

# How are *you* smart?



## How smart are *you*?

Horrible question! But one that determines the all important mindset essential for personal growth and intellectual development.

Some students protest, and rightly so.

*How smart are you* assumes two things:

- Intelligence is one dimensional and we are all 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 can result in a lack of the effort required to improve.

A simple change of word sequence to 'How are *you* smart' addresses the first assumption. The question now implies that we are all smart but in different ways. Howard Gardner was a key figure who liberated intelligence from its narrow definition to the multi dimensional, but the concept is hardly new. 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 doing well in certain areas doesn't mean they're not smart.

The triumvirate of maths, science and literacy is pervasive in education, and is certainly important. But intelligence and richness in life is more than this.

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 enjoy and find succeed.

Children love this positive activity and they observe among their peers a diversity of skills and preferences, strengths and weaknesses.

For a hearty classroom debate ask this question: Which intelligence is the most important? Witness the students speaking up on the merits of each intelligence until a conclusion is reached: they are all important.

So at this point, we embrace two essential learnings:

1. Everyone is smart, but in different ways
2. All types of knowing are important.

Self knowledge about our strengths and weaknesses is valuable, but it needs to be applied.

What do you need to do to get to reach the next level of expertise?

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.

Learning is most successful when driven by the *self* and internalized.

We also discuss the deep learning skills of metacognition, repetition, slow learning, chunking and the interesting 10000 hour ‘expertise’ rule.

Students will also reflect on areas of weakness. This is where a growth mindset (as Carol Dweck) is vital. “I’m just not good at this” is deterministic and belies the role of effort. Who is to say what can be achieved with a sustained effort over time? Effort 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 through our own efforts.
- 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 all the richer if we 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.

I hope that through this workshop, I can support and reaffirm the learning aims and social ethos of your school.

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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.

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