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Incorporating the Theory of Multiple Intelligences into Standardized Instructions

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Incorporating the Theory of Multiple Intelligences

into Standardized Instructions

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Are we teaching to the best of our abilities? How can we better serve our students? How can we effectively measure students' achievements? Do the answers to these questions lie in traditional approaches to teaching or do we deviate from the norm in order to seek out better approaches to reaching our students' full potential? The search for answers has prompted disillusioned teachers and others in the education arena to look beyond the traditional standards-based method of teaching to a variety of emerging methods all claiming to be more effective in the development of students. One of these methods is based on the theory of multiple intelligences (MI).

Developed by Howard Gardner, the MI theory is considered one of the most significant new approaches to teaching and learning. The theory was first introduced in Gardner's book, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, and has since become the framework for many of the teaching techniques being utilized by teachers. The basic idea is straightforward: Human beings use at least seven (an eighth and ninth were added later) relatively autonomous intellectual capacities to approach problem solving and "create products." The seven are as follows: linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily kinesthetic intelligence, musical intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and intrapersonal intelligence.

According to Tomlinson (2000), a great majority of teachers are confined to teaching a curriculum that is designed to measure and meet mandatory academic standards i.e. standardized/high stakes testing; that too much instructional emphasis is placed on teaching to the test. Tomlinson (2000) contends that this standard approach to teaching is conflicting because

teachers are “admonished to attend to student differences, but they must ensure that every student becomes competent in the same subject matter and can demonstrate the competencies on an assessment that is differentiated neither in form nor in time constraints” (para. 8).

While standards-based curricula remain the norm, studies have shown that integrating MI teaching techniques into standardized curricula can prove effective in reaching and sharpening student potential (Hodge, 2005). Haley’s (2004) study on the benefits of using an MI-based curriculum found that *how* and *how well* a student learns can strongly depend on teaching instructions and styles. The study also indicated that when compared to students taught by a standards-based curriculum, MI-based students performed better academically in addition to having better outlooks and higher satisfaction levels. Ultimately, the study showed that the creativity, freedom, and flexibility offered through MI-based instructions were the factors for all of the positives demonstrated. A study conducted by Reidel, Tomaszewski, and Weaver (2005) on how MI impacts achievement in the area of reading yielded similar results: Utilizing MI surveys, students gained insight into their strengths leading to self-selection of reading activities that further reinforced those strengths. The outcome from pre - and post-tests showed a significant increase in levels of understanding and motivation.

Referring to the integration of MI in the classroom, Smith, Odhiambo, and El Khateeb (2000) assert that many teachers find MI to be credible and are making efforts to infuse MI into their curricula in order to ascertain students’ intellectual strengths/weaknesses and prevailing intelligence(s). Similarly, a meta-analysis conducted by Hodge (2005) on the relationship between MI-based instructions and academic achievement at the secondary level reveals that a major reason for teachers’ acceptance of MI is due to recognition of student individuality. As

such, teachers are able to hone in on each student's cognitive abilities and unique traits, thus affording equality to each and every student.

The literature cited above is just a preliminary review of existing research found on the positive impact of an MI-based curriculum on students, teachers, and administrators. These positive findings also hold true for a study conducted by Mettetal, Jordan, and Harper (1997). However, in another aspect of this study, Mettetal et al. (1997) point out that although teachers appeared to "embrace" Gardner's theory, their positive attitudes tend to lean more towards the theory itself rather than how the theory affects curricula. In referring to this aspect of the results, the researchers state, "Perhaps the most surprising finding was the strong impact of the concept of multiple intelligences, apart from the impact of the MI curriculum" (p. 120). After the first year of implementation (1994-1995 school year), research findings on teachers' attitudes regarding MI seemed to support this by noting that there was an overall unevenness between teachers who implemented the MI curriculum and those who didn't due to feeling overwhelmed by the idea of having to redesign their existing curricula. The study does report, however, that during the follow-up year, the implementation of MI-based curricula had increased among teachers and was much more balanced.

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Haley, M.H. (2004). Learner-centered instruction and the theory of multiple

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intelligences with second language learners. *Teachers College Record*, 106(1), 163-180. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9620.2004.00326.x>

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Mettetal, G., Jordan, C., & Harper, S. (1997). Attitudes towards a multiple intelligences curriculum. *Journal of Educational Research*, 91(2), 115-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220679709597529>

Reidel, J., Tomaszewski, T., & Weaver, D. (2003). *Improving student academic reading achievement through the use of multiple intelligence teaching strategies* (ED479204). ERIC. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED479204>

Smith, W., Odhiambo, E., & El Khateeb, H. (2000). *The typologies of successful and unsuccessful students in the core subjects of language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies using the theory of multiple intelligences in a high school environment in Tennessee* (ED448190). ERIC. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED448190>

Tomlinson, C. (2000). Reconcilable differences? Standards-based teaching and differentiation. *Educational Leadership*, 58(1), 6-11.

http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/sept00/vol58/num01/Reconcilable_Differences%C2%A2_Standards-Based_Teaching_and_Differentiation.aspx

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