

LANG

matters

With the emphasis being on teaching the “individual” in modern teaching pedagogy, LANG has decided to dedicate this issue to how to cater and **plan for the individual within the state school structure**. It has become quite clear in recent years that in order to reach all the students within a group, we need to teach in a variety of ways – multi-modally – and cater for individual learning styles, ie. a Multiple Intelligences Teaching Approach to make our students learning and our teaching more effective.

Anyone who is familiar with the work of **Howard Gardner** will be aware of the importance of the **Multiple Intelligences Theory** to all forms of teaching, and in this issue you will be able to find a series of articles dealing with Gardner’s theory and the implications that adopting this approach may have for language teachers.

The opening article introduces us to some of the aspects of Gardner’s theory which is followed by an in service teacher’s account of a special needs MI project carried out in a school in Modena. This issue offers articles with **practical suggestions for including MI theory within various contexts ranging from creating individual access routes to English literature to simple activities for the Scuola Media teacher in everyday classroom situations**. We have an article by Flora Palamidesi on the **LANG Junior Portfolio** and how this relates to this issue’s theme and information on the distance training programme offered to schools by LANG in support of the Portfolio. CHALK TALK offers a practical advice to a teacher wondering how to apply the MI theory to state school classes with large numbers of students.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of LANG Matters and experimenting with some of the ideas put forward.

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A Multiple Intelligence Approach to motivate students

Students with little linguistic competence tend to be weak students and score poor results in tests, thus they are put off and their performance can only get worse. If we find ways of connecting with them using less traditional intelligences, then their attitude to school work might change and their performance could improve.

by Gaia Ierace

READING AND MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

We believe that MI can help students carry out challenging tasks such as reading in a foreign language. Reading is a challenging activity because it means shifting from the spoken to the written word.

M. Donaldson (1979) comments on this shift thus: "When they move from home to school, they move from spoken to written language. No body language. The only access to meaning is to interpret language. To be able to learn a language they must be aware of patterns and rules in a language". Readers must deal with a language that is structurally more elaborate than spoken language, a de-contextualised language where hardly any feedback is possible because it is a communication 'in absentia'.

A challenging task that becomes even more challenging when the learner starts reading in L2. At school, a pupil who learns English is faced with a series of difficulties:

- memorization of a word that stands for an object in L2;
- the phonic representation of the object;
- the graphic representation of the object.

The pupil will have to shift from the picture → to L1 = gatto → to sounds = /kaet/ → to graphemes = cat.

Reading makes a lot of demands on learner's linguistic skills if we approach reading as a merely linguistic process. No doubt reading is a linguistic process but there is more than that. The written word can become more accessible if we work with intelligences other than the verbal one. Reading should be turned into a process in which all our intelligences interact. Reading doesn't just mean decoding a string of words.

As Armstrong (1994b) suggests: "The master code of this learning style is simple: for whatever you wish to teach, link your instructional objectives to words, numbers or logic, pictures, music, the body, social interaction and/or personal experience. If you can create activities that combine these intelligences in unique ways, so much the better". For instance, letters

could become a mathematical riddle to solve, thus **mathematical learners** will be more intrigued. Teachers could link up the word-based symbol system to spatial intelligence by having pupils learn to read through rebuses.

Musical learners can learn to read English by singing the lyrics with simple vocabulary. **Kinaesthetically** students might act out written words.

Interpersonally oriented learners would probably enjoy leading a reading group or reading in pairs, whereas **intrapersonal** learners might prefer reading in a corner somewhere in the classroom. The **naturalist** learner might enjoy reading about lizards or the rainforest.

Thus we would shift the focus of our teaching away from the actual 'reading' task and concentrate on the most effective way each learner can face such a demanding task. 'What to teach' becomes less relevant than 'Who we are teaching'.

A TEACHING UNIT WITH MI

Having highlighted children's difficulties in learning how to read, we will now look at how multiple intelligence oriented teaching can ease students' access to the written word in a reading task.

