



Multiple Intelligences

Generally, when we think of “intelligence,” we think of the kind that is measured in tests. A person’s score on an IQ test is his or her intelligence, right? Well, not necessarily.

The idea that intelligence can be measured by a standardized test has been around for nearly 100 years. “IQ” stands for “intelligence quotient.” In most people’s minds, IQ refers to how smart a person is. However, from the beginning, the idea of an IQ test has been controversial. Various intelligence tests have been criticized for being “culturally biased” and only testing a very narrow range of skills. A new concept of intelligence has grown in popularity in the past two decades. The idea is that there are multiple intelligences—many ways that people are smart.

How We Are Smart: Introduction to Multiple Intelligences

The Big Idea

The idea that you can determine a person's intelligence based solely on logical and analytic skills is simply just wrong. So says Dr. Howard Gardner and increasing numbers of educators and psychologists. Gardner says that people have "multiple intelligences."

He thinks that understanding what these are and how they work can help people take advantage of their unique skills.

The concept of multiple intelligences has been around since 1983. It is fairly obvious that people have different skills, but it was Gardner who first referred to these skills as intelligences.

There are people who object to Gardner's ideas. They think that the logical and analytic skills that are tested by standardized tests are the most important. They think that the definition of intelligence is lessened if we also include skills in sports, music, and art, for instance.

Nevertheless, Gardner's ideas have caught on with many educators. They point to evidence that the brain has specialized areas for specific skills. And also that some people are clearly brilliant in a specific area while being limited in another. Many schools are now including curriculum that recognizes and builds on students multiple intelligences.

Savants

Gardner looked at studies of "savants" when he was working on his theory of multiple intelligences. These are people who have remarkable mental abilities, far beyond the capability of ordinary people, but whose other skills may be severely limited. Some savants are born that way. Others gain their abilities after an accident.

Some scientists who study savants believe they are evidence that there is genius potential in all of us but our minds are too busy with normal functioning to let it out.

Examples

Derek Paravicini is a blind English autistic savant. An injury received shortly after his birth left him severely disabled. However, he can play any piece of music after hearing it only once.



Alonzo Clemons suffered a severe brain injury as a child and has an IQ of around 50 points (very low). Yet he can create a highly accurate and detailed sculpture of any animal after only a brief

glimpse of its picture.

The Eight Multiple Intelligences



Verbal-Linguistic (Word Smart)

Characteristics: Effectively uses words, likes to write and talk.

Jobs: Writer, public speaker, storyteller, salesperson, editor



Logical-Mathematical (Number Smart)

Characteristics: Effectively uses numbers, likes to think through a problem

Jobs: accountant, mathematician, check-out clerk, computer programmer



Spatial (Picture Smart)

Characteristics: Thinks in images and pictures

Jobs: artist, architect, interior designer, guide, cab driver



Bodily-Kinesthetic (Body Smart)

Characteristics: Uses one's body to express ideas and feelings

Jobs: dancer, athlete, craftsperson, surgeon, motorcycle racer



Musical-Rhythmic (Music Smart)

Characteristics: Enjoys and responds to music, melody, and rhythm

Jobs: musician, singer, composer, disk jockey



Interpersonal (People Smart)

Characteristics: Works well with others, a team player

Jobs: social worker, supervisor, teacher, coach, child care worker



Intrapersonal (Self Smart)

Characteristics: Works well on one's own, self-reflective

Jobs: therapist, poet, philosopher



Naturalist (Nature Smart)

Characteristics: Enjoys and has a sense about nature

Jobs: park ranger, cook, landscaper, gardener

Multiple Intelligences | Key Terms

culturally biased	A term used to describe questions on a test that are easier to answer for one cultural or racial group than another.
IQ	Intelligence Quotient: A score on one of several standardized tests that attempt to measure intelligence. IQ tests are used to predict educational success but have been criticized because of their singular emphasis on logical and analytic skills and cultural bias.
multiple intelligences	An educational theory first developed by Howard Gardner. It suggests that people have multiple intelligences and schools should support these individual skills.
psychologist	A professional trained in the science of mind and behavior who may provide therapy or study mental health issues. Unlike a psychologist, a psychiatrist is also trained as a medical doctor.
savant	A person who has brilliant skills in a specific topic but limited skills in most others.

Discussion Points

1. People have different strengths and skills. Howard Gardner thinks that some of these could be considered as intelligences, just as important as the logical and analytic skills measured on standardized intelligence tests. Do you agree or disagree with Gardner? Why?
2. Savants have remarkable skills in a single area. If you could have exceptional skills in one area, what would it be?
3. Gardner identified eight intelligences. Other people suggest that there should be more. Are there any specific skills you think might be considered as a special intelligence? How about humor, for example?
4. Do you know in what intelligences you might be strong? You can assess yourself by going online to literacyworks.org. <http://literacyworks.org/mi/intro/index.html>