

The Integration of the Multiple Intelligence Theory into the Early Childhood Curriculum

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Abstract The study explored the position of administrators, teachers and parents on integrating the multiple intelligences theory (MI) into the early childhood curriculum (prekindergarten to third grade). Results revealed that overall administrators would not change anything in the multiple intelligences integration. They described the teaching effectiveness as very good. The teachers reported the integration as being an ongoing learning experience that was exciting and fun. Although, the teachers would like more time to plan and execute the MI integration into the curriculum. The parents revealed the MI integration as a great concept that allows the students to display their “smarts”. And they indicated that their children liked the MI integration in particular by allowing them to create their own projects. Findings from administrators, teachers, and parents revealed satisfaction with the integration of MI into the curriculum and in particular, the demonstration of respecting how students use different learning styles. The integration revealed enhancement of students’ strengths and love for the MI experience.

Keywords: *Multiple Intelligences Theory (MI), multiple intelligence integration, “smarts”, work stations, differentiated instruction*

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1. Introduction

The administrators, teachers and parents have discussed and analyzed their perspectives related to the integration of MI in the curriculum and how its teaching strategies help children learn.

The three objectives of the project were:

- (1) Examine administrators’ perceptions of the MI Curriculum as they relate to the teaching, learning experiences, and the student’s foundational preparedness
- (2) Analyze how teachers perceived themselves within the teaching and learning framework of the MI Curriculum of Kindergarten to Third Grade
- (3) Identify parents’ perception of the Multiple Intelligence (MI) Curriculum including learning experiences from Kindergarten to Third (K-3rd) Grade

This study interviewed seven (7) white teachers, five (5) administrators and ten (10)

Parents who were all from the same academy, a public school in Gainesville, Georgia. The interviews and focus groups revealed how their viewpoints on the integration of MI in K- 3rd grade.

There are several schools that use the MI Theory in their curriculum. This MI integration can be implemented using diverse educational techniques.

The Key School Community in Indianapolis was the first school to use the MI Theory in 1984. During this time period, the principal was interested in finding different

ways to assess students. The MI Theory made sense to her because it would meet the diverse learning styles of her students. The staff met weekly to discuss their programs. They implemented visual and performing arts, music and the athletics into their curriculum. Two kinds of classes that they offered students were the flow room and the pod room. In the flow room, a child became totally engaged in an activity of their choice that activated their intelligences in an open-ended way, whereas, the pod room centered on one particular activity such as a music activity. Each child was given a choice of going to the pod if the activity was of interest to them.

Further, the report cards of the school used symbols instead of grades and demonstrated their strengths in the different activities. Every year from kindergarten-12th grade, students were responsible for completing two projects. These projects were video taped and each student developed a video portfolio and high school students began to work on and a completed digital portfolio. This portfolio was an asset for their application to college.

Key looked beyond test scores and built on the strengths of their students. The staff expressed the view that standardized tests were a narrow reflection of what their children knew and what they could do. The school demonstrated that multiple intelligences built the confidence that was needed for students to learn.

Other schools implemented MI. The Briarcliff Rd Elementary School in Briarcliff, New York and Montgomery Knolls School in Silver Spring, Maryland are some additional schools. These schools used different approaches to implement multiple intelligences. The

Briarcliff Road used a thematic approach to instruction. The MI was used as the framework for the thematic activities implementing the seven intelligences. The staff decided to change to the project-based approach in order to have more in depth study rather than 15 to 20 themes per year. Their projects were in combination with discipline-based instruction that were important, real life questions and issues such as the elections, pollution, and community life.

From their MI experiences, the Briarcliff staff decided on three things: (1) Children were allowed to make different project so that would not all children would have to learn the same thing at the same time; At the end of a project, children would learn nearly all the concepts because they would share, display, and critique each others' work. (2) Some concepts would be taught by direct instruction and other concepts through project work. In order to keep projects authentic, the staff felt skill lessons would not have to be a part of a project. (3) Teachers decided the MI Curriculum was an excellent framework for observing children and reflecting upon their findings.

