

WHAT ARE “MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES?”

Harvard psychology professor Howard Gardner first presented his theory of “multiple intelligences” in his 1983 book, *Frames of Mind*. Since then, his ideas have been widely discussed and been of great interest to educators. His theory proposes that all human beings possess *at least* seven intelligences. It attempts to take into account the findings of modern brain science and psychology. Gardner sees “intelligence” as a biological and psychological **potential** that is capable of being realized to a greater or lesser extent, depending on one’s experience, education, social environment, and other factors. The seven intelligences described by Gardner, briefly summarized, are:

- **Linguistic Intelligence:** The capacity to use words effectively, whether orally or in writing. This includes the ability to manipulate the structure and syntax of language, the sounds of language, the meanings of language, and the practical uses of language, such as for explaining, remembering, persuading, etc.
- **Logical-Mathematical Intelligence:** The capacity to use numbers effectively and to reason well. This includes awareness of logical patterns and relationships, functions, and cause and effect.
- **Spatial Intelligence:** The ability to perceive the visual and spatial world accurately, including sensitivity to color, line, shape, form, space, and the relationships between them. Includes the capacity to visualize, make graphic representations, and orient oneself in spatial surroundings.
- **Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence:** The ability to use one’s whole body to express ideas and feelings, and the ability to fashion or transform with one’s hands. Includes skills such as coordination, balance, dexterity, strength, flexibility, speed, and other physical skills.
- **Musical Intelligence:** The ability to perceive, distinguish between, and express oneself in musical forms. Includes sensitivities to rhythm, pitch or melody, timbre and tone color. Can apply to either an intuitive grasp of music, an analytic or technical understanding of it, or both.
- **Interpersonal Intelligence:** The capacity to perceive and distinguish differences in the moods, intentions, motivations, and feelings of others. Includes sensitivity to facial expressions, gestures, and body language. This intelligence also includes the ability to respond to these cues effectively, to work well with others, and to lead.
- **Intrapersonal Intelligence:** The capacity for self-knowledge and understanding, and the ability to act on the basis of that knowledge. Includes having an accurate picture of one’s own strengths and limitations, inner moods, intentions, feelings, motivations, needs, desires, and a capacity for self-discipline and self-esteem.

The theory of multiple intelligences emphasizes that all of us possess all seven intelligences, and each of us possesses them in different degrees and combinations. As Gardner says, "It is of the utmost importance that we recognize and nurture all of the varied human intelligences, and all of the combinations of intelligences. We are all so different largely because we all have different combinations of intelligences. If we recognize this, I think we will have at least a better chance of dealing appropriately with the many problems that we face in the world." Gardner and others emphasize that the exact number of "intelligences" is less important than the idea that there are many kinds. He has discussed a "Naturalist Intelligence," saying, "...the individual who is able readily to recognize flora and fauna, to make other...distinctions in the natural world, and to use this ability productively...is exercising an important intelligence and one that is not adequately encompassed on the current list." He has also referred to a "Spiritual Intelligence." The ability to blend or synthesize different intelligences so they work well together has been called a "Synthetic Intelligence." Whether seven, eight, or more "intelligences" are described, the most revolutionary idea in Gardner's work is that there *are* multiple intelligences. Viewed in this way, human intelligence is not restricted to only the more narrow linguistic and mathematical abilities measured by most standardized tests and traditionally described in school as being "smart." As Gardner has been quoted as saying, "It's not how smart you are, but *how* you are smart!"

These ideas have had a significant impact on education. A number of schools around the country are seeking to put them into practice. More and more teachers, when assessing student achievement, are finding ways for students to work within their areas of strength to demonstrate what they have learned, as well as finding ways to encourage students to further develop other abilities and "intelligences" that may be more challenging for them. Gardner's work speaks directly to teachers adapting a variety of learning formats for students with differing learning styles, and to the belief that education works most effectively if the unique blend of ways that people learn, think, and feel is taken into account.

If you're interested in learning more about multiple intelligences, here are some recommended books.

Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences, Howard Gardner, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 1983.

The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach, Howard Gardner, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 1992.

Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice, Howard Gardner, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 1993.

In Their Own Way: Discovering and Encouraging Your Child's Personal Learning Style, Thomas Armstrong, Jeremy P. Tarcher Publishers, Los Angeles, 1987.

7 Kinds of Smart: Discovering and Using Your Natural Intelligence, Thomas Armstrong, Plume/Penguin, New York, 1993.

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