How Multiple Intelligences Theory Can Guide Teachers’ Practices: Ensuring Success for Students with Disabilities
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is to partner with Regional Resource Centers to develop powerful networks of urban local education agencies and schools that embrace and implement a data-based, continuous improvement approach for inclusive practices. Embedded within this approach is a commitment to evidence-based practice in early intervention, universal design, literacy and positive behavior supports.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), of the U.S. Department of Education, has funded NIUSI to facilitate the unification of current general and special education reform efforts as these are implemented in the nation’s urban school districts. NIUSI’s creation reflects OSEP’s long-standing commitment to improving educational outcomes for all children, specifically those with disabilities, in communities challenged and enriched by the urban experience.
How Multiple Intelligences Theory Can Guide Teachers’ Practices: Ensuring Success for Students with Disabilities

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How does this OnPoint help to explore and support NIUSI’s agenda for inclusive schools?

The National Institute for Urban School Improvement (NIUSI), established in 1997, works with urban schools, families, students, and communities to develop the skills, values, and environments that improve results for all students. With today’s increasing diversity among students in terms of language, culture, religions, ability, and experience, it has become even more important to find strategies that meet a wide range of needs. Schools that have successful results with all their students use a variety of teaching approaches, engage with families and communities to support life-long learning, and keep students motivated to learn and create. To do this work well, especially in large, urban school systems, practitioners (teachers, aides, school psychologists, and other school personnel) need some specialized tools. Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory and strategies provide a framework and tools that can help teachers in designing classrooms, instruction, and curricula that meet the individual needs of many kinds of students.

The best way of knowing that students are successful in any curriculum is to look at what they accomplish. As all other teachers must do, those who choose to use MI strategies need to consider student achievements as the test of whether their teaching techniques and curriculum choices are sound.

If you want to read more about NIUSI’s work, its Systemic Change Framework, visit our Web site at www.urbanschools.org. We hope you find this OnPoint relevant and useful to your work with students and schools.

Why multiple intelligences?

Helping teachers, students, and parents realize that there are multiple ways to learn and that they themselves possess multiple types of intellectual strengths and life skills is but one reason to consider the theory of MI for teaching students with special needs. Not only can MI increase students’ confidence and enthusiasm for learning, it can also improve their academic achievement and change teachers’ perceptions of their students’ learning abilities. MI unveils academic strengths and honors alternative ways of learning, which can be highly helpful when educating students identified for special education services.²

This OnPoint introduces MI and explores its use with all students by looking at the research on classrooms that use MI. In particular, we explore the Project on Schools Using Multiple Intelligences Theory (Project SUMIT) in depth so that readers have a robust example to draw on for their own classrooms.

² Readers will note that we use the term “students in special education” to identify learners who have traditionally been labeled “students with disabilities.” Since the theory of MI proposes that individuals have divergent intelligences, it becomes more difficult to identify what constitutes a disability versus an ability.
WHAT IS MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES?

The theory of MI was developed by Harvard University psychologist Howard Gardner and first appeared in Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1983). In Frames of Mind, Gardner explored the question, What are the mental abilities that support the wide range of adult roles over time and across culture? Dr. Gardner took a unique approach. Rather than defining intelligence in terms of IQ scores, Gardner offered an alternative view. He suggested that intelligence be described as the combination of psychological and biological characteristics that enable individuals to solve problems or create products that are valued in one or more cultures (Gardner, 1999). In other words, what if intelligence were thought of as a capacity that is developed and expressed within specific social and cultural contexts? This suggests that thinking, problem solving, and creating are valued differently depending on the family and community in which individuals live, learn and work. So, in one context, persistence, sustained effort, and deferred gratification may be more valuable than other attributes. On the other hand, bursts of creativity and story telling might be particularly appreciated in a family where conversation and novelty are valued.

WHAT ARE THE FEATURES OF MI?

