

Does Multiple Intelligences Based Instruction Have an Effect on Students' Attitudes & Achievement?

Chapter V Summary

Although many high school age students tend to think and learn in nontraditional ways, American schools still base their instruction primarily on the verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences. As a result, many students who are not strong in these traditional intelligences develop poor attitudes toward school and their academic achievement suffers. The results of this study indicate that incorporating the multiple intelligences into classroom instruction helps strengthen students' weaker intelligences, thereby improving students' attitudes toward learning and students' academic achievement.

According to the theory of multiple intelligences, intelligences change with age and with experience (Gardner, 1983). Since our culture places so much importance on the traditional intelligences and since so many high school students have strengths in the nontraditional intelligences (Teele, 1996), it makes sense to incorporate the multiple intelligences into classroom instruction in order to provide experiences that will change students' intelligences for the better.

All students should have the opportunity to not only further develop their dominant intelligences, but should also have the opportunity to develop their weaker intelligences. Since a majority of the students in this study were weak in the verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences, they will certainly be at a disadvantage in a culture which places so much emphasis on traditional intelligences. Despite their weaknesses, given the opportunity to succeed using an intelligence in which they could excel, these students demonstrated that they were capable of developing their verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences.

Because MI based instruction is designed to reach a combination of intelligences, the MI classroom is perceived by students as a place where all students can do something well, instead of as a place where some students are "smart" and others are not. MI focuses on students' strengths and uses those strengths to build up weaker areas. According to Jie-Qi Chen & Gardner (1997), MI can bridge the gap from an area of success to an area of difficulty because "the sense of success in one area may make the student more likely to engage in areas where they feel less comfortable" (p. 35). Since students are not made to feel as though they are stupid because they do not know something, a change in attitude takes place which effectively removes the "block" which once prevented learning.

MI based instruction is effective because it allows students to think in ways that are comfortable for them. It also helps them develop thought processes that they do not normally use by providing them with a positive environment in which they can experiment without feeling that they are not "intelligent." Students who are strong in nontraditional intelligences often are made to feel that they don't measure up to the rest of their classmates. MI based instruction provides all students with the opportunities they need to succeed. Students who have been successful are better equipped to attempt more challenging work. For many high school aged students, literary analysis, which requires the verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences, is just that challenge. In a short six week period, the students in this study made that first step from literal to inferential analysis because they were given the chance to

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succeed in several different ways using several different intelligences; therefore, the results of this study suggest that teachers in this school and probably other similar school should incorporate more MI based instruction into their English curriculum.

More research into the effects of MI based instruction on students' attitudes toward learning is in order. Perhaps a study taking place over the course of an academic year and involving more students from a variety of schools (e.g. urban, rural, mixture of socioeconomic status, etc.) would provide a clearer picture of the effects of MI based instruction on students' attitudes toward learning and on academic achievement.

In conclusion, MI based instruction has the potential to eliminate (or at least reduce) the number of American students who are currently stumbling blindly through our systems of education. These students can be provided with the opportunities that they need in order to succeed in school while they are improving the verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences which they will require in order to be successful in our society.