The following activities are taken from a teachers' resource pack written by myself and my colleague Tarugi for Lang. At the time we didn't know we were trying to create MI based activities but, as teachers, we felt it was important to involve our students with their whole beings, not only their cognitive skills but all their senses. We were designing the activities and thinking: *They should not only think in English but also feel in English.* And this is what we came up with.

101 Ideas is a resource pack for language teachers of Scuola Media that includes more than 100 activities covering the four skills as well as games and songs. Each activity focuses on a lexical set and a grammar point. The activity we are going to look at, Idea 62, is a reading activity for the second year of Scuola Media. The lexical set is 'words used to describe personality' and the grammar point is the use of "would like". The

teaching unit is divided into the traditional phases:

- warm-up that consists in a pre-reading activity;
- the text;
- a follow up activity.

◆ The first task students have to tackle is to look at pictures and complete some sentences. Thus they are relying on their 'spatial intelligence' because they are using an iconic code, pictures, to carry out a linguistic activity-completing sentence. However, if we look at the language task more closely, we realize that students will also need their intrapersonal intelligence to complete the task successfully. They are confronted with a list of situations like "It's hot. I would like to...". A visual clue is provided, but students should be encouraged to resort not only to their encyclopaedic knowledge (what they know about the world) but also to their personal experience (what they would do in a similar situation). Their "intrapersonal intelligence" will lead their response especially when dealing with more emotional, less physical needs such as "I'm bored" or "I'm sad".

◆ As students move on to the next activity, both their linguistic and their logical mathematical intelligences are challenged. They have to match opposites so what their mind is actually doing is not only thinking about linguistic concepts, in this case adjectives that qualify people's personality, but also processing the meaning of the adjective and selecting the appropriate antonym. They are classifying and categorizing data. Thus not only linguistic but also logical thinking is required.

◆ The third activity makes demands on pupils' linguistic intelligence. They have to scan the text and find the information necessary to answer the questions but in this context, language has not only an informative function but also an interpersonal one. It is used to give an insight into the social relationship the writer, William, has with the receiver, George, and his London friends. In order to understand both the locutionary and illocutionary meaning of the text, what we read between the lines (that is William's loneliness, his desire to be in London and to see his friends), the reader will need to rely on his 'interpersonal intelligence' defined as "the ability to relate and understand others", in our case the sender of the letter.

In the activity that follows, students read a definition and they have to find the word that matches the definition. Again, both linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences are at work. Students do not only have to decode the meaning of strings of words but they have to work out the link between a concept and its key, defining features. The fifth activity requires the knowledge of collocation so 'word smart' pupils will be particularly good at this activity. They will find out the company words keep, spotting that, for instance, 'a play' is a better companion for 'write' than the word 'a face'. In the last activity students must write a letter to a friend and convey their feelings and desires. Here the linguistic, the intrapersonal and the

interpersonal intelligences come into play. Students will use words to explore their feelings, their desires. Language will be a means of self-expression, self-exploration and a way of interacting with others, sharing our emotions with them.

More follow up activities could be suggested to include the bodily-kinaesthetic and the musical intelligences. Students could learn act out the conversation between William and George when they meet, or the teacher could tell them Hamlet's story or show them the film and the students could perform Hamlet's tragedy. Musical students could contribute writing and singing songs for the show or a ballad about poor William stranded in Stratford. Teachers could, for example, give students the beginning of a rap song about William and ask students to finish it.

Through Multiple Intelligence oriented teaching, the linguistic content of this unit will become more appealing and accessible to a greater number of students, creativity and cooperation will be encouraged. Each student will work with others and contribute to the learning process with his/her intelligence no matter how linguistic competent s/he is. In a curious way, with MI we go back to a communicative, task-based approach to language teaching, to the idea that the most effective way to teach a language is to shift attention away from language as a code to what you can do with language. M.I goes a step further, though. It focuses not only on 'doing things with words'. It opens up a whole new range of ways of connecting with our students. It encourages teachers and students to 'do things with words, numbers, our body, our inner self, our friends, our ears, our eyes'.

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