Dr. Gardner used the best research from the fields of developmental psychology and neuropsychology as well as cross-cultural anthropology and evolutilional biology to describe elements of MI. One of the problems that Dr. Gardner had to solve was how to select from many traits those that constituted an intelligence rather than a talent or skill. To be an intelligence, the characteristic should meet the following seven criteria:

1. It should be seen in relative isolation in prodigies, autistic savants, stroke victims, and other exceptional populations.
2. It should have a distinct developmental trajectory. That is, different intelligences should develop at different rates, from their beginnings in infancy to full adult usage.
3. It should have some basis in evolutionary biology. In other words, an intelligence ought to have helped our human ancestors to survive and ought to be evident in other mammals.
4. It should be captured in symbol systems. Given its importance, humans would likely have found a way to transmit information that draws on the intelligence, as they do, for example, in notations of math, language, music, spatial relations, and various forms of movement.
5. It should be supported by evidence from psychometric tests of intelligence. Gardner drew on this kind of evidence to uncover verbal, spatial, and numerical abilities. However, unlike traditional psychologists, he did not rely on evidence from psychometric tests at the exclusion of other information.
6. It should be distinguishable through experimental psychological tasks. For example, experimental psychologists have found that different neural structures help to support different kinds of mental processing.

7. Finally, it should demonstrate a core information-processing operation. That is, there should be nearly automatic mental processes that handle information related to each intelligence. For example, barring neurological impairment, human beings automatically break up streams of sounds into the words of their own language, discriminate greater or lesser numbers in small groupings of objects, attempt to make sense of facial expressions in interpersonal encounters, and make distinctions between pitches when they hear music.

WHAT ARE THE EIGHT INTELLIGENCES THAT COMPRISÉ MI?

Based on the criteria that he developed, Howard Gardner identified the following eight intelligences:

1. **Linguistic intelligence** allows individuals to communicate and make sense of the world through language. Those who have a keen sensitivity to language in its spoken and/or written forms might demonstrate this strength as poets, writers, lawyers, and public speakers. Linguistic intelligence is highly valued and rewarded in schools.

2. **Logical-mathematical intelligence** enables individuals to use, appreciate, and analyze abstract relationships. In Western culture, this capacity is often harnessed in mathematical reasoning and scientific investigations. Mathematicians, scientists, and engineers deploy this intelligence at high levels. Like linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence is emphasized in schools.

3. **Spatial intelligence** enables people to perceive visual or spatial information, to transform this information, and to recreate visual images from memory. Blind people skillfully employ this intelligence, using it to create mental maps of their environments. It is commonly seen operating at high levels in architects, artists, surgeons, and pilots.

4. **Musical intelligence** allows people to create, communicate, and understand meanings made out of sound. It is manifested to high degrees among composers, musicians, and acoustic engineers.

5. **Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence** entails using all or part of the body to solve problems or create products. The intelligence seems to stand in stark contrast to the reasoning that is prized in traditional tests of intelligence. Advanced forms of problem solving and creativity through use of the body are evident in the activities of choreographers, rock climbers, and skilled artisans.

6. **Interpersonal intelligence** is the capacity to recognize and make distinctions among others’ feelings and intentions, and to draw on these in solving problems. Successful
teachers, actors, therapists, political leaders, and salespeople rely on highly developed interpersonal intelligence.

7. **Intrapersonal intelligence** enables individuals to recognize and distinguish among their own feelings, to build accurate mental models of themselves, and to draw on these models to make decisions about their lives. Intrapersonal intelligence is sometimes seen in skillful autobiographies, and, more generally, among those individuals who make sound choices about their life and work.

8. **Naturalist intelligence** allows people to solve problems by distinguishing among, classifying, and using features of the natural world. This intelligence is commonly seen in people’s ability to categorize different kinds of plants and animals and has been harnessed to the task of distinguishing among human-made objects. It is essential to the work of landscape architects, hunters, archeologists, environmental scientists, and farmers.

Every learner has the capacity to exhibit all of these intelligences, but some intelligences are more highly developed than others in certain individuals.

