

Wonderland

MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

By Izabella Hearn

This paper starts with an overview of the issues upon which I will be touching. I will make this memorable with the help of a bouquet of flowers. The flowers represent the theories and tools that are available to us teachers today. But just before we begin, I would like to invite you to choose a word which most closely describes how you feel about yourself in your teaching role at this moment. For example, the words are all positive and include the following:

enthusiastic, happy, responsible, supportive, intelligent, interesting, confident, responsive, likeable, sensitive, perceptive, creative, active, clever, kind, thoughtful, tolerant, flexible etc.

After this activity there follows a feeling of satisfaction and well-being. We can acknowledge our talent, and the feeling of capability which allows us to succeed. Exercises to promote self-esteem are important for both students and teachers (who are usually overworked, underpaid and not as appreciated as we should be by society at large, given the responsibility of the job we do).

The first flowers that I put in my bouquet are eight carnations. Each one represents a different intelligence. Howard Gardner has identified eight intelligences so far, and is at present working on the ninth (the existential intelligence). In this paper we are going to concentrate on the eight: the visual/spatial, bodily/kinaesthetic, musical/rhythmic, logical/mathematical, verbal/linguistic, naturalist and interpersonal and intrapersonal which together are often referred to as the emotional intelligences.

The next flowers represent the five senses, the five ways in which we take in information; Visual, Auditory, Kinaesthetic, Olfactory and Gustatory (VAKOG). For the purposes of this paper we are going to concentrate on VAK, but that is not to say we should totally disregard the other two - far from it: whenever the opportunity arises and we are able to include the olfactory and gustatory senses into our teaching, the benefits will be enormous! Our senses affect our own particular teaching and learning style. To reach all our children we need to be as multi-sensory as possible in the classroom. We need also to find ways to help our learners discover their own learning styles so they can move forward independently, using the teacher as a facilitator rather than a dictator.

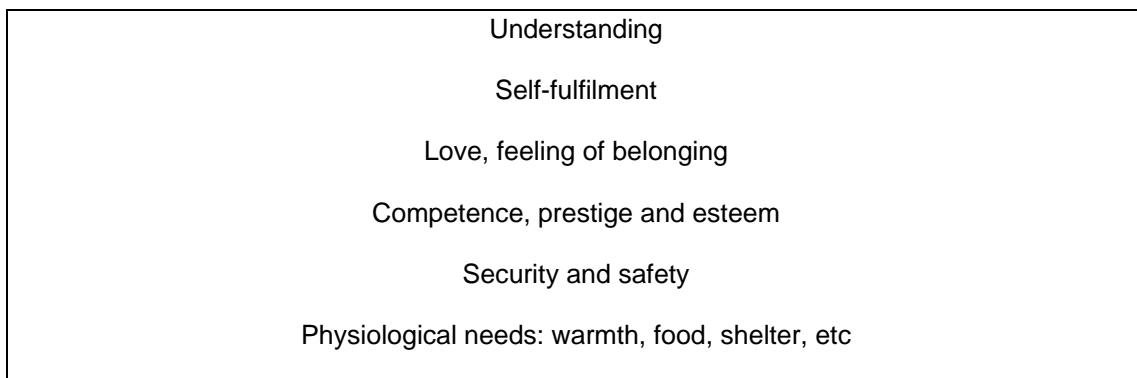
My single flower which I will now add to the bouquet is one which represents all the tools that can help us to ensure that the children can become successful learners and fulfil their potential. The tool that I have chosen to talk about is Educational Kinesiology, or Brain Gym ®. Brain Gym activities give learners the freedom to access parts of the brain that may be blocked, and to take control over their own learning by giving them strategies which will enhance their performance.

There are two flowers that are joined together and these complete the picture. These represent the brain; the left and the right hemispheres. They remind us that the **whole brain** needs to be stimulated for maximum learning to take place.

