

INSTRUCTIONALModule

Theory of Multiple Intelligences

What is the theory of multiple intelligences?

"All students have abilities, but in our naïve belief that some strengths and learning styles are more valuable than others, we have excluded many learners from feeling capable and from being successful."

—Debbie Silver, *Drumming to the Beat of a Different Marcher*

Preparing for the Project

In 1983, Dr. Howard Gardner, a distinguished cognitive psychologist at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, published the seminal book *Frames of Mind*, which describes his research and theory of multiple intelligences. Writing for other researchers—not educators—Gardner was initially surprised by the interest of educators in his work. Gardner's experience with stroke victims and people who had injuries to particular parts of their brains, along with his work with gifted people, led him and his team to understand

that intelligence cannot be measured by a simple IQ test. Instead, there are many kinds of intelligence. Currently, Gardner discusses eight intelligences, with comments as well about another one.

Gardner insists that intelligence should be considered within a context. Thus he defines intelligence as "the ability to solve problems, or to create products, that are valued within one or more cultural settings" (Gardner, 1983).

These are the intelligences that Gardner has identified so far:

Linguistic intelligence: People with a strong linguistic intelligence often love to read, play with words, write, do crossword puzzles, and invent word games.

Logical-mathematical intelligence: People with a strong logical-mathematical intelligence often like math, computer programming, logic puzzles, and problem solving.

Spatial intelligence: People with a strong spatial intelligence often read maps well, know where they are in space in terms of directions, and may be artists.

Musical intelligence: People with a strong musical intelligence often enjoy and appreciate musical performances, may play an instrument or sing, enjoy melodic speech and writing, and may compose music.

Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence: People with a strong bodily-kinesthetic intelligence often need to move to learn, enjoy feeling their bodies move, may be athletes or sports enthusiasts, and are physically active.

Naturalist intelligence: People with a strong naturalist intelligence enjoy being outside, see and enjoy patterns in nature, are proficient at understanding the natural world.

Interpersonal intelligence: People with a strong interpersonal intelligence learn best by talking ideas over with other people, like collaborating on projects, and enjoy meeting and spending time with people.

Intrapersonal intelligence: People with a strong intrapersonal intelligence learn best on their own, at least at first, and have a good understanding of their own thinking.

The ninth intelligence Gardner and his colleagues are exploring has been dubbed the "**existential intelligence.**" Since this doesn't meet all the criteria for an intelligence, such as a locus in the brain, Gardner is hesitant about including it, but he acknowledges the importance of the sense of who we are in the world, and that all of us come to terms with this idea in some way. He is making room for this intelligence among the others because it is such a fundamental aspect of being human, and some people are quite adept at understanding themselves in relation to a sense of the spiritual or something beyond ourselves.

Traditionally, schools work well for students with high linguistic, logical-mathematical, and intrapersonal intelligence, and not so well for those with high bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, or interpersonal intelligence. Since Gardner's research, many educators have embraced the philosophy he put forth, and have developed curricula and methods of instruction that attempt to provide multiple ways for students to engage with information and personalize their own learning.

A powerful example of an educational system that uses the theory of multiple intelligences as the foundation of its work can be seen at the Key Learning Community, a K-12 public school in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Started by a group of teachers who believe that putting Gardner's theory into practice best meets the needs of all learners and encourages them to explore their own strengths and build upon them to address their weaknesses, the Key Learning Community was founded in 1987, with elementary-age students. As the students grew older, parents lobbied for expanding the program; 2003 saw the first class of high school graduates, which included students who had attended Key since kindergarten.

Explore the article *The Key Learning Community: Cultivating Multiple Intelligences* and the accompanying video, "Key Learning Community."

Essential components of the philosophy of the school include Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow, Ernest Boyer's human commonalities, and David Henry Feldman's ideas on assessment.

Another article, *A Principal Reflects on a Successful Learning Community*, by one of Key's founders and its long-time principal, Patricia Bolaños, includes more information about this remarkable school and its practices.

As you read the articles and view the film segment, here are some questions to consider:

- What evidence do I see and read that multiple intelligences are being addressed?
- What evidence do I see and read that curriculum standards are being addressed?
- How would I adapt what I see and read to my own classroom and school?
- What methods of assessment will I use to determine if my students are learning what I want them to learn?
- What methods of assessment will I use to determine how focusing on multiple intelligences makes a difference in student achievement?
- How can I share with my colleagues what I'm doing, so as to expand their understanding and mine?

The following Web site(s) appear on this page:

The Key Learning Community: Cultivating Multiple Intelligences article: www.edutopia.org/957

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow: www.616.ips.k12.in.us/Theories/Flow/default.aspx

Ernest Boyer's human commonalities: www.616.ips.k12.in.us/Theories/Commonalities/default.aspx

David Henry Feldman's ideas on assessment: www.616.ips.k12.in.us/Theories/Assessment/default.aspx

A Principal Reflects on a Successful Learning Community article: www.edutopia.org/479