**WHAT DO OTHER EDUCATIONAL LEADERS SAY ABOUT MI?**

The theory of MI celebrated its 20-year anniversary in 2004. Since the beginning, it has been the topic of many educational research articles. The following selected articles, books, and monographs examine applications of MI for students in special education.

**ADAPTING INSTRUCTION WHILE MAINTAINING HIGH EXPECTATIONS**

Armstrong (2000) has argued that the theory of MI has broad implications for special education. Because MI focuses on a wide spectrum of abilities, it helps place “special needs” in a broader context. Rather than accepting what he calls the “deficit paradigm” which depends on labels, or can be viewed as a medical model, Armstrong maintains that a growth paradigm would be more appropriate for students with special needs. Educators who view special needs in the context of the eight intelligences view all those students differently. “Using MI as a backdrop, educators can begin to perceive children with special needs as whole persons possessing strengths in many areas” (Armstrong, 2000, p. 104). Numerous educators (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2003; Gardner, 1999; Kornhaber, Fierros, & Veenema, 2004; Perkins, 1992) have argued that the best learning opportunities are those that are most successful for all students. What may need emphasis, however, is the way in which lessons are specifically tailored to the needs of individual students or small groups of students. An MI curriculum not only provides teachers with ways to personalize education for students, it can also help to cultivate a passion for life and career goals (Armstrong, 2000).

**A MINDFUL CURRICULUM**

Schirduan and Case (2004) investigated the impact of MI curriculum on students that have
been diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD). This quantitative and qualitative descriptive study sampled 87 students with ADHD in 17 schools using MI. The authors used the Multiple Intelligences Developmental Assessment Scale, the Piers-Harris Children’s Concept Scale, and the Teacher Perception of Achievement Level in Students with ADHD Survey to gather information for their study. In addition to the quantitative instruments, Schirduan and Case (2004) profiled three elementary students with ADHD. These students were found to have highly developed levels of intelligence in areas outside verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical domains. For example, one student had pronounced cognitive strengths in the area of spatial intelligence despite experiencing difficulty in history which relies on understanding timelines and chronology. As a result of this study, the authors maintain that “curriculum leaders need to be mindful of the means by which the learning needs of students with ADHD can be met by a curriculum driven by MI theory” (p. 88).

Schirduan and Case (2004), like Armstrong (2000), argue that a mindful curriculum leadership practice should focus on ability, or on the student’s predominant intelligences. MI curriculum provides ways to differentiate instruction for students with ADHD, many of whom find it difficult to succeed in school. An MI curriculum not only provides ways to personalize a student’s education but can also be used to cultivate affective goals, such as a passion for career and/or life goals.

**STUDENT SELF-REFLECTION**

Rubado (2002) worked with a group of middle school students (n = 17) who were having difficulty learning the general education curriculum and were at risk of failing, but were not being served by the traditional special education program. To meet their needs, she began integrating MI into her instructional practices and found that students naturally began to identify their intelligences. Over the course of the 10-week study, Rubado’s students participated in numerous activities intended to foster understanding of intelligence. The students completed questionnaires, practiced using each intelligence in their school work, created songs and collages, analyzed a popular television show for the use of intelligences, and discussed emotions students had with each intelligence (Rubado, 2002). Other teachers then began integrating MI into their instructional practices and found that their students readily began to identify their intelligences in their work. Rubado found that students, through the process of self-reflection³, began to identify their areas of strength in the context of MI. That is, they were able to identify which intelligences would enhance their performance. More than that, students also understood that they had the ability to use all eight intelligences, even if

³ Students wrote a self-reflection as part of an assignment-planning sheet they completed before they began complex assignments. The self-reflection required students to identify which intelligences would be used in the assignments, which parts would be easy, and which parts would be difficult. Finally, students were asked to explain what they planned to do to overcome any obstacles they might face in the assignment.
they didn’t yet understand the complexity of each. For example, there were students who were talented public speakers who felt that they were weak in verbal/linguistic intelligence most likely because they didn’t like to read. Through the use of a self-evaluation rubric, the students, many of them with special needs, discovered that they were using all the intelligences effectively, depending on the situation — they realized they were better-rounded than they had initially believed (Rubado, 2002). Most importantly, however, the researchers found, as others (Kornhaber, Fierros, & Veenema, 2004; Waldron & Van Zandt Allen, 1999) had before, that the students realized that there are multiple ways to learn and that they possessed multiple types of academic strengths and life skills.

WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM PROJECT SUMMIT?

The Project on Schools Using Multiple Intelligences Theory (Project SUMIT) documented how MI was used in schools to improve students’ educational experiences, particularly for students in special education. Findings from Project SUMIT show how MI improves instruction for diverse student groups and increases teachers’ ability to work with students in special education. Project SUMIT’s findings are particularly valuable since the project’s researchers investigated urban, rural, and suburban schools with diverse student populations.

Project SUMIT was a three-year national investigation of 41 schools using MI theory. The project identified, documented, and promoted effective implementations of MI. Project SUMIT investigators explored how MI worked in urban, suburban, and rural settings in states across the United States, and they also sought to better understand the efficacy of MI in schools in which the socioeconomic status of students had a wide range. By looking at schools with many different kinds of student populations in many different parts of the country, the investigators identified practices that could be useful to educators in a wide range of schools and classrooms.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MI AND INCREASED STUDENT OUTCOMES?

A majority of Project SUMIT schools reported improved standardized test scores, reduced disciplinary infractions, increased parent involvement, and increased ability to work with students with learning disabilities. Perhaps most compelling among the positive outcomes was that teachers and administrators realized the power of MI for all students, including those students with learning differences. Teachers and administrators reported that “their efforts to incorporate MI supported a wide range of learners, including those with learning disabilities” (Kornhaber, Fierros, & Veenema, 2004, p. 16).
The Project SUMIT investigators phone-interviewed principals, regular education and special education teachers, students, and parents at 41 schools across the United States that had been using MI in their schools. In addition to the interviews, Project SUMIT researchers conducted three-to-four day visits at 10 of the 41 schools. During these school visits the researchers documented the use of MI in the school environment, student work, and school practices.

Through interviews, site visits, and informal conversations, researchers learned that SUMIT schools had adopted MI into their curriculum for many different reasons. For example, a number of Project SUMIT schools were converted from existing traditional schools to MI schools, others opened as new MI-focused schools, and still others were created as schools within schools. Yet, all the Project SUMIT school teachers and principals agreed that they wanted to use MI as the basis for all or part of their instructional practices.

HOW DID INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES ADDRESS CULTURAL DIVERSITY?

Project SUMIT investigators observed many different teachers using MI in interesting and effective ways. For example, Marge Staszek, a 5th and 6th grade teacher from Glenridge Elementary School, located in Kent, Washington, who was reinvigorated after adopting MI into her teaching. Like many schools in the United States, the Glenridge School had changed because of demographic shifts in the school district. Because she wanted to address the learning needs of all her students, Ms. Staszek developed a “unit that invites students to delve into their past, their heritage, their ancestors, their family customs and stories—their traditions” (Kornhaber, Fierros, & Veenema, 2004, p. 160). This unit, called the Heritage/Traditions Unit, involves a sequence of assignments that take place over a three-week period. During this time, students work on a range of activities that combine the study of immigration with the study of the diverse heritage in their own and others’ families (Kornhaber, Fierros, & Veenema, 2004).

Students compile many assignments from the unit into a Traditions Scrapbook, which they display during a banquet held before the winter holiday break each year. As parents, grandparents, and other guests circulate to look at the scrapbooks, the students, parents, teachers, and principal share food, music, and stories that reflect each of their families’ heritage and traditions.

