Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences (MI)

The American psychologist Howard Gardner found that humans from all cultures display a wide variety of abilities, and that there are many ways of learning and knowing. Everyone has his/her own special and unique pattern of abilities and preferred ways of learning. Gardner identified eight main ways in which people prefer to make sense of the world, which he called ‘Multiple Intelligences’ (MIs). He also noted that people have different abilities within these intelligences, but that everyone has the ability to develop increased capacity in any one of them. This may be related to maturity. For example, adults may be able to exhibit interpersonal intelligence more easily than children in order to work together cooperatively.

Learning in schools has traditionally taught for only two main Multiple Intelligences – verbal linguistic and mathematical- logical, i.e. reading, writing and arithmetic, the old ‘3Rs’, and as a result, many students are not able to learn as well as they could. As well, some students who express dominant body-kinaesthetic (movement) intelligence often do less well in school and tend to drop out earlier. The theory is useful and important for thinking about how to cater for the range of MIs in the design of learning and assessment.

The Eight Multiple Intelligences

1. Verbal-linguistic (V-L)

V-L learners are good at languages. They like to learn through stories, reading, writing, copying, listening and talking.

2. Mathematical-logical (M-L)

M-L learners are good at mathematics, patterns, numbers and counting. They are logical and like to reason and organise activities. They often like to play games.
3. **Visual-spatial (V-S)**

V-S learners are generally good observers, and easily think in three dimensions. They like maps and charts and learn well from diagrams and other visual images. They are often good at art, and may also be the class daydreamers and doodlers.

4. **Body-kinesthetic (movement) (B-K)**

People who have strong B-K intelligence learn better when muscular movement is involved, and they can get up and move around. They are good at physical activities such as sports, dance and performing, and often at hands-on tasks such as building and making things. They learn best by doing something physical rather than reading or hearing about it. In school they are often the children who are restless in a confined space.

5. **Musical-rhythmic (M-R)**

M-R learners enjoy music, singing, instrument playing or rhythms. They can remember and sing tunes and in school will often be the student who taps on the desk or rocks to and fro in class.

6. **Social (interpersonal)**

People with a high interpersonal intelligence tend to be outgoing and sociable, are sensitive to others’ moods, feelings, motivations, and cooperate well in groups as they communicate effectively. They learn best by working with others and enjoy discussion and debate. They are often very popular, with many friends.

7. **Intrapersonal**

People who are strongest in this intelligence can be shy and are often not very sociable, often preferring to work alone. They are usually self-aware and capable of understanding their own emotions, goals and motivations and can often be perfectionists.

8. **Naturalistic**

People with a high naturalistic intelligence have a love of nature and like being outdoors. They enjoy bushwalking and being in wild places. They usually have a good knowledge of the natural world and enjoy working with plants and animals, growing things, fishing and collecting objects from nature. They learn well outside the classroom and may be restless in a confined space.