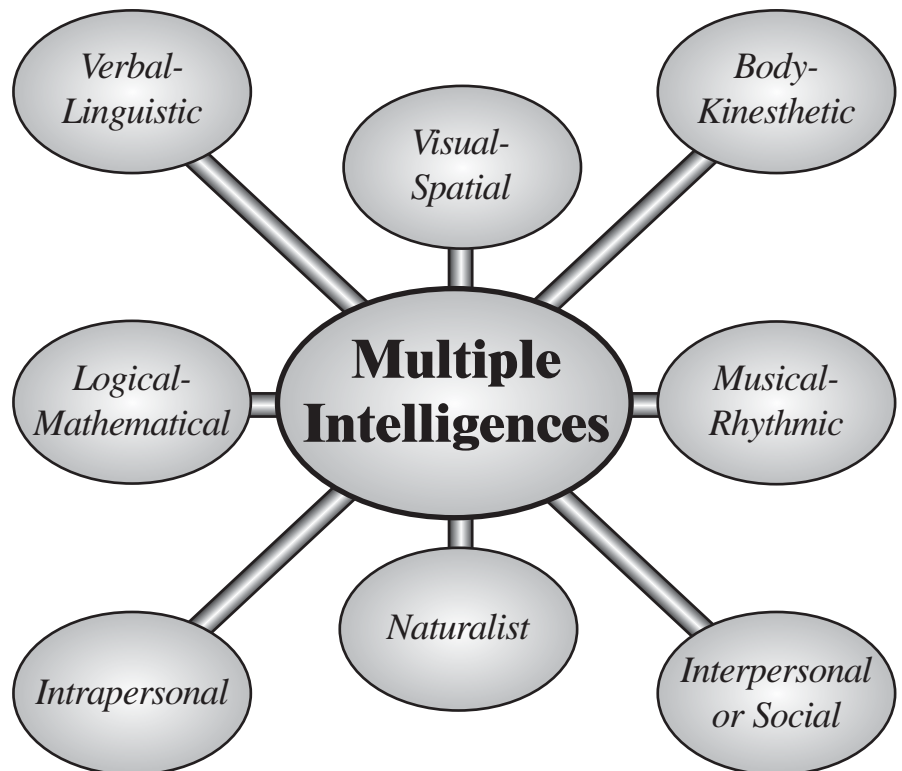
Gardner suggests that the musical-rhythmic intelligence tends to be very strong in young learners. Pre-school children have the ability to learn musical patterns easily, and they rarely forget them. He points out that many adults can still remember tunes from when they were very young. (*ibid.*: 78). This suggests that musical and rhythmic activities should be used extensively with young learners, as their musical-rhythmic intelligence helps them to learn more easily and affords a high rate of retention.

Intrapersonal intelligence learners tend to be very introverted. They will often keep to themselves in the classroom. These learners are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses. They are also aware of their feelings and are able to regulate their moods and emotional responses (*ibid.*: 110). They enjoy thinking and meditating on ideas. Activities that will stimulate this type of intelligence include drawing pictures to show meaning.

Interpersonal or social intelligence students identify themselves through their relationships with other people (*ibid.*: 138). They have the ability to see things from other points of view and to understand how others think and feel (Santrock, 1998: 293). They often have the ability to sense others' feelings, intentions, and motivations.

Organization is a key strength, although they sometimes resort to manipulation in order to make things run smoothly. The interpersonal learners are the leaders in the classroom (Gardner, 1988: 139). These learners are able to understand your role as the teacher as well as the plights of the students. They will do best working in groups or with partners. Activities such as reporting, interviewing, teaching, and choreographing are things that the interpersonal learner will excel in.

The naturalist is the eighth learning style. The naturalist has an understanding of the natural world. This



person's interest and understanding lies in plants and animals (*ibid.*: 155).

In the classroom the naturalist will often be an observer. They may often have collections of insects and rocks which they could bring and share with the class. They will benefit from activities such as collecting leaves, growing plants, and experimenting. Cooking and home economics related activities can also be effective for the naturalist (*ibid.*: 156).

Each of the intelligences involves unique cognitive skills. Once a child's learning style is determined, then accommodating their particular learning style in the classroom can greatly increase the likelihood that the child will learn.

Getting to know the learning styles of the children in your classroom at the beginning of the year will help you to plan your curriculum effectively for the rest of the year. Knowing about learning styles and multiple intelligence is helpful for everyone, especially for teachers of young learners with short attention spans.

While there may be little or no concrete research to back up Gardner's theories, experience suggests that using knowledge about learning styles in the classroom

works. Knowing your teaching style and the learning styles of your students will help you to develop coping strategies, compensate for weaknesses, and capitalize on strengths. It is every teacher's responsibility to make the learning process a pleasurable one for all students; becoming familiar with the different learning styles will help us to do just that.

### References

- Gardner, H. (1988). *Frames of Mind*. New York: Basic Books.  
 Santrock, J. (1998). *Child Development*. New York: McGraw-Hill.  
 Traub, J. (November, 1999). "Multiple Intelligence Disorder" on Channel Seven News. New York: ABC Network.

### Suggested further reading:

- Berman, M. (1998). *A Multiple Intelligences Road to an ELT Classroom*. Carmarthen: Crown House Publishing.  
 Berman, M. (2001). *ELT Through Multiple Intelligences*. London: NetLearn Publications.  
 Cunningsworth, A. (1984). *Evaluating and Selecting EFL Teaching Materials*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.  
 Gardner, H. (1999). *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century*. New York: Basic Books.