

How Smart Are You?

How Are You Smart?

'Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.' Aesop, Jr.

The actor Chris Hemsworth was interviewed on the *Graham Norton Show* recently. Asked how he was faring during Covid 19 lockdown, he replied that the biggest challenge he was facing during this time was attempting to home-school his children. He had become aware of how maths had 'evolved and changed' since he was in school and related how he had resigned himself to the fact that his children would be 'behind' when they returned to school, due to his lack of teaching skills. Then he said: *'If it was a movie on the other hand, I could be a teacher in a movie, I could Good Will Hunting my way through the process and be very impressive, but not in real life unfortunately'*. Now, there's a man who knows his own natural talents!

While some parents are reportedly enjoying the home-schooling experience and coping very well in their new teaching role, others are undoubtedly finding it difficult, particularly when combined with the challenges of working from home or caring for sick or vulnerable family members. Multiple Intelligences theory can provide reassurance and encouragement for parents (and children) that engaging in a variety of broad and diverse educational experiences during the period of school closure will almost certainly add to one or more aspects of their learning profile. So what is the theory of Multiple Intelligences?

The theory of Multiple Intelligences was developed in 1983 by Dr Howard Gardner, professor of education at Harvard University. In his book entitled *Frames of Mind*, he suggested that traditional ways of testing for intelligence, based on IQ testing, were far too limited and may be biased towards certain types of individuals. He challenged the traditional definition of intelligence as a uniform cognitive capacity that people are born with. Instead, Dr Gardner proposed 7 different intelligences to account for a broader range of human potential that he had observed in children and adults. They are:

- **Visual/Spatial (Picture Smart)**
- **Verbal/Linguistic (Word Smart)**
- **Mathematical/Logical (Logic Smart)**
- **Bodily/Kinaesthetic (Body Smart)**
- **Musical/Rhythmic (Music Smart)**
- **Intrapersonal (Self Smart)**

➤ **Interpersonal (People Smart)**

In a subsequent publication, *Intelligence Reframed* (1999), Gardner added two more intelligences:

➤ **Naturalist (Nature Smart)**

➤ **Existentialist Life smart (Life Smart)**

Successive primary school and secondary school curricula have tended to focus on linguistic and mathematical intelligences, and the timetable allocation to literacy and numeracy reflects that bias. Children who struggle with either or both of these modes of learning can sometimes feel alienated from the school environment in a way not experienced by their peers. Indeed, we all know adults who, perhaps because of a biased and narrow interpretation of 'intelligence', struggled in school, but went on to be highly successful and accomplished in their preferred area of interest or natural ability.

Regardless of whether your child is a competent all-rounder, or a child with a particular talent or interest, introduction to Multiple Intelligences theory benefits all. MI theory is inclusive and democratic in that it promotes tolerance and respect for the diverse ways in which we, as individuals, understand the world and how we choose to express ourselves in it. As a teacher, both in the classroom and in the Special Education setting, I can testify to the transformative power of promoting awareness of Multiple Intelligence Theory, or 'The Smarts', as we call them. I have observed children seeing themselves in a whole new light when the theory of Multiple Intelligences is introduced and embraced within the school. A 'Body Smart' gymnastics display from an All-Ireland medallist, a whole-school Question and Answer session with a 'Nature Smart' lizard enthusiast, a wood carving carefully crafted and painted one weekend in response to Marita Conlon McKenna's *The Blue Horse*, transformed the way these uniquely talented pupils saw themselves as learners, and the way in which other children in their classes responded to them.

If you are struggling to get through the assigned class work with one child or several children, you can be reassured that every experience is a learning opportunity and by exploring different aspects of our learning profiles, we become 'Self Smart' in relation to our own particular talents and strengths. Home learning provides an ideal opportunity to explore your child's preferred intelligences and to exploit their natural abilities and proclivities. Chris Hemsworth could help his children to make a mini-film as a record of his family's Covid 19 experience! A 'Music Smart' child could write a song, a 'Body Smart' child could choreograph a dance routine, a 'People Smart' child could 'interview' a grandparent by phone, a 'Self Smart' child could keep a diary of these extraordinary times etc. I know that the class teachers

in Edmondstown National School would endorse the recommendation to take a break, even once in a while, from the class assigned tasks in order to make time to indulge your child's preferred interest, hobby or talent, and for you to share yours with your child. Allowing children to direct their own learning by choosing activities most suited to their own learning style and interests encourages autonomy and ownership.

Attached are some resources which provide an introduction to Multiple Intelligences, suitable for use with young children, older children and adults. Beginning next week, I will focus on one 'Intelligence' per week, providing a more detailed explanation of how it can be recognised, nurtured, and celebrated in primary school children, and in later life. If this is an area you would be interested in exploring further, there are countless articles online, including many suitable for use with children on Twinkl.ie (Free to parents and students during Covid 19 closure).

In the survey responses, it was heartening to read that many parents were prioritising life skills, cooking, baking, gardening, physical exercise etc. during school closure. I hope that the theory of Multiple Intelligences might reassure all parents that taking a 'break from the books', and broadening your child's home learning experiences may help them to discover their forte, their life-long passion or even their future career!