

ABSTRACT

Jean Mantzaris' research focuses on how students' awareness of and participation in MI activities will affect their career choices. Consequently, she infuses her career awareness class with MI-based activities and invites her students to explore their multiple intelligences. For example, in an effort to "dig deep" into each students' intelligence profile, Jean asks the students to reflect on the activities they loved to do as children and to bring representations of these activities into class. She then invites students to consider a possible connection between their childhood preferences and the intelligences they had identified in the class as adults. Through this and other MI-based activities, students become more aware and appreciative of each other's strengths. Jean also observes a "notable increase in student engagement, motivation, camaraderie, and persistence."

Analysis of student comments and their plans for next career steps leads Jean to conclude that awareness of their own intelligences influences students to broaden their career decision-making to be more aligned with their intelligences. "Once students became aware of their strengths, possibilities of new careers abounded." This more complex understanding of their own strengths and the career possibilities that might best correspond to them results in students extending their career exploration rather than identifying an immediate job choice. This proves to be a double-edged sword and hence a concern for Jean as welfare mandated students are under pressure to take any job.

RESEARCH QUESTION

I began my MI journey with a myriad of questions:

- What will Multiple Intelligences theory have to offer the field of career counseling, especially as it pertains to basic skill and high school diploma learners?
- Will knowledge of MI theory affect students' career choices?
- Will certain careers manifest certain intelligences?
- Can we find a good fit when we know student intelligences, and those required in certain careers?
- Can MI activities be devised to help students in career planning?
- Will an MI approach to career planning enable students to choose training and careers that they will be successful in and satisfied with?

My final research question became:

How will adult diploma students' awareness of their own intelligences and their participation in activities informed by MI theory affect their career decision-making process?

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Wallingford Adult Education serves approximately 500 ABE/GED, Credit Diploma, and ESOL students per year. We have two locations, one of which is the historic Wallingford railroad station, where day and evening classes are held. Wallingford is a growing industrial and commercial community, 13 miles north of New Haven and has appreciable acreage devoted to agriculture. It has a growing immigrant population, with a significant number of Mexicans.

Our students left the traditional school system for a variety of reasons. Many felt inadequate, and school was not a favorite place. Others lacked "motivation" or had personal or social obstacles that interfered with their educational process. Most students are employed at minimum wage jobs or receive benefits from welfare, disability, or unemployment. Some are referred to our program by the court system. Often these students are also supporting young children. An essential element of their high school diploma education at our Learning Center revolves around choices for future higher education, which includes career specific training.

How will adult diploma students' awareness of their own intelligences and their participation in activities informed by MI theory affect their career decision-making process



Working as a Guidance Counselor with adult learners in adult education and at the community college level involves a substantial career development component. Choosing appropriate careers entails obtaining information regarding one's abilities, interests, and values, as well as information about specific careers and the necessary training involved.

My main concern is that students come up with a career that is a good "fit" for them. Most ABE/GED students have little time or money, and many have family commitments. These factors do not usually allow for a choice of leisure learning or extended formal education. Wallingford Adult Education students who have returned for a high school diploma are generally enrolled less than one year before receiving their diplomas. There is pressure to make the right career choice because of life circumstances and also welfare reform which is causing people to lose their welfare benefits within short time spans.

EVOLUTION OF MY WORK AND THINKING

Entering the AMI research project during its second year of operation, I felt pressured to "catch up." I began my journey as a rather traditional learner who might be described by Howard Gardner in the *Unschooled Mind* as a "person who seeks to master the literacies, concepts and disciplinary forms of school" (1991, p. 7). I responded by reporting back facts and concepts. Kegan would probably have described me as a combination Instrumental Learner who "gets it" and is "in possession of it" and a Conventional Learner who asks "What do you think I should know?" (1994).

As an Instrumental Learner, I "got it" and was "in possession of MI knowledge." As a Conventional Learner, I was thinking about what I needed to know in order to meet the expectations of this new AMI group. With that in mind, I devoured Gardner's *Frames of Mind* and felt confident that I could pass a university examination with an acceptable grade.