So now we have a beautiful bouquet of ideas, but what a difference a few sprigs of green leaves can make! Suddenly our flowers come to life! The green sprigs (or fern) are the underlying thread which enhances the value of all our wonderful theories and strategies. The green sprigs are the self-esteem that all learners need in order to believe in themselves sufficiently so they can move forward in their own learning. The greatest gift we can give our students is the gift of self-esteem. In the words of Walt Disney..” ***If you can dream it, you can do it***”

One of our main tasks as teachers is to produce a stress-free environment where our learners can flourish. The psychologist Abraham Maslow describes how we all have basic needs that must be satisfied before understanding, and therefore meaningful learning, can take place. This means that our energy will be drawn towards any lower level of need (see Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Triangle) which we feel is not being met (for example a child that is feeling cold or hungry, is unlikely to pay much attention to learning new vocabulary). Think of five (practical) ways in which it would be possible to improve the environment in which they work.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs



A STORY

The story I am going to tell has a variety of purposes. Like all stories it has an underlying message which I hope that all teachers can connect to. In this story, which is based on fact, a young boy is asked by his teacher to write an essay with the title “What I want to do and be when I grow up”. The boy, Monty, spends a lot of time on his essay. His ambition is to own his own ranch, and he describes it in great detail. Monty comes from a working family and has changed schools many times, and as a result his work has suffered. When he gives in his work, the teacher reads it, and tells Monty that his dream is completely unrealistic so he will have to fail him. He offers to give Monty another chance telling him to re-write the essay and he will change the grade. Monty thinks very hard about this, but finally goes back to school and tells his teacher that he has decided to keep his dream. Years later, when Monty has his ranch and opens it to visiting schools, his old teacher arrives, accompanied by his class. Monty’s essay is framed about the fireplace in the ranch that is identical to the one he had described as a child. His teacher admits that he had tried to “steal” his dream, something which maybe many teachers do, unknowingly.

During the story we are going to do a drill of some key sentences which practice the “going to” future tense. We are going to do this with some visual as well as auditory stimuli and also actions which we will decide on together. In this way we make sure that we are reaching learners with visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning styles, and we are leaving no-one behind! We will look at the types of activities that we most often use in class and establish whether we are giving the class a balanced VAK menu or are we tending to favour our own preferred style?

At the end of the story we are going to look at different follow-up activities. Each one is linked to one of the eight intelligences. We can invent a rap to advertise Monty’s ranch, or design a poster inviting schools to visit. We can find out more about horses and what they eat and how they live. It is interesting to discover which activities we are enthusiastic about, and which ones don’t interest us at all. One of the most exciting aspects of Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences is that intelligence is NOT fixed as was so often thought in the past, and we can help our students to develop talents that they didn’t know they had. A step towards this would be to ask the children to work with a partner who has chosen a completely different task, and work together, finding out what it is about each task that another child finds attractive. In this way the children are not just exploring the way they learn best and so achieving independence and autonomy in learning, but also moving forward to discover new territory.

We, the teachers in the third millennium, have such a wonderful variety of tools and resources which can help us to really move our students forward. The tool that I have found most useful both as a teacher and a learner is **BRAIN GYM** or **Educational Kinesiology**.

Brain Gym activities are helpful in many ways. Very briefly, Brain Gym activities were developed in the early seventies by Dr. Paul Dennison. They were based on the understanding of the links between Physical Development, Language Acquisition and Academic Achievement. The activities enhance the experience of whole brain learning and are especially effective with academic skills.

In this paper I am going to explain PACE, a simple and short 4 – step routine that can be used at the start of each class.

1. The first step is to allow the children to have a drink of water. Often, the key reason why the children are finding it difficult to pay attention is that they are dehydrated. It is a problem that is so easy to solve and yet so often we are unaware of it.
2. The next step, which I will demonstrate, is the “Brain Buttons” exercise, where the children gently massage the points under the clavicle to the left and right of the sternum. One of the results of this is the increased flow of electromagnetic energy and a linking of the right and left hemispheres which crosses the reading midline and decreases visual stress.
3. The Cross Crawl is a favourite exercise for my classes and can be done with music and chants. In this exercise we alternately move one arm, touching the opposite knee with our elbow, and then proceed with the opposite arm and *its* opposite knee. This exercise is most effective when done slowly, and for smaller children it can be done sitting down. The Cross Crawl activates the brain for left to right eye movement and is helpful for all the skills. I have found that in my own class, the children will automatically get up to do a Cross Crawl whenever they feel they are blocked or in need of inspiration.. This is a wonderful way of empowering the children to take control over their own learning process.
4. The final activity in the sequence is the Cook’s Hook-Up, another favourite, and one that can be used as a tool for classroom management during those times when we need to calm the atmosphere and regain the focus, of an over-excited class. To do the Hook-up we cross the left ankle over the right (in a sitting or a standing position) and extend the arms, crossing the left wrists over the right, palms together. We then interlace our fingers

