

## MI in the Inclusive Classroom

by Sally Grimes

Until very recently, many general education teachers in the United States were not trained to modify instruction to address the array of individual differences in learners. Even with the main streaming of learners with special needs into the general education classrooms, the emphasis has often been on having the student who learns differently fit into whatever was going on in the classroom.

Things are changing, however. In today's inclusive classroom, all children are expected to learn and teachers are expected to tailor instruction to give all children access to the curriculum. The new inclusive classroom presents a challenge, but it can be met when teachers use the theory of multiple intelligences to help all students realize success in the general education classroom. The theory can be used in at least two ways: (1) as an entry point to motivate, capitalize on a child's strengths, and boost self-esteem; or (2) as a way of enhancing a certain capacity or intelligence (as in the arts) that had not been noticed before because of the traditional value placed on weaker capacities (such as reading). Some examples follow:

Students with well-developed visual/spatial abilities can grasp content with the use of visuals, such as graphic organizers, outlines, and signs with special lettering and graphics. For some, this approach provides an opportunity to develop those strengths; for others, it can be a motivator. Grouping key concepts on graphs and providing organizational charts for students to use while exploring those concepts enables students to broaden and deepen their understanding on their own and in ways that match their ability levels.

Some students learn best when they can move their bodies. Ask students to act out parts of sentences, vocabulary words, and concepts. How will the child who has a highly developed Bodily Kinesthetic intelligence best learn the periodic table? Perhaps through skits in which he role plays chemical equations.

Students with learning disabilities usually learn and thrive on the skills involved in reading, writing, and spelling when taught using a multi-sensory, hands on approach. Moving blocks to represent a word's phonemes (or sounds) while sounding out the word helps enormously. Similarly, finger spelling or tapping out the syllables with one's finger is a technique that even adults with spelling problems often rely on.

The use of music doesn't just help kindergarteners learn the ABCs: rhymes and rhythm are essential to early and disabled readers. Music is a powerful tool and researchers are slowly unlocking the reasons for its role in enhancing learning. Furthermore, a student who may have struggled with understanding a process such as photosynthesis when taught only linguistically may have strengths in the area of music that can be enhanced by composing a "photosynthesis song." This can also boost that student's self-esteem and image, and serve as a motivating factor or entry point for another child.

These examples really just represent good teaching, but it's often easier for teachers to tailor their instruction for students with special needs when they use the theory of multiple intelligences to guide

lesson planning. For students with language based learning disabilities and other special needs, using nontraditional teaching tools is often essential, not simply "fun" or "different" or "easier for the child."

Through MI, teachers also begin to see the included child in a new light. One teacher discovered that a bright child with serious reading disabilities had superior artistic and musical abilities. Instead of penalizing him for reading failure, the teacher praised the student for his newfound intelligences. What's more, his language skills were enhanced through the use of music and spatial tasks and a more appropriate reading program. His life was turned around. Truly, an MI classroom is an inclusive classroom.

This article was published in the September 1997 issue of Classroom Leadership, the companion newsletter to ASCD'S Educational Leadership Magazine and is reproduced with permission.

This article may be reproduced if its source and author are credited.