There was, however, a nagging voice in my head that kept asking "What do I want to know? What is important for me as a guidance counselor? How can I use MI to grow as a counselor and assist in the growth of my students?" I was looking to become a Self-Authoring Learner. I wanted to challenge my own assumptions and broaden my vision with new ideas.

A breakthrough came when I read Earl Shorris' article "On the Uses of a Liberal Education as a Weapon in the Hands of the Restless Poor" (1997). Shorris expressed his belief that numerous forces such as hunger, isolation, illness, drugs, crime, etc. keep the poor from being political and that the absence of political awareness keeps them poor. He asked V. Walker, an inmate at Bedford Hills Correctional Center, "Why do you think people are poor?" He had listened to hundreds of people in the past and believed there would be no surprises in the answer to his inquiry. Walker replied, "You have got to teach the moral life of downtown to the children. And the way you do that, Earl, is by taking them to plays, museums, concerts, lectures, where they can learn the moral life of downtown" (p. 50). Walker never spoke of jobs or money. She felt that in order for the poor to enter the public world and practice the political life, the poor had to learn to *reflect*. That is what Walker meant by the "moral life of downtown."

This powerful essay struck a chord inside of me. I had been so focused on the "right fit" in the

career decision-making for my students, and so pressured by their need to get jobs and money, that I missed the discovery process that my students and I had to go through. My own vision of career decision-making was broadened. I realized that decisions have many paths, and we must explore many options. There is not necessarily one “best” decision. We have to be open to new perspectives and challenge old assumptions.

It was at this point that I began reading about “learning for understanding,” described by Gardner in the *Unschooling Mind*. Gardner emphasizes the use of apprenticeships, job shadowing, and on-the-job training as a means to reduce the gap between the agenda of school and the agenda of life. I was aware that most of our students had low-wage jobs and shared a narrow understanding of their career possibilities.

I was also inspired by T. Armstrong’s *7 Kinds of Smarts* chapter on awakening the intelligences that didn’t have a chance to develop. I decided that it would be a good idea for students to examine their childhood strengths since children exhibit their strengths in a very natural manner before they have expectations or rewards and are aware of the consequences. Students could then see if those strengths still flourished in themselves or perhaps needed to be nourished. A friend suggested reading Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. This is a poignant portrayal of Angelou’s journey from a mute child (her voice is literally lost) to the poet and linguistic genius she later becomes. I knew I was onto something.

METHODS

Eleven students, who were simultaneously enrolled in an ABE/GED multi-level, individualized class, participated in a 12-week career development module during the 1998 spring semester. The module consisted of activities inspired by MI theory. Three of the 11 students participated minimally because they completed their diploma preparation early. Six students participated in all activities and two participated in most activities. The participant demographics are as follows:

Male	5	Age 16-21	4
Female	6	Age 21-32	3
		Age 32-45	4
Native Born	9		
Foreign Born	2	Caucasian	10
		Black	1
Court or Welfare Mandated	3		

- Counselor/student interviews
All students participated in two or three counselor/student interviews in which I asked them about their possible career choice, their strengths, what they are “good at,” and a “dream” or “wish” career.
- Self-Assessment
All students assessed their intelligences using an instrument developed by Meg Costanzo, an AMI project member. The Costanzo instrument was chosen because it is a multi-dimensional model with an appropriate vocabulary level for our students.
- Class Profile
A class profile was developed to show a composite of the students’ individual MI self-assessments, but I did not do much with this profile during my research.
- Harrington-O’Shea Career Decision-Making System
All participants completed the Harrington-O’Shea Career Decision-Making System. This career inventory, commonly used in adult education, has several reading levels and is available in Spanish.
- Observation
I observed students participating in MI-inspired career decision-making activities. Silja Kallenbach, the AMI project co-director, videotaped and observed my class twice. The students’ ABE/GED teachers observed any noticeable changes in students in their regular class sessions and wrote anecdotal reports.
- Student Journals
Students kept journals, and occasionally I commented in writing to each student about his or her journal entries.
- Student Feedback
Together, the students and I directed and planned our approach to MI-inspired classroom activities. At the end of each class, students commented in writing on the lesson and gave feedback. All students learned about the eight intelligences through my presentations and assigned readings. To demonstrate that knowledge, they performed a “show” for ABE/GED teachers portraying several of the intelligences, allowing teachers to comment on their understanding of MI theory.