The Heritage/Traditions Unit aims to build both organizational skills and students’ knowledge of their own family history, as well as their knowledge of immigration, and the many cultures that have become part of American society. These aims are supported by three key teaching strategies:

• Building readiness in school and at home
Modeling good work

Holding culminating activities

These strategies can be adapted to any extended project work with students in a variety of grade levels and content areas. Examples of each strategy are provided below:

Building readiness in school and home. A letter to parents helps to introduce the Heritage/Traditions Unit to each student’s family. It describes some of the activities that will take place, and it suggests ways that parents or other family members can help their children during the unit. For example, the letter includes a survey and other work that is convenient to undertake during the fall holidays (e.g., Thanksgiving). Information collected during family holidays will be used in several different activities and student work during the unit.

Modeling good work. At the beginning of the Heritage/Traditions Unit, Ms. Staszak models the Traditions Scrapbooks that her former students have created. Models of the scrapbooks are kept in the classroom to provide handy references whenever students want to see them. Current students also model how strong work is developed. When students in the class are in the process of creating good work for their scrapbooks, Ms. Staszak suggests that struggling students observe how this work is being done. Each student needs to present one or more pieces from his or her scrapbook at the Traditions Banquet (Kornhaber, Fierros, & Veenema, 2004).

Holding culminating activities. Culminating activities are another strategy for helping diverse learners to produce high-quality work. Because students know that their work is going to be shared at a public event that includes their family and other members of the school community, they are motivated to do their best. The Traditions Banquet that concludes the Heritage/Traditions Unit is also a way to involve the community and enables the students’ work to be publicly appreciated by the school and their family (Kornhaber, Fierros, & Veenema, 2004).

HOW MI CONTRIBUTES TO THE HERITAGE/TRADITIONS UNIT

As Figure 1 shows on the next page, activities in the Heritage/Traditions Unit include most but not all the intelligences to a certain degree. This means that the concepts of the unit can be engaged in by very different learners. It also means that students with different profiles of intelligences are likely to find some activities more appealing than others. The survey, in which students investigate their own heritage, is a particularly good opportunity to engage students’ interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences. Yet, it should be noted that while it is important to consider the different intelligences in the creation of a learning curriculum, it is also important to remember that addressing all the different intelligences in one lesson or unit is not the ultimate goal. Rather, the goal is to engage learners in multiple ways that make sense to teachers and students alike.
Scrapbook development: Students create aesthetically pleasing scrapbook pages to present what they have learned in the Heritage/Traditions Unit activities.

Interview: Students interview family members and use the interview material to write stories and poems.

Writing: Students’ writing process includes writing webs to help them brainstorm and connect ideas.

Autobiography: Students write brief autobiographies.

Math activities: Students produce Venn diagrams comparing their own and older relatives’ childhood, Heritage graphs, and “what if.”

Performing arts: Students learn music and dance of different cultures.

Project coordination: Students learn the organizational skills necessary to complete a large scale project over an extended period of time.

Heritage/Traditions Banquet: Students present their scrapbooks to teachers, classmates, and family members at a culminating banquet.

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ACTIVITIES

MI AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Numerous educators and researchers have found that the theory of MI has broad implications for special education, primarily because MI focuses on learning that happens in areas outside the traditional verbal/linguistic or logical-mathematical spheres. Instead, MI fosters the inclusion of numerous different ways of knowing that allow teachers to perceive students’ learning strengths in multiple ways. An MI framework reminds teachers that their classrooms work best for students when many ways of knowing and doing are valued and accepted.

Students in special education also benefit from teachers’ use of MI as a framework for curriculum design and instruction. The following two vignettes provide examples of how MI can guide the choices that teachers make. Notice that the students who attend these schools come from multicultural heritages.

HOW COOPERATIVE LEARNING AT MCCLEARY SCHOOL IS PART OF MI THEME

The McCleary School is a small K-5 elementary school located in the Lawrenceville section of Pittsburgh. The student population at the McCleary School is one-third African American and two-thirds white, and poverty is widespread; more than three-quarters of the school’s students receive free or reduced-price meals. Almost a quarter of the school’s students have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).

