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How to Address Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom

Tips and resources for putting MI theory into practice.



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Journalist

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This how-to article accompanies the feature "Elementary School Kids Show Their Multiple Intelligences (<http://www.edutopia.org/multiple-intelligences-immersion-enota>) ."

Multiple-intelligences theory can provide a flexible approach to good teaching, say teachers and administrators at the Enota Multiple Intelligences Academy (<http://www2.gcssk12.net/schoolsites/eesweb/index.html>) in Gainesville, Georgia. Tailoring classroom activities to individual students' needs, interests, and strengths makes sense -- and, at this school, it has proved extremely effective. Whether you're interested in starting an MI-themed school or incorporating some of the MI philosophy into classroom activities, here are a few tips and resources that work at Enota:

Read a Book

Enota staff spent nearly a year -- plus ongoing professional-development hours -- studying MI theory and its application. From Howard Gardner's groundbreaking book *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* to specific lesson-plan ideas from Thomas R. Hoerr, former head of the New City School (<http://www.newcityschool.org>) , here's a list of books that are helpful in conceptualizing and effectively incorporating the multiple intelligences into classroom activities:

- *Becoming a Multiple Intelligences School* (<http://shop.ascd.org/productdisplay.cfm?productid=100006E4>) , by Thomas R. Hoerr
- *Eight Ways of Knowing: Teaching for Multiple Intelligences* (<http://www.corwinpress.com/booksProd-Desc.nav?prodId=Book228661>) , by David Lazear
- *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (<http://search.perseusbooksgroup.com/book/paperback/frames-of-mind/9780465024339>) , by Howard Gardner
- *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century* (<http://search.perseusbooksgroup.com/book/paperback/intelligence-reframed/9780465026111>) , by Howard Gardner

- *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom* (<http://shop.ascd.org/ProductDetail/tabid/55/ProductId/1037/Subsystem/INV/ProductCode/109007/Default.aspx>) , by Thomas Armstrong
- *Teaching and Learning Through Multiple Intelligences* (<http://www.pearsonhighered.com/educator/academic/product/0,3110,0205363903,00.html>) , by Linda and Bruce Campbell and Dee Dickinson

Go to Enota's bibliography page (<http://www2.gcssk12.net/schoolsites/eesweb/academics.html>) for more resources.

Use Online Resources

A simple Google search will go far, says Enota fourth-grade teacher Audrey Thornton. Beyond that, she recommends adding to general MI knowledge by gathering ideas from specific online destinations. She uses articles, teachers' blogs, and resource-intensive websites. Here are a few links from her MI trove:

- "What's the Big Attraction? (<http://education.jhu.edu/newhorizons/strategies/topics/mi/wilson1.htm>) "
- This article by education professor Leslie Owen Wilson explains and defends the use of MI in the classroom.
- Multiple Intelligences for Adult Literacy and Education (<http://www.literacyworks.org/mi/intro/index.html>)
- Although this page specifically addresses adult education, there is still a wealth of useful information for K-12 teachers, including an overview of MI theory and its educational applications, ways to assess learners' intelligences and skills, and subject-specific ways to leverage the different intelligences in the classroom.

Assess Student Intelligences

In order to focus on MI, teachers need to learn the specific aptitudes of each of their students. One way to do this is to offer a steady stream of varied activities, and then pay close attention to the types of intelligences students display as they solve problems and complete tasks. "You've got to be sure you know your children," says Enota principal Susan Culbreth, "so that you can say unequivocally, 'I feel confident that if I take this child down this path, he's going to be successful.'"

Another way Enota teachers take stock of their students' strengths is by conducting frequent surveys on their preferences. The book *Teaching Young Gifted Children in the Regular Classroom*, for example, includes a "What I Like" worksheet.

Visit a School

"I think being able to visit a school that's doing something that's working is the best resource," says Enota fourth-grade teacher Marty Jones. "You can read about all the different ways to help your children connect to the different smarts, but unless you can really get your hands in it, I don't think it will work."

Enota staff looked at programs offered in several other states and welcome visitors to their school as well: The Key Learning Community (<http://www.myips.org/keylearningcommunity>) is a successful K-12 public school in Indianapolis. Sharon Elementary School (<http://www.york.k12.sc.us/hgs/>) , in Charlotte, North Carolina, served as an example for Enota's founders when they first opened its doors as an MI school in 2003. And the New City School (<http://www.newcityschool.org>) is a private MI school in St. Louis whose former head-of-school, Thomas R. Hoerr (<https://twitter.com/tomhoerr>) , is author of an MI-themed book and numerous articles. (See "Read a

Book," above.) He also publishes *Intelligence Connections*, the free e-newsletter for the Multiple Intelligences Network, sponsored by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (<http://www.ascd.org>) (ASCD), which includes articles by MI practitioners around the country and the world. (To subscribe, email Thomas Hoerr (<mailto:trhoerr@newcityschool.org>).

Design Learning Contracts

One of the unique adaptations of MI at Enota is the learning contract, an activity chart that provides students with options for tackling weekly curriculum. Sometimes a teacher will ask students to complete all the activities; other times, students can select the projects that appeal to them. Students are expected to complete the work at their own pace -- hence the word *contract*. "You do give up a lot of control," says teacher Denise McConnell. But in the experience of many Enota teachers, greater autonomy leads to greater engagement.

"My contracts are not as conventional as some, but they work for me," adds McConnell, who believes that the key to using MI in the classroom is to find out what works for you and then design ways to incorporate that discovery into your teaching.

Check out this sampling of Enota teachers' learning contracts and related materials:

- Language Arts Assignment Sheet (download a PDF (<http://www.edutopia.org/pdfs/mi/edutopia-MI-enota-language-arts-assignment.pdf>))
- Language Arts Contract (download a PDF (<http://www.edutopia.org/pdfs/mi/edutopia-MI-enota-language-arts-contract.pdf>))
- Survival Contract (download a PDF (<http://www.edutopia.org/pdfs/mi/edutopia-MI-enota-survival-contract.pdf>))
- Persuasive Writing Think-Tac-Toe (download a PDF (<http://www.edutopia.org/pdfs/mi/edutopia-MI-enota-think-tac-toe.pdf>))
- Science Contract (download a PDF (<http://www.edutopia.org/pdfs/mi/edutopia-MI-enota-science-contract.pdf>))
- Math Extension Menu (download a PDF (<http://www.edutopia.org/pdfs/mi/edutopia-MI-enota-multiplication.pdf>))
- Math Curriculum Compacting Contract (download a PDF (<http://www.edutopia.org/pdfs/mi/edutopia-MI-enota-math-contract.pdf>))

Build a Team

The MI classroom can be a lot more work than a lecture-based one, certainly when it comes to lesson planning. "I would not lie to you and say this is easy to do," says Audrey Thornton. "What I can tell you is that it helps if you've got a team that works together." Thornton's fourth-grade team meets every day, and sits down together once a week to plan the following one. A typical learning contract, she says, "requires about four hours of five bodies sitting down most days of the week."

If that isn't possible for you, advise Enota teachers, at least don't go it alone: It helps enormously to have at least one colleague to bat ideas back and forth with from time to time.

Take Baby Steps

"Don't think you're going to start and everything's going to work right," cautions McConnell. "One day, you might try something, and it's just horrible. And you'll think, 'I'm not doing this anymore,' but you do it the next day, because students will say, 'Can't we do that?'"

As with anything in education, say Enota teachers, "try, try again." The MI approach, they add, becomes easier to grasp once you've practiced it and developed a backlog of activities to choose from.

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