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# TEACHERS APPLY MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES THEORY IN THEIR CLASSROOMS

**T**he Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) sounds good, but some teachers will feel skeptical. They wonder: How can I develop and teach units that allow students to use their individual intelligences, while still covering the required content of the course? Does this really work?

As teacher-educators from La Sierra University School of Education, I and my colleagues sought to answer this question in an LSU summer graduate course at Avondale College in Coorانبong, New South Wales, Australia. The course dealt with strategies for including students with learning disabilities in the regular classroom. After studying Thomas Armstrong's *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom* (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1994), each of the 15 students in the class developed a teaching unit with these requirements:

- It should be for a grade level they would teach the following school year.
- It had to cover at least 10 instructional periods.
- It must include a variety of teaching strategies and projects.
- It had to use as many of the seven intelligences as was practical.

At the conclusion of the unit, teachers were asked to reflect on the overall success of the unit, considering their own perspective as well as the students' reactions. They were to include an evaluation of the students' interest,

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motivation, participation, and academic performance. (An "in process" grade was entered in order to allow the teachers time to complete the assignment after school was in session.)

Several teachers prepared units for elementary school students, while others focused on students at the secondary level. Units were prepared for Bible, science, literature, and social studies. Below are brief descriptions of three of these units, with sample learning activities and projects that include strategies for each of the seven intelligences.

BY BETTY T. MCCUNE

## **Units Incorporating MI Theory** *Life in Vietnam*

One teacher prepared a unit on life in Vietnam for an elementary social studies class. She placed learning centers for the seven MI categories around the room and required students to do at least one activity or project at each center. Here are some examples of the activities for this unit:

### **Linguistic**

- Do the crossword puzzle, using the clues relating to the geography of Vietnam.
- Read three of the legends from George F. Shultz's *Vietnamese Legends* (Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1965), and write your own "Vietnamese" legend using a similar topic and images.
- Read the chapter on Ho Chi Minh and do the following (some logical/mathematical and spatial aspects were also included):

- (1) In the circle below, write the key words from the first paragraph.
- (2) Inside the shape of Uncle Ho's hat, list adjectives that describe him.
- (3) Calculate Ho Chi Minh's age at the time of his death, and write the figure in the diamond shape.
- (4) In each of the four boxes, sketch a pictograph to illustrate one of the occupations in which Ho Chi Minh engaged.

- Imagine that you are living in the U.S.A. or Australia during the years of the Vietnam War. Many people have been drafted to fight in Vietnam. You are asked to deliver a

speech *For* or *Against* the draft. Present your speech on an audio cassette tape. Remember to make your speech convincing.

### **Musical, Spatial, and Bodily/ Kinesthetic**

- View the video of Vietnamese music. Even though you cannot understand the words, what do you think the songs are about? How do the images on the video help you to decide about the themes of the songs? Which instruments in the video can you identify?

- Listen to protest songs that were written about the war in Vietnam (e.g., Bob Dylan's "Blowing in the Wind").

- Experiment with traditional Vietnamese musical instruments:

- (1) Bamboo flute (the Vietnamese name is *sao*, meaning "a bird"). This small model is played like a recorder, while longer models are played horizontally like a flute. Experiment with playing the flute.

How is the sound produced?

Can you compose a little tune?

Make up some Vietnamese "mood music" with the flute and describe the visual setting in which it could be used.

- (2) Drum: Look at and feel the drum. What is it made of?

How is it constructed?

How is the sound produced?

How can different sound effects be

## *Overall, teachers and students responded very positively to the units.*

produced?

Produce sound effects suitable for an Autumn Moon Festival dance.

### **Logical/Mathematical**

- Using the table of information given, construct a large time-line of Vietnamese history from 1954-1991. Draw your time-line to scale.

- Using the figures given in the table, construct a graph showing the production of rice each year between 1976 and 1990.

### **Bodily/Kinesthetic Intelligence**

- Body map: Imagine that your body represents the country of Vietnam. Your head is the north, and your feet are the south. Using a map, decide which parts of your body represent features on the map (e.g., your nose represents Hanoi City and your toes represent the Mekong Delta). Explain your body map to four other class members.

- Autumn Moon Festival lion dance:

Choreograph and perform a lion dance for the children's Autumn Moon Festival. The dance will require the following characters: lion's head, prince of the earth, drummer, cymbals, dancers to represent the tail of the lion, dancers to carry lanterns.

- Mime: Prepare a series of mimes based on Vietnamese activities (e.g., fishing, planting rice, riding on a water buffalo, herding the ducks to the pond, playing badminton, and riding a bicycle in busy traffic). Perform your

mimes for the class.

### **Australian Science**

A seventh-grade science teacher assigned a unit on scientific advances developed in Australia or by Australians. Working in cooperative groups, students were instructed to select seven scientific advances and present each one in a different way, as described below:

- **The William Shakespeare Way—using written/verbal skills.** Write a poem/limerick or a short story about the Australian inventor and his or her invention. Present or perform it for the class (all members of the group must be involved in the performance).

