
Review: Viens and Kallenbach's *Multiple Intelligences and Adult Literacy—A Sourcebook for Practitioners*

David Yearwood

Julie Viens & Silja Kallenbach

Multiple Intelligences and Adult Literacy—A Sourcebook for Practitioners

Teachers College Press, 2004

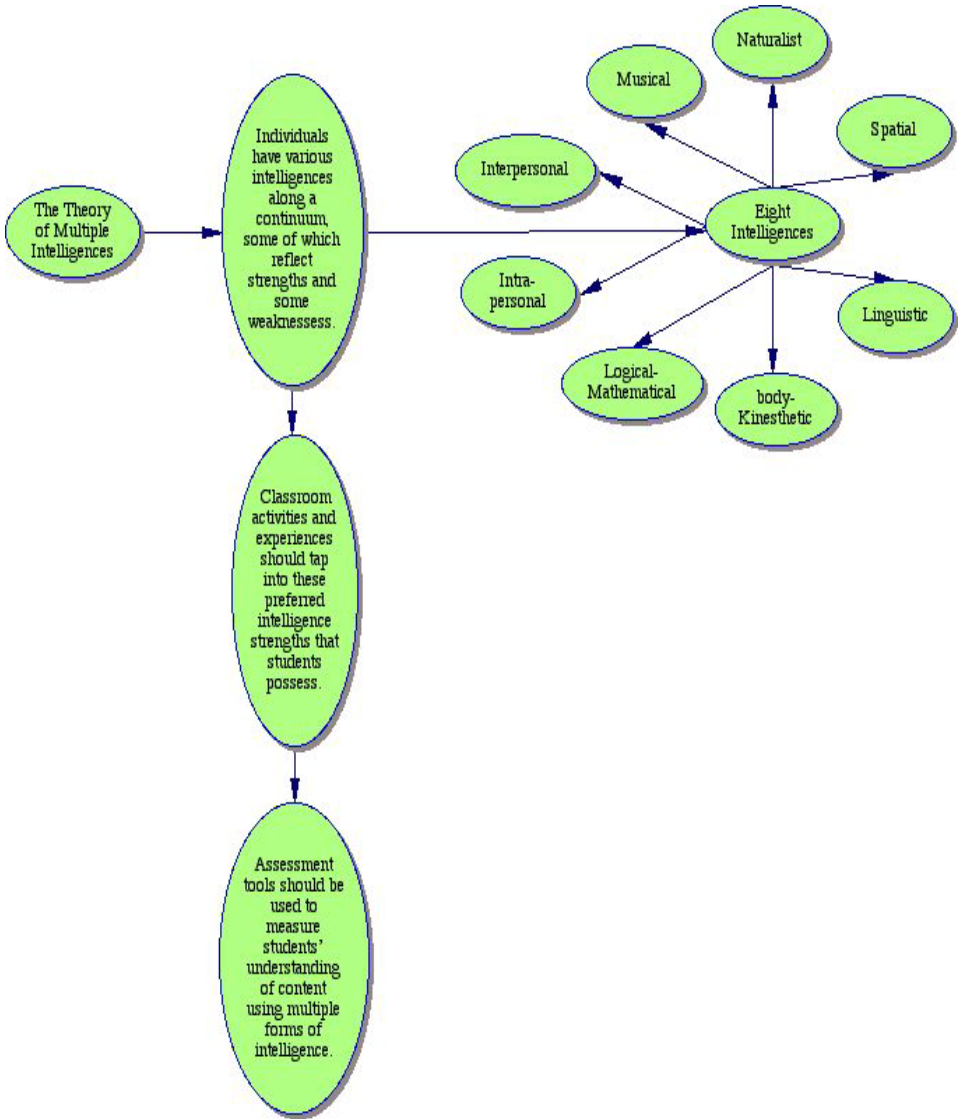
ISBN 0-8077-4346-1 (paperback)