and draw the hands up towards the chest, breathe deeply and relax. We place our tongue on the roof of our mouth, breathe in through the nose, drop the tongue, and then relax. Finally we gently connect our fingers at waist level. The Hook-ups activate the brain for emotional centring and increase attention.

Any one of these exercises can be used individually, but together they are an ideal starter, serving to energise and enhance the class. The children themselves soon feel the benefits of Brain Gym, and can adapt the way they use the techniques to suit their own learning needs. In my own classes, we have put Brain Gym actions to chants and songs, and used them to practise imperatives and vocabulary. The activities are a wonderful stress-free way of allowing the whole class to participate in the same activity, establishing a rapport and sense of belonging.

Brain Gym activities stimulate both the right and left hemisphere so that whole brain learning can take place. We don't need to go into a detailed analysis of the functions of the brain, but an anecdotal reference to the concept of the two hemispheres and their differences can make all the difference to a child's perception and understanding of their own learning process. We will do a short visualisation which will serve to stimulate the whole brain in a multi-sensory way. During the visualisation we will deliberately access both hemispheres and enjoy exploring the reactions of the "right/left" brain. Before working on a story the children can visualise the words, alternating the images on the left and on the right side of the brain. They can then be guided to imagine a sequence from the story in a multi-sensory way. Visualisation activities are particularly useful to set the scene for a topic and put the class in the desired frame of mind to share an experience of a story.

I would like to end by describing two very dedicated teachers, Malcolm and Sally, living and working many years apart. Malcolm was a teacher working in the 1950's and his question as he entered his classroom, was "***I wonder if these children are intelligent***", while Sally, working in the year 2004, asks herself "***In what way are these children intelligent?***" They each have a fairly typical group of children, ranging from the more studious child who enjoys the traditional reading and writing activities, the child who is logical / mathematical and so has no problem with number work, and then those children that are bursting to go out and play - the ones that want to run move and sing and make a noise or doodle or investigate the insects in the playground. All these children are talented, but in different ways. They all need our time and our respect. We will look at some well-known people who have reached a high level of success in their field and explore which intelligences they developed in order to reach their goals. Today, we are aware that we all have a huge variety of talents or intelligences in our classes, but are we really doing everything we can for each and every child? It is important for the children themselves to know that there are many different ways of being intelligent, so they can celebrate and recognise their own strengths and find learning strategies that are in line with their profile. They can also begin to appreciate and respect the differences that there are between the members of their group, which will allow them to collaborate successfully, and reach a sophisticated level of learner autonomy.

Whatever we teach, whatever we hope the children are going to learn, the experience is richer and more memorable when we engage the emotions, when we include an element of fun, when we laugh. The following chant, which can be taught in the usual enjoyable way, can serve to help the children discover some of the characteristics of the eight different intelligences.

CHANT (*Fun English* Level 6)

Do you like to work,
alone in class?
Are you happy in a group,
or in a team?
Is art your favourite subject,
Or is it maths?
Are you really good
at sport or P.E?

Who likes singing,
or reading books?
Who's good with animals, and plants?
Everybody's different,
everybody's great.
let's learn together,
It's never too late!

Eric Jensen said, "The secret to classroom success with all of our learners is to treat EVERY student as gifted and talented". I think this is sound advice, because it is true: our students ARE gifted and talented, and our job as teachers is to find that talent and work with it so our learners can make the progress that they deserve.

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(The story of Monty comes from *Chicken Soup for the Soul* by Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen. Health Communications, Inc)