The students at the McCleary School vary in their ability levels but are extremely engaged learners. Part of the credit for this engagement goes to the teachers at McCleary. They established high standards that require students to evaluate and critique one another’s work on thematically based, long-term projects as well as to focus on consistent attendance and good behavior. Students produce work that shows that they are gaining crucial skills and behaviors that have also resulted in higher test scores than seven other schools in the community. The principal and teachers interviewed told us that the McCleary students’ high performance continued into the middle school setting, where their grades were much higher relative to students from other elementary schools’ students. This occurred despite the number of students designated as having special needs or those without IEPs who had specialized circumstances that impeded their learning (Kornhaber, Fierros, & Veenema, 2004).

The success at the McCleary School is due in large part to the school culture, which encourages teacher collaboration, and a varied curriculum, but the principal and teachers also said that “the use of MI had served to reframe their views of students and made the curriculum better” (Kornhaber, Fierros, & Veenema, 2004). McCleary students, from
all ability levels, complete a variety of whole-class and small-group activities. The whole-class activities include brainstorming, site visits (i.e., field trips), and post-trip meetings. In these activities, the class works together with the teacher as the facilitator or leader to construct meaningful learning based on a common theme (e.g., rivers). In the preparation of the curriculum, teachers use MI as a framework to tap into their students’ different intelligences. McCleary School students work in small groups to use their interpersonal intelligence. They complete chalk drawings and murals using their artistic intelligence, river readings their linguistic intelligence, and construct bridges and stream-table experiments with their logical-mathematical, spatial, and interpersonal intelligences. These multiple approaches to instruction provide all students with both the structure and the independence to participate in hands-on learning with their fellow classmates while drawing on students’ different intelligences, which gives the students a better chance of succeeding in school.

HOW GLENRIDGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL INCORPORATES MI INTO THEIR COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

At the Glenridge Elementary School in Kent, Washington, Mrs. Sandy Molnar, a teacher who teaches special needs and other students intensively during pullout sessions, rewards students, including those with special needs, each day for “getting caught doing something good.” It is a central part of the school to note when students are helping others, contributing ideas, cooperating, and caring. Another important aspect of the Glenridge Elementary School is that all the children in the school are “pulled out” to the portable classroom behind the school to spend time with Mrs. Molnar and the special needs education staff. This way, students with special needs and students without special needs all get to go the portable classroom.

Students with special needs and their families are encouraged to exceed expectations in the school, where high-quality work is a central part of the culture. This expectation is accompanied by ongoing school-home communication. Mrs. Molnar uses MI to communicate to students the intelligences she believes are being addressed and those that need extra attention. Mrs. Molnar, who works with students who need extra support, noted that “often special needs students . . . are only challenged to a certain level that is often much lower than that of other students in a school. I think that all students must be challenged and that, by raising the level of expectation, students often respond to the challenge” (Kornhaber, Fierros, & Veenema, 2004, p. 153).

The successful use of MI must be recognized as one of the many tools that can be used in teaching students with special needs. The key to using MI, however, is that it changes the way educators think about students and their
abilities to learn. In *Multiple intelligences: Best ideas from research and practice*, Kornhaber, Fierros, and Veenema (2004) provide a set of practices called “Compass Points” that have been used by schools that have engaged students’ MI in ways associated with student learning.

**WHAT ARE COMPASS POINT PRACTICES?**

The Compass Point Practices developed by Project SUMIT investigators provide educators with some guidelines for successfully introducing and/or implementing MI in their schools. Common across all the Project SUMIT schools was that hard work by all members of the school community was necessary for successful school outcomes and that no educational curriculum can, by itself, improve schools.

There are six Compass Point Practices (Kornhaber, Fierros, & Veenema, 2004):

1. **Culture:** Acting on a value system that maintains that diverse students can learn and succeed, that learning is exciting, and that hard work by teachers is necessary.
2. **Readiness:** Preparing people to work with MI and other new ideas. Building staff awareness of MI and of the different ways that students learn.
3. **Tool:** Seeing MI as a means of fostering high-quality work. Using MI as a tool to promote high-quality student work rather than using the theory as an end in and of itself.
4. **Collaboration:** Promoting informal and formal exchanges among the staff, in which they share ideas and make constructive suggestions.
5. **Choice:** Providing meaningful curriculum and assessment options. Embedding curriculum and assessment in activities that are valued by both the students and the wider culture.
6. **Arts:** Giving the arts a significant role in the school. Employing the arts to develop children’s skills and understanding within and across disciplines.