FINDINGS

Finding 1: Students Broadened Their Career Decision-Making to be More Aligned With Their Intelligences

My students and I learned that career decision-making is a journey with many paths to explore which may not necessarily lead to one “best” decision. The students moved from considering standard career choices – those that students are familiar with such as certified nurse assistant or food service worker – to considering their own strengths and related career possibilities. Thinking about themselves in light of MI theory caused the students to challenge their own assumptions and broaden their vision of career decision-making.

Six students had previously completed a Harrington-O’Shea Career Decision-Making System (CDM). Two of the six students had a “flat” profile with no peaks or valleys. (The interest inventory asks about a person’s likes and dislikes related to a long list of job activities, and these are scored against six major work settings. Often a flat profile results when students do not express an opinion about their likes and dislikes related to careers.) It is not uncommon for adult education students to exhibit a “flat” profile, and I believe that is because many students have not reflected on their likes and dislikes.

On their individual MI profiles, students had marked high and low points. Students expressed a belief that the CDM didn’t “carry the punch” that the MI assessment did. They believed the CDM to be more external and the MI assessment more internal. By this, I think they meant they could relate better to the questions on the MI survey.

One of the first MI-based classroom activities we did centered around reflection on childhood intelligences. Students were asked to “go back in time” and reflect on activities they loved to do as children. They were asked to bring representations of these activities into class – favorite stories, games, photos, etc.

Two students shared childhood photos during the reflection activity. John shared a picture of his first Halloween. He commented on how much he enjoyed pretending and still does. Kimberly talked about taking things apart and putting them together, something she still enjoys today. Eric talked about a childhood among adults, and how being a clown in school got him in trouble. He thought broadcasting might be something to explore. At the end of class, John remarked that his childhood is something he does not often think about but maybe should, as his imagination could make anything out of nothing. This evidence shows that reflection on childhood is an important part of the career decision-making journey.

After sharing favorite childhood activities with each other and having time to “play,” students reflected on whether these favorites were connected to present favorite activities or strengths, or whether there were some they wished to pick up again or strengthen. Students looked to see if there was a link between their adult and childhood intelligences and explored why childhood intelligences

Findings

- Students broadened their career decision-making to be more aligned with their intelligences.
- Students demonstrated increased respect for diversity.
- There was a notable increase in student engagement, motivation, camaraderie, and persistence.
- Students became more self-directed

withered or flourished. They then examined careers in light of their manifested (or not) childhood and adult intelligences. Each student made a key chain ornament to depict a strength or intelligence he or she would like to nurture.

Students were asked to write in their journal after each MI-inspired activity and comment on what they learned that day. Journal entries after the “Introduction of MI” lesson and the MI Assessment activity included:

Steve: “This stuff is fun, but more than that it shows you how many people around you are smart in many ways and so am I.”

Eric: “Like it woke me up. I thought it was enlightening. I came in with a poor mood but this picked up my spirits.”

Julie: “It shows how all the intelligences are everywhere in the world today and when we appreciate them, we can get along and accomplish a lot.”

When students moved to a study of Connecticut Career Clusters – eight areas of careers that drive Connecticut’s economy (see attachment) – they began to look at these careers in light of multiple intelligences. They began to tease out the strengths or abilities required by careers in certain clusters. One student saw how a natural resource manager needs math-logical strength to study chemistry, physics, and math; linguistic strength to express concerns verbally and in writing; kinesthetic strength for field work; visual/spatial strength to look for clues in the environment; interpersonal strength to accept recommendations; and intrapersonal strength to reflect on findings and to make ethical considerations. Another student for whom business and finance may not have had any appeal before, viewed his strengths as math/logical and musical and began to think about a business career in the recording industry. Yet, another student with linguistic strength and no known career objectives described how his quick tongue – a source of trouble for him in school and with the law – might be an asset in the broadcasting industry.