In contrast, Montgomery Knolls was awarded funding in 1990 to develop an "Early Childhood Gifted Model Program." The program administrators chose the MI as a guided theory for their students. All teachers were to implement MI ideas into their classroom activities. For their classroom assessment the staff developed a checklist to identify each child's strengths and weaknesses. The observations in the Fall semester would not only indicate strengths and weaknesses of the child but it would be used to inform curriculum planning. The checklist in the Spring would be used to see the child's progress and to examine the child's MI profile. In addition, students were allowed to rate themselves. In this survey, the students were asked to rate what activities they liked to do and what activities they did well. This self-assessment would encourage students to see assessment as a learning process not as a judgment.

Teachers also began to use portfolio assessment as a means of capturing the diverse ways in which students learn. Some teachers used audio and videotaping to document students' strengths and weaknesses. Other teachers collected students' drawings and written work as documentation for learning. Collecting and saving children's work allowed teachers and students to reexamine what the student had learned about himself or herself (Kreshevsky & Seidel, 1998).

The school continued to use portfolio assessment. The work in the portfolio was selected from students and teachers and the information collected was required assignments for students at the grade level, and different sources related to the students' work. The portfolio was expected to be passed from one grade level to the next. Montgomery Knolls students identified as gifted and talented were 27% of second grade students in 1988 to 51% in 1994 (Chen, Krechevsky, & Viens, 1998).

This review reflected how the MI integration could be used in different ways and how a school could select the method that would meet the needs of their students.

2. Materials and Methods

This was a cross-sectional, exploratory study that was conducted to explore administrators, teachers, and parents

perceptions of a MI curriculum implemented at an elementary school outside of Atlanta, Georgia, USA.

The research team provided questionnaires to all participants. These questionnaires were given to participants prior to the focus groups. There were three research team members with no more than 25 participants in each group. The time for each focus group was set for approximately one hour and the group discussed questions that related to the MI integrated curriculum. The research team met with K-3rd grade teachers and parents. The principal disseminated questionnaires to teachers and other administrators, in addition to sending out letters and questionnaires to parents and to the asst. principal. All information was be confidential and voluntary.

In addition to collecting data from the questionnaires, there were three separate focus groups for teachers, parents and administrators. In addition, the researchers attended several teacher meetings.

3. Results

The tables below are examples of how the administrators, teachers, and parents responded to some of the questions that were asked.

1. Administrators

Responses to the question: If you could change any aspect (s) of the MI integration what would it be?

N=3

Administration	Changes in MI
43%	I wouldn't change anything.
14%	More time is needed.
14%	More consistent in the usage of the MI integration.
29%	More professional development

The administrators rated the question:

What do you think about the teacher's contribution to the day-to-day design of the curriculum experience?

N=3

Administrators	Comments regarding Teachers' Contribution to the Curriculum Experience
58%	Lack of PD training
14%	Some teachers have not fully embraced offering choices, a change from traditional teaching.
14%	The teachers have been trained.

The administrators rated the question:

If you were to rate the effectiveness of teaching and learning in a MI Integration, how would you rate the MI integration into the curriculum?

Administrators	Effectiveness of the MI Integration into the Curriculum
17%	Excellent
66%	Very Good
17%	Good

At the beginning of the implementation of the MI integration, the administrators described MI as organized chaos, however they felt the theory allowed the child's flexibility to learn and to achieve in a way that suited children's uniqueness in learning. The MI integrated in the curriculum was learning through the following concepts: organizing ideas, reasoning and problem solving, concrete experiences with one's environment, pattern and rhythm, feelings and values, and interaction with others and the natural world. It became a partnership between teacher and student and was effective with diverse learner. It was

not a curriculum, but teachers used their own creativity and resources to develop plans. It approaches teaching and learning from the many ways of knowing the nine intelligences of smarts. Students learned and expressed their learning in different ways. The MI integration was a respect of students' different learning styles.

2. Teachers

If you were to rate the effectiveness of teaching and learning in a MI Integration, how would you rate the MI integration into the curriculum?