The term “Multiple Intelligence” (MI), popularized by the work of Howard Gardner, has become something of an attraction, a kind of a buzz-word among many in the educational community who are fascinated by the idea and potential promises of MI. What is it about MI that makes it particularly attractive to educators, and can MI live up to these expectations? An important aspect of MI’s appeal appears to be that it can be blended with pedagogical practices that include cooperative learning, inquiry, the inclusion of student experiences, and multisensory teaching in the classroom. As a theory, MI holds great promise possibly because of the potential to connect with students via multiple pathways. A second but equally enticing aspect of MI is its adaptability—the ability to be applied to many disparate uses in many different ways. This flexibility lends itself well in how one interprets and decides to apply the basic tenets of MI. If this all seems interesting to you, then you may find it helpful to preview Gardner’s discussion on the subject. However, if you are pressed for time, then Chapter I of Viens and Kallenbach’s text provides a useful introduction to the topic.

To understand the appeal of MI it may be helpful to examine the underlying premise of the theory behind Multiple Intelligence and the implications which are graphically represented in Figure 1. As the diagram suggests, the basic premise of MI appears to be that if educators can

ascertain their students’ strengths and weaknesses in any of the eight identified intelligences, then it may be possible for teachers to work with these individuals so that they can be successful in their academic ventures. The question that may be posed at this point, however, is what does MI have to offer over other traditional classroom approaches to instruction? Further, how are the discussions about students’ learning styles and student-centered learning different from the discussions about MI presented by Viens and Kallenbach?

Perhaps it may be helpful at this juncture to point out a few things about the first three chapters of the text. Student-centered learning, best practices, and MI all aim at achieving the same goals: the creation of a classroom environment for successful teaching and learning, one in which instructional strategies are appropriate, innovative, creative, and effective. Thus, it is important that the newcomer to MI understand that MI should not be considered a new practice as much as it is a way of taking into consideration students’ abilities and the design of classroom activities that takes such abilities and/or ways of learning into consideration. Many of the ideas ascribed to MI may indeed be borrowed from other theories or theorists, something which the authors of this text fail to mention or for which there is little discussion.



Viens and Kallenbach’s text not only provides an introduction to the study of MI but, specifically, how it can be applied to adult literacy populations. The studies conducted and reported, which are related

to Adult Multiple Intelligences (AMI), offer educators an MI approach for working with adult populations. The basic method employed by the authors is to present educators with a variety of examples

organized around subject matter which can be utilized to provide meaningful learning experiences among adult students in a number of different ways.

The ideas presented in the text are organized into five chapters: MI Basics, MI Reflections, MI-Inspired Instruction, MI-Inspired Lessons, and Student Responses to MI Practices. Chapter I offers some very useful information about MI that is easy to follow and, in a way, may encourage the reader to seek more information on the subject. One notable shortcoming of this chapter, however, is its omission of any discussion about MI's relationship to "best practices" or "student-centered learning" which attempts to provide similar approaches to MI—the design of practical or real-life projects/assignments, the idea of connectedness, collaboration among students, the creation of active classroom environments, and assessment designed to promote and diagnose learning. Readers will find the "myths and misconceptions" sections in assessment, learning styles, and teaching to all eight intelligences particularly helpful in understanding the pitfalls to avoid when considering how MI could be integrated into their practice.

While the MI Reflections discussed in Chapter II are useful, it is evident that some of this information—the first section, which is instructional in nature—should be separated from the reflections themselves. It would be more appropriate to read about teacher reflections and student responses to MI practices later in the text (i.e., in Chapter V) rather than interrupt the discussion about MI Basics and appropriate instructional strategies.

Educators working with adults will find Chapter IV—MI Inspired Lessons, the pragmatic section of the text—one of the most helpful sections because it provides sample lessons developed and used by the Adult Multiple Intelligence (AMI) teachers who participated in the study. The lessons presented are practical and straightforward in their approach and

some can be adapted for a variety of subject areas. Chapter V is perhaps a fitting way to end the text because it summarizes students' experiences to the MI intervention techniques employed by the AMI teachers.

All in all, this is a useful text, perhaps one of the few texts, that directly situates MI practices in adult education. Read Viens and Kallenbach's text if you wish to have an overview of MI practices and you work with adult student populations. If, on the other hand, you merely wish to learn about MI practices, you might seek out Gardner's text and use your imagination and creativity to blend sound pedagogical practices with the basic tenets of MI.