The students also began to consider the paths to higher education and the necessary financing. Upon my suggestion, they developed a monopoly-style board game where one gains entry into the career choice cluster by earning educational levels and acquiring “chance” cards for scholarships, day care, federal aid, etc.

I did interviews at the beginning and end of the career development module. During the pre-interview of the eight students who participated in MI-informed activities, four indicated they were fairly certain about possible careers, two had no idea, and two were concerned about possible jail time rather than future careers. In the post-interview, only one student remained certain of career choice.

Once students became aware of their strengths, possibilities of new careers abounded. From their perspectives, there was so much more to explore. They were allowed to dream. This allowed a decision of “no choice” to be seen in a positive way. Three students changed their “almost certain” career choice and decided to enter community college to explore different areas of study. The two who worried about serving jail time now made plans: one to attend a community college and the other to attend the state university. For the three court or welfare mandated students, the changes were significant. All three filed college applications and Free Application for Federal Financial Aid

(FAFSA). For one student, that took particular courage since her welfare benefits were ending and she faced opposition from family members.

Perhaps one of my most eloquent of the student journal writers, John, sums up our MI journey in career decision-making:

“Our past experiences shade our view on life... my glasses were somber and obscure, tainting everything that fluttered through... Then unexpectedly the world around me changed. The air gave birth to new sounds and smells. The land filled with colors I had never seen... I had unconsciously changed my glasses. New dreams and desires danced through my mind. Words like “college,” “career,” and “future” introduced themselves into my vocabulary...” [John, 2/11/98, Journal]

Divergent Cases

In doing interviews at the beginning and end of the career development module, I found that there was no change in plans for the three students who participated minimally in the program. All three completed diplomas early in the spring semester, and none had any future career plans when they departed. It appeared they had come for their diplomas and were now leaving without considering possible new career choices. All three held low-paying, entry-level jobs. They did not express any thoughts about a possible career – a question in their pre and post interview. I believe that because those students had not become aware of their intelligences and had not examined careers in the light of their own intelligences, they were not disposed to viewing new career possibilities for themselves.

Finding 2: Students Demonstrated Increased Respect for Diversity

The theme of respect for diversity flowed throughout the journals. As students were recognized for their intelligences by me and each other they began to use each others’ strengths when confronted with a project or concern. For example, they looked to each other when presenting MI to their teachers and when making the career board game.

In a student journal entry, Steve writes, “I liked the way Kimberly got us started by suggesting we write a poem. I appreciate his gift for writing and John’s ability to organize us. Until we had this class, I really didn’t know or appreciate anyone’s strengths and looked at these guys (Kimberly and John) as hip-hop and left-over sixties kids.” Kimberly commented, “Sitting in adult ed... even though life isn’t fair... I now care about everyone sitting around me. I’m learning to meet people different from me and they are what they claim to be and more.”

In our Learning Center, students generally work on an individual basis with teachers. We have open enrollment with instruction planned according to the student’s goals and a CASAS assessment. Age, life experience, and ability level varies a great deal. It was with this in mind that individualized instruction became a model at our Center.

Finding 3: There Was a Notable Increase in Student Engagement, Motivation, Camaraderie, and Persistence

In this semester of MI-inspired career decision-making, I was struck with the realization that our students are isolated at our Learning Center. This was the first time students participated together, and this participation was remarked on, not only by myself, but also by the students themselves and staff. ABE/GED teachers commented on how energized the students were becoming. There was a notable increase in student engagement, motivation, camaraderie, and persistence. The students talked more openly with each other and with the teachers. Quotes taken from student journals commonly reflect this feeling. Kimberly remarked, “This [MI activity] releases stress and opens my heart and soul.” Julie remarked, “I’m struck by cohesiveness and harmony and what we can get done.” Beth said, “This wakes me up and picks up my spirits.”

My students’ teachers said that these students asked more questions and helped each other in class. For example, two students helped tutor two other students who were not going to complete requirements before graduation on June 3rd. One student made it in time. The other student, who staff believed would never continue, finished over the summer.

