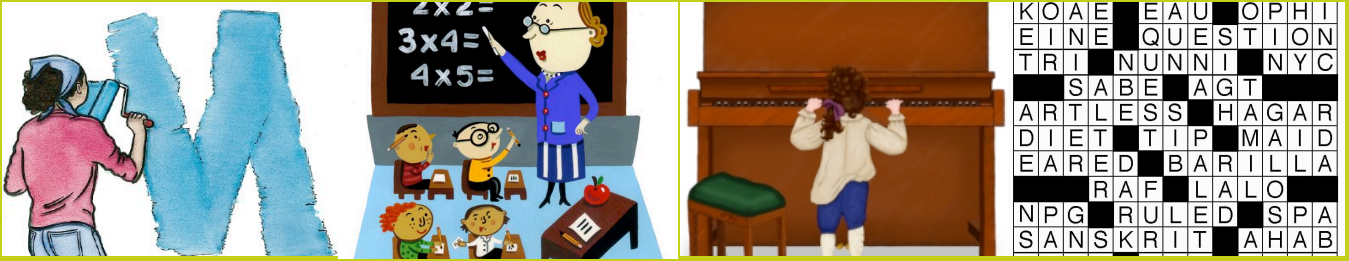


# How are *you* smart?



## How smart are you?

A cruel question indeed! But a useful one for determining the mindset essential for personal growth and intellectual development.

Some students sense the tease, and with quizzical looks and tentative answers show their displeasure for the question!

And nor should they like it - it's the wrong question.

*How smart are you* assumes two things:

- Intelligence is one dimensional and we are placed somewhere along it's continuum
- Intelligence is fixed

This has significant implications for students, particularly those who don't see themselves as being smart. Low self esteem often results in a lack of the effort required to improve their 'smartness'.

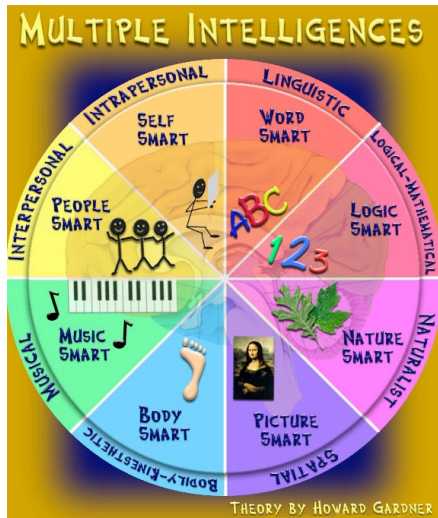
A simple change of word sequence to 'How are *you* smart' addresses the first issue. This question now assumes that we are all smart but in different ways.

Howard Gardner is recognized as a key figure in liberating intelligence from its narrow dimensions to the multi dimensional, but the concept is hardly Copernican. Put simply, just because a person is good at something doesn't guarantee proficiency in something else. One problem we face is a kind of reversal of this, so we need to proclaim that just because a child is not good in certain things doesn't mean they're not smart.

The triumvirate of maths, science and literacy is pervasive in education, and is rightly important. Students, and the community at large, often limit their definition of intelligence, to these subject areas.

The broader view of multiple intelligences is wonderfully empowering for students. In my 60-minute workshops, I lead students through the Gardner 8 intelligences, inviting students to

identify the areas they succeed in, and enjoy.



Children love doing this. They observe in their classroom a diversity of human capacity and witness themselves and their peers having both strengths and weaknesses.

Question: Which of Gardner’s eight intelligences is the most important? Such a question ignites a wonderful debate on the value in all intelligences, and students speak up on the merits of each until a conclusion is reached: they are all equally important.

So at this point, students embrace two essential learnings:

1. We are all smart, but in different ways

2. All types of knowing are important and there is no consensus as to what is *the* most important. Fully human diversity embraces all MI.

This self knowledge about our strengths and weaknesses is valuable, but needs to be applied. I ask students to identify the intelligence they resonate with and are really good at.

Do you want to be an expert?

What do we need to do to get really good at something?

How can *we* teachers/family/friends support your quest to improve?



We talk about finding groups of like minded people, mentors, reading books, watching documentaries and so on; that learning is most successful when driven by the *self*, and internalized. We also discuss deep learning skills like metacognition, repetition, slow

learning, chunking and the 10000 hour ‘expertise’ rule.

Students also reflect on areas of weakness. This is where a growth mindset (a la Carol Dweck) is vital. “I’m just not good at maths” is deterministic and belies the role of effort. Who is to say what we can achieve with a sustained effort over time? *This* is the pathway for discovering our true potential. Students must believe in improvement through effort.

Further essential learnings:

- We are not destined to be weak at something forever. We have the capacity to improve with effort.
- We should further develop our strengths as excellence gives us confidence and transforms our self-image. This gives us the courage to address our weaknesses. Our lives will be richer if we fully embrace the physical, social, emotional, artistic and academic opportunities given to us.

Successful learning also involves exploring relationships between learning domains. For example, I think *better* after I do physical exercise, or in the case of Einstein, after I play the violin. This leads to the wonderful world of trans-disciplinary learning, making connections and more fully using our brain.

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Michael has been presenting for schools and conferences in more than 20 countries. His primary focus on achievement and motivation encourages independent thinking, reflection, participation and action.

Other workshops include

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*Study, Stress and Music* Addresses the issue of learning arousal and distraction when studying to background music

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View the [5-minute video](#) ‘How are you smart?’

