



by Karen Stephens

Intelligence: IQ is Just One Measure of *Smarts*

At one time, a single test score was thought to accurately access our intelligence quotient (IQ) and our ability to learn. It turns out that the IQ scores were reliable in identifying children with good mental reasoning and language ability. But they had a shortcoming — they didn't take into account other valuable abilities and talents children have, such as musical, athletic or social skills. And IQ didn't predict ability to function outside of academics, either.

Researchers, teachers, and parents worried that kids who didn't score well on one IQ test would be pigeon-holed and destined to be treated as "slow learners." They began to ask questions, such as: Did the IQ test define intelligence too narrowly? Might common sense and other gifts or talents be overlooked? Do we shortchange kids by valuing language skills over other types of smarts? Could learning be more effective if talents other than linguistic were incorporated into learning experiences? In response, Dr. Howard Gardner presented his theory of multiple intelligences. His book *Frames of Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1983) was his way of saying that language skills weren't the only types of smarts around. His views have been heavily applied to educational settings, from preschool to the college classroom.

Gardner believes each of us develops a variety of ways of interacting with the world. It's through these preferred styles that we approach learning. He identifies eight distinct intelligences used to make sense of knowledge. Another way to think of those intelligences is to call them skills, aptitudes, or talents. What Gardner calls "intelligences," I think of as styles of collecting information, organizing it, and applying it to daily life. We mix and match our "intelligences" to suit our immediate needs whether at school, home, or work. When stressed or facing a new experience, we usually resort to the intelligence we have greater mastery over.

Multiple intelligences theory encourages parents and teachers to nurture children's overall intelligence, not just one narrow aspect. An array of abilities, talents, and predispositions should be respected and encouraged at home, child care, and school. Adults should offer a variety of experiences and learning opportunities so children can identify their own strengths and preferences. Children can then apply varying intelligences as needed. That flexibility and versatility will improve their chances for success in all areas of life — family, hobbies, work.

Gardner's eight intelligences and how they are revealed in children and adults follow. I hope they help you understand your child (and yourself!) better. Let them guide you in responding sensitively and wisely to the unique qualities your child brings to the world.

MUSICAL INTELLIGENCE: Those with a strong musical intelligence are very sensitive to sounds — often from infancy. Kids in tune with this intelligence are adept in perceiving, concentrating on, responding to, and producing music. This may be through voice, instrument, or simply a persistent fascination with intriguing sounds.

BODILY — KINESTHETIC INTELLIGENCE: This intelligence is observed in children with natural skill in physical movement and fine- and large-motor coordination. Kids literally use motion to fill up every inch of space around them. People who utilize this intelligence are very tactile; they NEED hands-on interaction with the world. The more they can touch, manipulate, and examine the better. These kids are sensitive to texture, temperature, and body zones. Athletes, physical therapists, dancers, and stage actors rely heavily on this intelligence. Artists who work with clay, welding, or even ice sculpture do, too! Typists apply this talent, and I definitely want a dental hygienist with good fine-motor coordination!

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LOGICAL — MATHEMATICAL INTELLIGENCE: Endeavors that involve a lot of MENTAL problem solving put this intelligence to good use. Children skilled in this area love to observe, make associations, and create relationships between objects. They enjoy creating and recreating patterns. People with this talent identify problems, or even create them, just for the fun of solving them. They are fascinated with the question, “What if?” This intelligence leads one to be interested in the sciences (physics, biology, chemistry), medicine, invention, computer programming and information systems, engineering, investigative detective work, or mechanical machines and systems. Mathematical problem solving and word problems tantalize. Researchers and statisticians are very logico-mathematical!

LINGUISTIC INTELLIGENCE: Linguistically skilled folks savor the written and spoken word. They love riddles and tongue-twisters. Kids will talk your leg off with made up stories. And they think they can talk themselves out of any problem they find themselves in, too! While all children talk to themselves out loud as they learn new concepts, linguistically skilled children MUST talk out problems or challenges. It’s a fundamental tool they use to understand their world. They love reading and writing at school and for pleasure. Adults with linguistic skills apply them to teaching, writing, serving as staff trainers, journalism, public relations, and other types of communication. If you know someone who loves to tell stories or talk on the phone, this intelligence is their forte!

SPATIAL INTELLIGENCE: Those very sensitive to their surroundings are using spatial intelligence. They are aware of everything beside, above, and around them. They enjoy identifying space and adapting it to their needs. With children, this may reveal itself in how they arrange their study or play space. Or they may be constantly rearranging their room. Kids who enjoy working with building blocks, Legos,[®] mazes, and toy train tracks are putting their spatial awareness talents to good use. Nurturing this skill leads to mastery of concepts related to navigation, mapping, visual arts, and designing physical environments. Architects, landscape designers, truck or bus drivers, interstate highway designers, land surveyors, interior decorators, pilots, and even artists apply this intelligence. Do you know someone who enjoys chess? They, too, fall into this category!

INTERPERSONAL INTELLIGENCE: Competencies in this area relate to understanding and communicating with others. Empathy, compassion, and the ability to identify a wide range of thoughts and feelings are characteristic of folks with interpersonal tendencies. And they excel in communicating their understanding. Individuals with interpersonal strengths often say, “I’m a people person.” They enjoy working with others, especially in groups. They would be bored to tears working with a machine all day. Elementary school teachers, business managers, therapists, child care and nursery teachers, ministers, social workers, nurses, human resource managers, and some talk show hosts apply interpersonal skills. And might I add: parents!

INTRAPERSONAL INTELLIGENCE: This category is highlighted by the ability to understand and communicate one’s own thoughts and feelings. Solitude is not wasted on these individuals. They use it for continual self-reflection. When presented with new knowledge, or faced with a new challenge, they prefer to mull it over on their own before making a decision or taking action. As kids they seek out forts, tents, tree houses, and private play spaces. Poets, film writers and directors, priests; editorial, column, and opinion page writers apply this intelligence. Those who enjoy solitary walks, reading, journaling, or meditating put intrapersonal intelligence to work.

NATURALISTIC INTELLIGENCE: This ability translates into a keen ability to see and distinguish differences in the natural world, whether it be plant, animal, or mineral. These individuals key in on characteristics and features that set species or natural objects apart, such as pattern, shape, color, and survival adaptations. People with this intelligence gravitate to the natural sciences, hobbies, or professions such as: biology, forestry, horticulture, nature and science educator, geologist, conservationist, environmental scientist or engineer, farming, ranching, and even balcony gardening enthusiast.

About the Author — Karen Stephens is director of Illinois State University Child Care Center and instructor in child development for the ISU Family and Consumer Sciences Department. She writes a weekly column for parents in her local newspaper. Karen is author of two books and frequent contributor to *Child Care Information Exchange*.

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