N=7

Teachers	Effectiveness of the MI Integration into the Curriculum
14%	Excellent
14%	Very good
29%	Good
29%	Fair
14%	Not very effective

Teacher's responses to the question: How much time do you spend disciplining students each day?

N=7

Teachers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Little time as possible	Small portion of the time	Lots	Varies with the group	Not much	Not much	10-15 minutes a day

Teacher 's responses to the question: How do you contact parents?

N=7

Teachers Responses	Ways to Contact Parents
100%	Phone contact
100%	Face to face
14%	Mail
29%	Newsletter
43%	E-mails
29%	Agenda
14%	Write Notes

Teacher's responses to the question: What are some reasons you contact parents?

Teachers' Responses	Ways to Contact Parents
7	Students overall academic performances.
5	Students conduct in the classroom.
0	Students' participation in extra-curricular events.
6	Students' attendance.
5	Volunteers for classroom events.
5	Volunteers for school events.
1	Other: Students 'Programs
1	Review of Skills

The teachers' perspective of the MI integration into the curriculum was that the entire MI ideas were flexible in meeting the needs and learning styles of the students. Teachers' contribution to meeting the day-to-day design of the curriculum experiences was utilizing all the pieces of MI, implementing standard-based instruction and assessment together in their collaborative day-to-day teaching. The teachers designed and facilitated experiences for their students to learn the concepts and content through the nine multiple intelligences. Teachers made sure all students were learning and allowed for

different situations in order for students to have an opportunity to developing their learning style.

Teachers played a key role in collaborating with students' choices and guiding the experiences and learning opportunities for students. It was critical for teachers to be leaders in this type of learning.

3. Parents

Parent's responses to the question:

Do you like the MI integration into the curriculum?

N=8

Parents	Feelings regarding MI
1	Love the concept
1	Okay
4	Yes, like MI.
1	Don't like MI
1	Undecided

Parent's responses to the question:

How prepared do you think students are to progress to upper elementary grades?

N=8

Parents	Feelings about Preparation
4	Very prepared
1	Good
2	Fairly prepared
1	If the child has an IEP, the parent doesn't feel the child is as prepared as the other students.

Parent's responses to the question:

If you were to rate the effectiveness of teaching in the MI integration, how would you rate the MI integration into the curriculum?

Parents	Ratings
1	Excellent
2	Very Good
3	Good
1	Fair
1	Not Sure

The parents' perspective of the MI integration was a great concept that allowed the students to display how they were using their "smarts". It allowed students to feel they were smart in one area rather than to be labeled "dumb". It was inclusive for parents, teachers and students. In addition, it was appropriate for most students, however it seemed to be difficult to incorporate standards.

It was very varied with more organized efforts toward the choices and the parents liked the concept but not sure it was implemented throughout the curriculum. They liked the non-traditional approach, however with the many changes in the educational system, it could make helping the student with their work more difficult for the parent.

4. Discussion

This data was gathered from a public elementary school outside Atlanta, Georgia, USA, but there are several elementary schools across the United States that have integrated the multiple intelligence theory in their curriculum. It would be beneficial for educators to investigate the perspectives of this MI integration that administrators, teachers and parents have discussed

because it could be implemented as a strategy to build on students' strengths and meet the academic needs of all students. The MI integration could be a significant strategy used in teaching and learning to bridge the achievement gap.

All three (3) groups felt that the MI integration was effective. All the administrators rated MI as good to excellent; Fifty-seven per cent (57%) of the teachers revealed that MI was effective; and seventy-five per cent (75%) of the rated MI as effective.

Since the research indicates positive academic improvements, this could be another strategy to bridging the academic achievement gap. This MI integration addresses differentiation lessons to meet the diverse learning styles of students.

5. Conclusion

The researcher has interpreted and summarized the benefits of the MI Theory in teaching and learning within the school curriculum. It was concluded that the MI integration respects differentiated instruction and it was a great concept that allows the diverse learners to display how they are using their "smarts." It enhances and builds on children's strengths and love for learning.

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Statement of Competing Interests

There are no competing interests.

List of Abbreviations

MI-Multiple Intelligences Theory.

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