

Using Our Many Intelligences to Learn

by Silja Kallenbach

Adults, like children, process information and make meaning in their own, distinct ways. The theory of multiple intelligences (MI), developed by Dr. Howard Gardner, proposes that each one of us has a unique set of strengths or intelligences that affect how we make meaning. According to MI theory, there are eight intelligences that shape our interests and learning preferences:

- Linguistic intelligence is the capacity to use language to express what's on your mind and to understand other people. Story-tellers, poets and writers specialize in this intelligence.
- Logical-mathematical intelligence enables individuals to use and appreciate abstract relations. People who are good in math and logical thinking rely on this intelligence.
- Musical intelligence allows people to create, communicate, and understand meanings made out of sound. People who have a strong musical intelligence don't just remember music easily—they can't get it out of their minds. Musicians and singers exemplify this intelligence.
- Spatial intelligence refers to the ability to represent the spatial world internally—the way a sailor or airplane pilot navigates the world, or the way a chess player or sculptor can visualize objects.
- Spatial intelligence can be used in the arts or in the sciences.
- Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence allows individuals to use all or part of the body to create products or solve problems. Athletes, dancers, and actors have this intelligence.
- Intrapersonal intelligence refers to having an understanding of yourself, of knowing who you are, what you can do, what you want to do, how you react to things, and which things to avoid.
- Interpersonal intelligence enables individuals to respond constructively to others' feelings and intentions. Teachers, parents, politicians, psychologists, and salespeople rely on interpersonal intelligence.
- Naturalist intelligence designates the human ability to discriminate among living things (plants, animals) as well as sensitivity to other features of the natural world (clouds, rock configurations). This ability is central for farmers, gardeners, chefs, and florists.

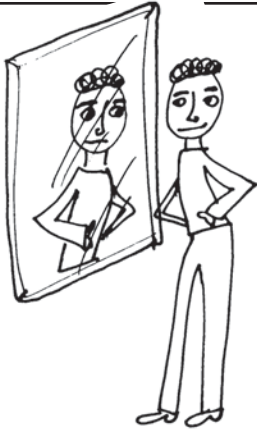


Drawings by Rachel Wimmer



All of us have a distinct set of these intelligences, which suggests that we learn differently and are engaged by different topics and activities. Offering adults diverse ways to learn taps into their multiple intelligences.





CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES THAT USE YOUR MANY INTELLIGENCES

Select two activities from this list to do either alone or with other classmates. Be prepared to present your work to the whole group.

1. Read the story by Denise Beal on page 1 and write a letter to the author that relates her story to your personal experience.
2. Write and perform a skit that portrays one negative and one positive force (see p. 5) that affects adults' ability to come to school.
3. Write and deliver a motivational speech to help adults keep up with their studies.
4. Draw a cartoon that presents a positive set of scenarios in contrast to the ones on page 3. Write a few paragraphs explaining your choices.
5. Create a poster that motivates adults to keep up with their studies. Write a few paragraphs explaining your poster.
6. Based on the chart about negative and positive forces (p. 5), write questions to survey your classmates about negative and positive forces that affect their ability to come to school. Ask people to rate their top three positive and negative forces on a scale of 1, 2 or 3. Combine (aggregate) everyone's responses and calculate what percentage of people rated each force as their top priority.
7. Find or write two songs with one portraying a negative force and the other portraying a positive force or inspiration that affects adults' ability to come to school. For example, the song "Working 9 to 5" portrays a negative force, and the song "You Can Get It If You Really Want" portrays a positive force. Then write a few paragraphs explaining your choice of songs and relate them to your personal experience.
8. Create and perform a series of movements portraying the negative and positive forces that affect adults' ability to come to school. Write a few paragraphs explaining what you came up with.



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Silja Kallenbach co-directed the Adult Multiple Intelligences (AMI) Study for the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy with Julie Viens from Project Zero at Harvard from 1996 to 2001. Silja is co-author of Multiple Intelligences in Adult Education, A Sourcebook for Practitioners (Teachers College Press, 2004). Silja is the Director of the New England Literacy Resource Center at World Education.

