

Training and Professional Development of Early Childhood Educators in The Theory of Multiple Intelligences

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Abstract

The theory of multiple intelligences (MI) is relatively easy to implement in early childhood programs. However, there are a number of components, or competencies, that must be considered, if the theory is to truly realize its potential in the classroom. This presentation provides eight specific competencies that should be part of any training program for early childhood educators on the theory of multiple intelligences. They include: experiencing multiple intelligences directly, connecting multiple intelligences to one's own life, understanding the theory behind multiple intelligences, understanding how to identify the multiple intelligences in students, understanding how to create multiple intelligences environments, understanding how to create multiple intelligences lesson plans, developing the willingness to try out new multiple intelligences strategies, and experiencing multiple intelligences support groups with other teachers.

One of the most appealing features of the theory of multiple intelligences is that, while it is a comprehensive model of learning, at the same time, it is relatively easy to train early childhood educators in its use. It is especially important that the training not be simply delivered in a lecture format, although lecture has its place as one important tool for training. Since the theory of multiple intelligences makes the point that educators must go beyond lecture in their instructional methods for children, the same thing is true of training for educators: it must embrace all the intelligences, and thus be highly experiential. In this presentation, I'd like to introduce you to some key elements of such an experiential training program. These elements are expressed as specific competencies that early childhood educators should have at the completion of the training (and this is true, whether the training program is one day, or extends over a period of several weeks or months).

1. Experiencing the Multiple Intelligences Directly – As noted above, it is important that early childhood educators not merely be verbally told what the eight intelligences are, but have direct experience of each intelligence. This makes each of the intelligences vivid in the mind of the educator, and thus more likely to be remembered and understood. Thus, when training educators, I make it a point of creating eight experiential activities – one for each of the intelligences. Here are some examples:
 - a. Linguistic – think of a poem that you learned sometime in your life and listen to it in your “mind’s ear”

- b. Logical-Mathematical – answer the question: “how long was a million seconds ago?”
- c. Spatial – close your eyes and visualize the room you’re sitting in, in as much detail as you can
- d. Bodily-Kinesthetic – stand up and move as if you’re walking in bare feet on hot pavement
- e. Musical – listen to the first four notes of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony (dah-dah-dah-DAH!!!), and finish the phrase with the next four notes.
- f. Interpersonal – choose a partner, decide who will go first, and then tell your partner something interesting that happened to you in the past two weeks without using words
- g. Intrapersonal – reflect on what you feel is your great asset as a person, and your greatest limitation as a person (note: do not have partners share this with each other).
- h. Naturalist – name five birds that are found in your neighborhood

These are just suggestions, and many other activities can be used as well.

2. Connecting the Multiple Intelligences to Their Own Life - Another training competency that prevents the theory of multiple intelligences from becoming just another remote program that educators must master, is to have trainees apply the theory to their own lives. This is most easily done with a questionnaire or checklist (see handouts). After completing the checklist, teachers can then form sharing groups to talk about the results. Often, I will ask teachers to share something about their most developed intelligence and their least developed intelligence. Sometimes, I will also invite them to discuss factors in their own upbringing that may have encouraged or discouraged the development of different intelligences. This whole process makes the theory of multiple intelligences more alive and personalized.
3. Understanding the Theory Behind Multiple Intelligences. – Oftentimes, teachers will say that they don’t want theory, they want practice with lots of specific examples. This is important, of course, but it is also important that the theory be presented in vivid detail (I use handouts). If one doesn’t understand the theory, then it is hard to go beyond the simple application of individual strategies. In other words, with a mastery of theory, teachers can be in a better position to create their own unique strategies. Even more importantly, by understanding theory, they will know why this method of learning is so important to use in education. The individual components of theory include (the material comes from Gardner’s book Frames of Mind):
 - a. Symbol systems
 - b. Cultural value
 - c. Exceptional individuals
 - d. Developmental trajectories
 - e. Brain research

4. Understanding How to Identify the Multiple Intelligences in Students. - While teachers have sometimes used checklists or inventories to identify students' multiple intelligences (much as they identified their own MIs above), I feel it is better if teachers use their own observational skills to determine a student's most and least developed intelligences. Observe your students when they have a chance to choose activities (do they choose musical, artistic, linguistic, or social pursuits, for example). Observe your students when they are most passionate about learning (and when they are least passionate). These observations can give you important clues about their multiple intelligences. Also, it is good if teachers can get information from other sources: from parents, from other teachers, and from the students themselves (simply by asking them, do you enjoy music? Art? Science and math? Etc.).
5. Understanding How to Create Multiple Intelligences Environments. At the early childhood level, being able to create appropriate environments is more important than being able to teach specific skills. Children learn best by being in environments (or learning centers) where each of the intelligences is valued and utilized. So, for example, teachers should have an understanding of how to create a musical interest center, which might include some of the following materials: musical instruments, percussion instruments, musical recordings, sound boxes (boxes that have 'mystery' sounds in them that need to be guessed at), and listening devices (e.g. stethoscope, walkie-talkies etc.).
6. Understanding How to Create Multiple Intelligences Lesson Plans – Of course, at the same time, it is important to know how to create lessons around specific reading, math, science, social, and other skills. For this, I often use a simple tool called a Multiple Intelligences Lesson Plan Mind Map (see slides), which allows teachers to ask specific questions about how to teach a given objective. If the objective was simple multiplication, then the range of strategies might include storytelling, magic squares, modular math (a number line in a circle), clapping rhythms, doing multiplication aerobics, create a cooperative learning circle, finding the multiples in nature, and discovering the multiplication principle through math manipulatives. The important thing here is not that we will be teaching everything eight different ways, but that we will be able to come up with at least eight *options* for teaching any given objective. This gives us greater flexibility in determining how we will approach any given subject.
7. Developing the Willingness to Try Out New MI Strategies. – The theory of multiple intelligences asks teachers to break out of the standard approach to education that they have been using over the years, and try some new approaches and new strategies. This often involves the element of risk. We do not know if a specific activity or strategy will work or not. Sometimes they will work. Other times, they will fail. However, we won't know the effectiveness of a strategy until it is tried. Sometimes we will discover that an activity will work with one group of children but not another, or with one specific child. It is important not to

give up after trying a strategy, but seeing if there are ways to improve it. At the same time, since there are so many strategies available to us under the theory of multiple intelligences, we also have the freedom to pick and choose which activities we will try out, and to choose those we feel will have the best chance of succeeding.

8. Experiencing MI Support Groups with Other Teachers - An important structure to help us as we try out new teaching strategies is the use of support groups. These consist of eight teachers, each one of whom agrees to take responsibility for a given intelligence (e.g. to be the “expert” in that intelligence). The support group should meet on a regular basis, and be a place where teachers can ask for help in coming up with new MI strategies for specific objectives, and where they can receive support after having tried specific strategies. If the strategy succeeded in the classroom, then the teacher can receive the congratulations of the rest of the teachers. If the strategy failed, then the teacher can receive supportive feedback from the rest of the group on how the strategy might be made better, or how an alternative strategy might be preferred.