- **The Albert Einstein Way—using logical/mathematical skills.** Design an experiment or demonstration related to another Australian scientific finding and present it to the class.

- **The Thomas Edison Way—using body movement skills:** Build a model, do a drama, or perform a mime to tell the class about an important Australian scientific finding.

- **Pablo Picasso Way—using visual/spatial skills.** Explore another Australian scientist's work by using a variety of art forms, including pictures, charts, and pop-up diagrams. You must show all of the important ideas visually in such a way that it needs little verbal or written explanation.

- **The Ray Charles Way—using rhythmic/musical skills.** Compose and perform a song or a rhythmic presentation to explain another Australian scientific discovery to the class.

- **The Mother Teresa Way—using people skills.** You be the teacher. Provide a learning activity in which the groups of class members have to cooperate to brainstorm ideas on butcher paper and discuss the scientific advance you selected. Teach each group to arrange ideas in an organized way by using a semantic map.

- **The Emily Dickinson Way—using your feelings.** Show how things affect you on the inside. Choose a topic about which you really feel impressed. (Perhaps the invention you have chosen has saved the life of someone you love, or has made it possible to communicate with people around the world). In story form, tell how this advance caused you

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**Australian teachers enrolled in the author's summer graduate course prepare lesson plans using multiple intelligence techniques.**

to feel the way you do. Your story must touch several times upon your own feelings to show the class how things affect you on the inside.

### **God's People in Progress**

One teacher designed a secondary-level Bible unit to explore the characteristics of God's people—they struggle, they persist, they serve; and God continues to love them, regardless of whether they fail or succeed. Students were given a list of Bible personalities, and told to do both individual and group work, with the groups deciding on strategies for completing the assignments. The following activities are a sample of those planned for the unit:

#### **Linguistic**

- Write a biographical sketch of three people selected from the list.
- Write an obituary for each of these three people.
- Write a script for a play involving one of these characters.

#### **Logical/Mathematical**

- Construct an accurate time-line for each of the three people chosen.

#### **Spatial**

- Design a collage or mural of the lives of the three people.
- Design a cover for a biographical video on one of the three characters.
- Construct a poster or model of the key events in the life of one of the people chosen.

#### **Musical**

- Choose a song with lyrics that focus on the life of one of the individuals.
- Write and perform a rap song relating to the events and overall theme of the character's life.

#### **Kinesthetic**

- Act out a mime or charade dealing with events in the life of one of the biblical characters.

#### **Interpersonal**

- Set up a panel to discuss the similarities and differences among the three individuals you have studied.

#### **Intrapersonal**

- Write a personal diary for each of

the three characters. Pretending that you are the people, reflect upon events in their lives, and the way they may have felt and responded to these events.

- Write an article explaining from your point of view the ups and downs of a Christian's experience.

### **Evaluation of the Units**

Overall, teachers and students responded very positively to the units. Teachers commented on the outcomes of the units as follows:

- "Overall I consider this experiment in using the seven intelligences approach to teaching as being a very valuable and worthwhile experience. As a primary teacher, I am already used to integrating my themes to a certain extent, but this theory has given me more structure and a wealth of ideas for increasing the students' abilities in these areas. Even though it seemed as if we were continually rushing to get the work completed, the unit was successful in accomplishing its goals. One boy, in particular, who has a dreadful attitude about school and a very poor academic self-concept, began to be interested in what was happening and was motivated to learn and read during these classes. His parents were also very happy with the change they noted in him. This unit was interesting and motivating both to me and the students, and we all learned a lot."

- "I was very impressed with the effort and participation most students put into their research projects. The children seemed to enjoy the freedom to choose their own way of presenting their projects and there were some excellent results."

- "The multiple intelligences approach to learning has potential in the science courses. I plan to use the unit again and fine-tune it for future years."

- "The two grade 10 classes I taught were divided according to achievement level. It was interesting to note that the class with the 'brighter' students did better in the writing projects, while the other class did much better in artistic endeavors. This seems to confirm the theory of MI."

- "Students needed little motivation—they were keen to participate in the work. I feel that the overall average of the class did improve. As teacher, I certainly enjoyed specific performances and other as-

signments—creativity was staring me in the face more often than normal."

One teacher had students evaluate the unit activities and found that 89 percent preferred this method of learning to traditional class presentations and assignments. They further ranked their assignment preferences as follows:

- musical (most popular)
- spatial
- kinesthetic
- linguistic and intrapersonal
- logical/mathematical
- interpersonal (least popular)

One teacher had required high school students to research the development of an invention that had personally affected their lives, and to report to the class. They were to express their feelings about the way that particular technology had affected them. Although medical technologies had touched many students' lives, they found it difficult to convey their emotions in this area. He concluded that his students felt reluctant to use intrapersonal skills, or at least to share their emotions in a class setting.

In conclusion, teaching with the Theory of Multiple Intelligences can work. The experiences of these teachers indicate that not only can all students be challenged by using techniques that come more naturally to them, but the learning derived from these experiences seems to be both valuable and enjoyable for students and teachers alike. 🍃

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#### **REFERENCE**

Armstrong, Thomas. *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom*. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1994.