Building a Foundation

Most adults who work with young children know that the question “Why?” is a familiar one. And it should be; children deserve to understand what lies beneath their experiences of the world.

The same is true about their experience of themselves. They deserve an understanding of how their brains work—and what makes their brains unique and special. Toward that end, then, teaching students to recognize their own multiple intelligences (MI) on a metacognitive level gives them a foundation for getting the most out of learning.

With a few simplifications, symbols, and activities, you can explain MI theory to children of almost all ages.

Explaining MI Theory to Students

In *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom*, Thomas Armstrong (2009) encourages using an inclusive approach to introduce MI theory to students. All students should recognize that they are intelligent in each of the eight ways, but that each of them is stronger in some specific ways.

Armstrong uses an “MI Pizza” with eight slices to show some of the ways that people are intelligent. With simple words and symbols, the eight intelligences become:

- Word smart (linguistic intelligence)
- Logic smart (logical-mathematical intelligence)
- Picture smart (spatial intelligence)
- Body smart (bodily-kinesthetic intelligence)
- Music smart (musical intelligence)
- People smart (interpersonal intelligence)
- Self smart (intrapersonal intelligence)
- Nature smart (naturalist intelligence)

**Activities That Teach MI Theory**

Armstrong provides a variety of activities that teachers can use to teach students more about the eight intelligences. Some of these activities include (Armstrong, 2009):

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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Career Day</td>
<td>Bring a variety of guests to class to talk about the tasks they do in their jobs and which of the intelligences they use; for example, an editor might talk about “word smart” aspects of a job, while a veterinarian might talk about “nature smart” tasks.</td>
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<td>Field Trips</td>
<td>Take students to see particular intelligences “at work” in places such as libraries, science labs, or radio stations.</td>
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<td>Biographies</td>
<td>Have students read about the lives of people who have shown special gifts in certain intelligences: for example, a scientist such as Marie Curie or a naturalist such as Jane Goodall.</td>
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<td>Lesson Plans</td>
<td>Teach one subject in eight different ways so that students can see how each of the intelligences can be applied.</td>
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<td>Experiential Activities</td>
<td>Have students complete eight activities, one that emphasizes each intelligence, and then discuss which they prefer and how that relates to a specific intelligence.</td>
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<td>Displays</td>
<td>Post a simplified explanation of the eight intelligences on the wall where students can review it; post “products” made by students that show how they have used various intelligences, such as essays, musical compositions, sculptures, and so on.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Readings</td>
<td>Assign older students actual readings in multiple intelligence theory, such as Howard Gardner’s <em>Frames of Mind</em>.</td>
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For more ideas or for more specific instructions on how to execute the activities above, see “Chapter 4: Teaching Students About MI Theory” in Armstrong’s book.

**Teacher Observations**

As you teach students about MI theory through instruction and activities, you will have the chance to see and assess the specific intelligences of each student. Simple observation is your greatest tool. As you watch students, consider how they “misbehave.” When students are off-task, they are often showing you how they learn naturally. Also, think about what they are most likely to do if given free time (Armstrong, 2009, p. 34).

**Recording and Tracking Information About Student Intelligences**

Although you have limited time, gathering information about each student’s intelligences can aid you in meeting each child’s individual needs. Here are some ideas:

- Jot down notes about observations you make.
- Create and fill out a multiple intelligences checklist, or use the one in *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom* on page 35.
- Collect evidence of students’ strengths through photos, video, samples of schoolwork, and so on.
- Look for patterns in students’ school records, including report cards and testing.
- Talk to other teachers about their observations.
- Talk with parents to find out how the student is similar/different at home. (Armstrong, 2009)
Conclusion

Even young students are capable of understanding the different ways in which they are smart. By giving students the language to talk about their multiple intelligences, teachers can recognize and celebrate student strengths, which empowers students with confidence.