

ABSTRACT

Coming to the AMI Study with a well-developed and articulated theoretical background, Diane Paxton's challenge is to consider how multiple intelligences theory can inform her teaching in new ways, and in ways that did not interfere or contradict her already well grounded practice as an ESOL instructor.

Like many students, Diane's students initially resisted MI-based approaches, seeing them as unusual, childish, or simply too different from the traditional approaches they knew and had come to expect. Interestingly, and perhaps because of her strong theoretical background, Diane herself resists MI. She finds problematic the notion of assessing students' intelligences, finding something as complex as students' profiles of intelligence too difficult, if not impossible, to assess. Once she recognizes that assessing MI is not prescribed by the theory - in fact, no specific practices are - Diane finds a comfortable place using MI theory as a framework to enhance further her multi-modal approach to teaching English. In the process, students' perceptions change as well. They accept, engage in, and for the most part, become very enthusiastic about multiple and diverse ways of knowing.

Diane accounts for her students' changed perceptions in several ways. First, her students become engaged and enjoy their participation in thematic units and projects that are informed, in part, by MI theory. Secondly, their reflections on their learning activities facilitated by Diane help them recognize and articulate how these new types of activities contribute to their improved English. Diane also notes that displaying project-generated work on the walls helps students recognize the role of this work in their learning English. And developing a trusting environment over time and forming a sense of community is key to students' acceptance and ultimate enthusiasm for the nontraditional approaches in their classroom.

Diane also details some of the contextual factors that support or obstruct use of an MI-informed approach. These include: students' prior educational experience, which shape their expectations; students' socioeconomic background and related investment in the class, and institutional constraints, such as class size and setting.

One of Diane's most significant learnings from the AMI project is the importance of knowing one's own teaching context well and taking a critical approach to the theory or approach in question. In combination, these two elements are key to understanding if and how a particular theory or approach can support one's teaching and learning activities. Diane concludes that MI theory supports good ESOL teaching, and that multiple intelligences theory is a useful construct with a place in her teacher's "toolbox."

RESEARCH QUESTION AND CONTEXT

I began my research in the Spring of 1997 with a beginning level ESOL class. The class, known as “Un Paso Mas,” was comprised of elders from the Latino community, 12 students ranging in age from 52 to 72. The students all had in common a low level of first language literacy. Our class was held at Centro Latino, a community center in Chelsea, MA, and met two days a week for two hours each day.

I had been working with half of these students for a year when we began this project, and the other half, for five months. My sense was that their ideas of effective education resulted in an attachment to traditional methods of teaching and learning. They preferred workbooks, dictations, and a focus on grammar, perhaps because of their limited experience with education (only one student had gone to school beyond the third grade in their native countries, and none had studied more than basic ESOL in this country).

My initial research question was: “What effect does metacognitive awareness of their own multiple intelligences have on the perceptions of effective ESOL teaching and learning by students with limited native language literacy?”

I developed this particular research question under the assumption that doing individual MI profiles of students’ strengths and weaknesses, as a vehicle to gain “metacognitive awareness” of their own intelligences, would be a key element to interpreting MI theory into practice. Up to the time I began this research I had worked with my students using a mixture of traditional and nontraditional classroom methods. I had found that the traditional classes they wanted generally were not helpful for enhancing their comfort with or communication in English. I was interested in exploring whether a focus on diverse, multiple intelligences-informed approaches to curriculum would help the students practice and acquire English more effectively. In this case, the MI approaches would be designed to invite the students to build on their diverse strengths and life experiences towards understanding and solving problems in English. My research question also was designed to find out if the application of MI theory would help the students appreciate and value a less traditional, more diverse and holistic approach to acquiring English.

*What effect does
metacognitive awareness
of their own multiple
intelligences
have on the perceptions of
effective ESOL teaching
and learning
by students with limited
native language literacy?*

*What happens when I try to
integrate MI
into an
ESOL class*



A funding cut eliminated the first class, requiring me to move my research to a new teaching context. I began to work at Bunker Hill Community College (henceforth BHCC) in their consortium of adult basic education classes held throughout the city of Chelsea. I taught an intermediate level ESOL class (Level 2) that met for two three-hour sessions a week. The students ranged in age from 19 to 50, and all but one were Latino. I had taught only some of the students during the previous summer semester, so I didn't know most of them. However, as with the first group, I knew them to be strongly attached to a class with a grammar and workbook focus.