**WHAT ARE THE KEY IDEAS ABOUT MI?**

In what ways can practitioners use MI to improve their instructional practice? The answer is that there are numerous ways that teachers can use MI in their teaching, but perhaps the key is that MI allows teachers to think differently about how students learn (Kornhaber & Krechevsky, 1995). Teachers who integrate MI into their teaching instantly expand their curricular offerings to address students’ different intelligences and to provide all students with situated learning experiences that can lead to better learning opportunities for students and teachers alike. Moreover, an approach to instruction that motivates students to learn is more likely to have a positive impact on student achievement and, by extension, test scores (Perkins, 1992; Vialle, 1997).
This *OnPoint* explored the intersection between MI and special education. MI can be used to improve the learning opportunities for diverse learners, and it has a positive impact on both students with special needs and their teachers (Haley, 2004; Kornhaber, Fierros, & Veenema, 2004; Rubado, 2002). As Haley (2004) points out, “Teachers who plan and organize their instruction around the [MI] learning preferences of individual learners, emphasizing special strengths and shoring up underutilized gifts and talents, may unlock the full learning potential of all their students” (p. 172). The use of MI in daily instruction impacts academic achievement and student motivation. By referencing the Compass Point Practices described here, teachers and families have a guide for thinking about curriculum and instruction in their schools.

The use of MI in schools helps educators move instruction beyond linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences that leave many students out of the learning process. MI helps educators understand cognitive abilities and frame decisions about curriculum. To use MI well, educators need to consider the appropriate tool to use for developing the curriculum that engages learners who have different intelligences. Without an MI framework for designing learning opportunities, students’ strengths could be ignored, and their opportunities to learn could be lost as well.

The challenge for teachers is to create learning environments that foster the development of all eight intelligences.

Balanced instructional presentations that address MI benefit all learners and strengthen their underutilized intelligences. Teachers of diverse students and students with special needs recognize that not all learners excel in the linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences. MI provides a framework for teachers so they can understand how their students learn. By approaching students with a model that targets their successful learning in a particular intelligence instead of a standard approach that limits learning, students get an opportunity to experience success in school. When students can associate school with a positive experience, for example, because they painted a notable piece of art, they are likely to work and improve in areas where they haven’t had as much success (i.e., writing and mathematics).

Again, MI theory cannot, by itself, address the learning needs of diverse student populations in urban, suburban, or rural settings, but it can change the way teachers think about students and their intelligences. The greatest impact of MI theory lies in the ability of teachers to identify students’ areas of intelligence and to organize their instruction accordingly. As a result, teachers can meet the needs of students from multicultural backgrounds. The use of MI promotes diversity and inclusiveness, rather than the “one size fits all” approach to teaching.
References


About the Author

Edward Garcia Fierros is an assistant professor in the Department of Education and Human Services at Villanova University. His major research interests are in the placement of minority students with learning disabilities, charter school policy, and the theory of multiple intelligences.
GREAT URBAN SCHOOLS:

- Produce high achieving students.
- Construct education for social justice, access and equity.
- Expand students’ life opportunities, available choices and community contributions.
- Build on the extraordinary resources that urban communities provide for life-long learning.
- Use the valuable knowledge and experience that children and their families bring to school learning.

Need individuals, family organizations and communities to work together to create future generations of possibility.

- Practice scholarship by creating partnerships for action-based research and inquiry.
- Shape their practice based on evidence of what results in successful learning of each student.
- Foster relationships based on care, respect and responsibility.
- Understand that people learn in different ways throughout their lives.
- Respond with learning opportunities that work.