Multiple Intelligences

Howard Gardner revolutionized modern thinking about intelligence and creativity with his *Theory of Multiple Intelligences.* This article gives a brief introduction to some of his ideas.

In the mid-twentieth century the dominant idea in much of the Western world was that intelligence can be reduced to three main areas: the logical-mathematical, the linguistic, and the spatial. Intelligence was often measured through written testing, generally in multiple-choice format, and the test results were expressed in numbers, called the IQ or Intelligence Quotient.

In the USA, for example, students were regularly subjected to a battery of written *intelligence tests* and the test results served as a tool to stream students into learning groups. An IQ of 100 was considered average. Those scoring above 100, for example, were streamed into one group, whilst those falling below the mark were streamed into another group. The disadvantages of this type of testing system are obvious: not only is it divisive, but it relies heavily on linguistic and logical abilities.

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In his book *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York, 1983, Basic Books), Howard Gardner, Professor at Harvard Graduate School of Education, presents a very different approach to the question of intelligence. First of all, he defines an 'intelligence' as *the ability to solve problems or create products that are valued in one or more cultural settings.* Secondly, he presents a set of eight criteria which must be fulfilled before one can speak of 'an intelligence'. These criteria cover a wide spectrum and are too specialized to be covered in this short article. Thirdly, he proposes that intelligence falls into seven capacities, which he named *the multiple intelligences*. Each of these seven intelligences is characterized by a particular set of abilities, or modes of operation. Gardner presents and discusses each of the seven intelligences individually; in actual life, however, they seldom function in isolation. More often they interact with each other in constant change and flow.

The seven intelligences

The linguistic intelligence
This intelligence includes the ability to interpret and explain ideas and information through language, to understand the relationship between form and content, as well as the ability to use language to excite the emotions.

The musical intelligence
One with a well-developed musical intelligence displays a sensitivity for beat, rhythm, tone, and also understands the relationship between sound and feeling.

The logical-mathematical intelligence
This intelligence is commonly associated with 'scientific thinking'. It also comes into play when we solve problems by establishing relations between pieces of information that may seem separate, or when we are involved in planning, prioritizing and systematizing.

The spatial intelligence
This includes the ability to perceive the visual world accurately through the mind's eye. Sculptors and architects, for example, have highly-developed spatial intelligence.

The bodily-kinesthetic intelligence
Characteristic of this intelligence is the ability to control one's bodily motions, as well as the capacity to handle objects skillfully.

The interpersonal intelligence
Characteristic of this intelligence is the ability to relate to other people's feelings, to listen to, and understand what other people seem to be saying, to gain rapport with another person.

The intrapersonal intelligence
Self-awareness, the capability to understand oneself and one's relation to others, as well as the ability to be alone with oneself are characteristics of this intelligence.

Motivation through MI

According to Gardner all human beings possess all the intelligences to a greater or lesser degree, but no two individuals, not even identical twins,

have the same intellectual make-up. Furthermore, a person's abilities are not carved in stone; each of the intelligences can be further nurtured and developed. As language teachers we can tap into this potential by creating learning activities that address the various talents of each individual learner. By doing so, we will find that their motivation, success and self-esteem rise as they improve their language skills and learn more about their own intrinsic talents.

MI and course books

In modern course books, such as the *Fairway* series, or *At Work*, Gardner's theory has been put into practice. A few examples serve to illustrate how this has been done.
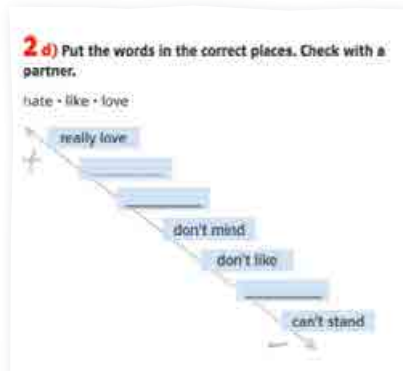
Figure 1: *Fairway 2*, p. 53

Ordering language on a diagram or scale (see Figure 1) activates the logical-mathematical intelligence. Of course, the linguistic intelligence also comes into play.
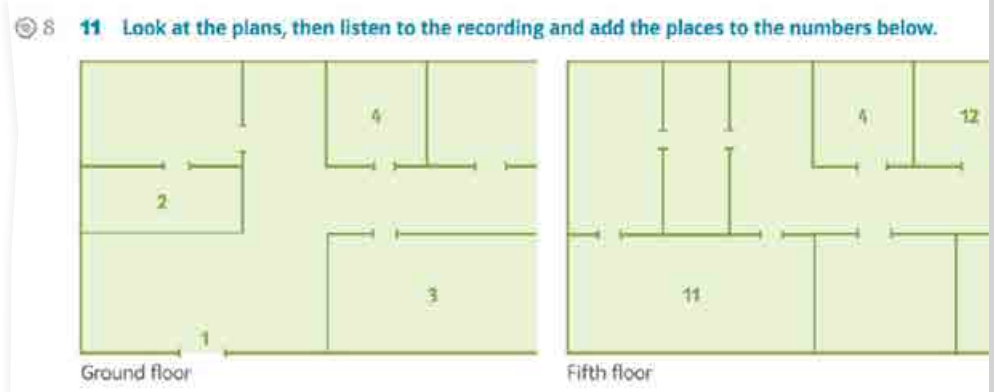
Figure 3: *Fairway Refresher B1*, p. 30

Figure 2: *At work*, p. 16

In the activity in Figure 2 learners listen to a description of the layout of an office building and put the places mentioned into the diagram. This activity focuses strongly on the spatial intelligence.

In addition to the linguistic intelligence, the activity in Figure 3 activates several other intelligences, the musical intelligence being the main one. The intrapersonal intelligences come into play when learners consider their own feelings about the music. The adjectives in the diagram represent a particular category of adjectives, namely states of mind; categorizing is a characteristic of the logical-mathematical mode of thinking.
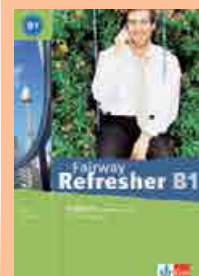
Further Developments

Over the past twenty-five years Gardner has developed and revised various aspects of his theory. In the mid-90s he proposed that there may be other intelligences. He felt there was enough evidence to add what he called the naturalistic intelligence (the ability to understand, and be in harmony with nature) to the original list of seven. He felt there was also some evidence for what he called the existential intelligence (the intelligence of "big questions"). In *Intelligence Reframed, Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century*, (New York, 1999, Basic Books) Gardner discusses these and other important

issues regarding his theory – a fascinating read for anyone interested in his ideas.

Harvard University's Project Zero website, www.pz.harvard.edu, provides more information about Gardner's publications, projects and research as does the website www.howardgardner.com.   ‹‹