Finding 4: Students Became More Self-Directed

My exposure to MI led me to appreciate the variety of students’ strengths. As a result, I changed my teaching approach to explicitly foster different intelligences. That meant I couldn’t hold onto the linguistic way in which I had presented lessons in the past. Once I started to diversify my lesson plans, I began to look to the students for more input.

As time went on students took over decision-making for activities such as the career “board game.” For example, they wrote all the “chance” cards for the game. Their ideas were quite different from mine in that they focused more on the kinds of assistance they would need, whereas I would have included some luxury items such as a trip to a warm island, new car, jewelry, etc. They added two new squares: on-the-job training and Ph.D. programs. They developed the MI “show” for teachers on their own. I became a guide and participant in these activities designed by the students. As Julie commented, “It was a lot of fun and showed how much fun a bunch of people could accomplish if they got together.”

The course graduates also led an activity at a dinner prior to graduation. They had suggested a performance of intelligences for the graduation ceremony in place of usual speeches. They talked about multiple intelligences and some of the activities they had done in the course. They then asked other graduates to describe what adult education meant to them by naming a favorite song or using visual references or words. I believe that the kinds of choices they presented to their peers reflected their learning experiences in the MI career planning course.

My own journal reflects the changes that were taking place in me and my students. ABE/GED teachers and I commented on students’ increased involvement with each other and appreciation for each other. In one journal entry (1/28/98), I note that “bonds of trust and mutual respect are developing.” Students seemed to become more independent learners. In another entry (3/25/98), I comment, “Students armed with knowledge and appreciation of their own and others’ strengths are able to finetune requirements of careers and create learning experiences that enhance the career

decision-making process. They become the center.” I believe the trust and respect laid the necessary foundation for students to take more control in the classroom.

In the end, I think the students’ consideration of and commitment to higher education and new career possibilities was influenced by having more control in the activities.

NEW QUESTIONS, NEXT STEPS

My MI study was one semester of twelve classes with a limited population. While my findings are very promising, the application of MI theory in career decision-making should be studied for a longer period of time and with more students.

One concern I have is the decision some students made to continue to explore career options at the community college or state university. Some of these students faced opposition from family and outside agencies providing temporary funds. I plan to do a longitudinal follow-up because I am very concerned about their struggle and what happens to them. If exploration leads to nothing, it hasn’t served its purpose.

Another potential area of study would be to include an apprenticeships module whereby students could “try on” careers. It would be interesting to see what intelligences students identify as useful in these career “try-ons” and whether or not they possess them or wish to develop them. When I talk about apprenticeships, I’m not necessarily referring to union trades-type apprenticeships, but to a more cooperative type education employed in high schools and especially universities where you are assigned to work in an area of choice with supervision and evaluation. I hope to begin this in the next academic year.

Another area that should be addressed is the need to include group instruction in the individualized instruction setting of our Learning Center. In the March 1998 issue of *Focus on Basics*, devoted to learner motivation, Michael Pritza writes how a shift from individualized instruction to group discussion can increase student retention and participation. Based on the impact of our MI-informed group activities, I believe his conclusions are valid and worthy of consideration. However, it could be the subject of another study to tease apart the impact of the group mode of instruction and MI-informed activities.

My advice to practitioners is to first relate MI to your own life and self, and if it appeals, just jump in. I think it is important to present Gardner’s theory in ways students can grasp. Students are impressed with theory and honored to be part of something new. It demonstrates respect for students, and allows them to show and share their strengths with you and their classmates.

Personally, I have always believed that a counselor has and needs interpersonal skills, but it was the growth in the intrapersonal realm that gave me the strength I needed most to effect positive changes in my students and myself. I developed an ability to reflect on my practice and myself. I learned much of this from my students who truly had an ability to reflect when given the opportunity and appropriate prompts and experience. Some were not eloquent writers, but in an atmosphere of trust and belonging, all had the ability to voice what they felt. I could relate to E. Shorris who was surprised by his informants’ insights and acumen.