I developed a second research question that fit my new context and also specifically addressed the application of MI theory in my classroom: "How does experience in an MI environment affect or change the perception of effective ESOL teaching and learning by intermediate level students?" However, as I reviewed my journals and progress report from the first semester, I realized that I didn't feel comfortable with the emphasis on "an MI environment" in this question. It felt too prescriptive in terms of how I used MI theory. At that time I was struggling with simply looking at my practice through an MI lens, so I didn't want to force a particular instructional framework on myself.

I decided to ask a more open-ended question and explore what would happen if I tried to integrate MI theory into the class, leaving open how I would do that. I wanted to avoid pushing myself into a particular emphasis or interpretation of MI theory. I was still interested in the potential for change of student perceptions of effective teaching and learning; however, I wanted to work with the students in a way that was comfortable for me and for my students foremost. My emphasis was on collecting data to see what the students' responses were to the more and less traditional activities we did in class.

I continued to consider my first research question although I changed its focus to the relationship between students' metacognitive awareness of their own learning and their perceptions of good ESOL practices. I added a second research question to reflect the more open-ended nature of my questioning: What happens when I try to integrate MI into ESOL teaching at the intermediate level?

EVOLUTION OF MY WORK AND THINKING

This section is about the sources and resources that served as catalysts for my evolving work and thinking related to my work with MI theory. These include: my educational and theoretical background coming into the project, introduction of MI theory to my teaching practices "toolbox," journaling, reading and research, and other opportunities to dialogue with colleagues. Together these things helped me to question, develop, modify, and integrate MI practices in my classroom in ways that made sense to me and my students.

I began this project within a year of completing my Masters degree in ESOL Studies at the University of Massachusetts. The UMASS program has a particular focus on participatory education, growing out of the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. My teaching practice has been richly informed by my graduate studies, and I have consciously drawn on them in planning the curricula for my classes during and since the time of my graduate work. Participatory education has been one of my most important goals as a teacher. As Auerbach states (1992),

In a participatory approach the curriculum emerges as a result of an ongoing, collaborative investigation of critical themes in students' lives. . . Both the content and processes of this model invite learners to become the subjects of their own education. Content centers on problematic issues from their lives, so literacy is immediately relevant and engaging. Because this reality is problematized (presented in all its complexity, without predetermined solutions), participants become the creators rather than the recipients of knowledge. (p. 17)

I am continually struggling with the many challenging issues I find in attempting to integrate, develop, and design curricula to support this approach in my classroom. As a result of my education and the carefully considered nature of my work, nearly everything I do with students is explicitly informed by theory. Aspects of the way I think about teaching and learning, informed by other theories which support effective ESOL, are similar to pedagogical approaches suggested by MI theory. Therefore, when I began my work on this project, MI became one of many theories in my tool box that I used to broaden my thinking about diverse ways to introduce materials to students and to develop thematic units.

If it is possible to cite my own journal writing process as part of the evolution of my work, I will. The journal was the tool that helped my thinking evolve about how to integrate MI theory with my practice. I discovered through journaling that it is important to adapt MI theory to our contexts and to our individual theoretical frameworks which already inform our teaching. To try to put MI theory into practice without reflecting critically on its usefulness and adaptations for our individual teaching styles and contexts will only result in a cookie cutter approach which may or may not do the students good.

For example my early research efforts were influenced by my initial understanding that developing individual intelligence profiles of students was central to applying MI theory. Two sources of information encouraged developing individual student profiles (i.e., description of the student's strengths and weaknesses). They included the comments of Thomas Armstrong, who was participating on an MI panel discussion (1997 TESOL convention), and an AMI Project Institute held in March, 1997. Armstrong, a well-known MI authority, emphasized the importance, benefits, and relevance of assembling individual student profiles. The March institute highlighted MI assessment and the development of related assessment tools.

With this "profiling" interpretation of MI theory in mind, I involved my Un Paso Mas students in reflection and assessment activities that attempted to identify their areas of strengths and that were geared to help them learn about multiple intelligences theory. However, over time and with consideration of my personal and teaching contexts, my student data and related reflections were strongly suggesting that "profiling" was not helpful or successful with my students. It was still early in the project and so the emphasis on profiling was still in my mind; I wondered about the usefulness of the theory for me in my teaching context, or whether I was understanding the theory correctly.

From that point, my thinking about MI evolved. I realized that developing individual profiles was something I neither had nor wanted to continue to do. I stopped assessing for intelligences and concentrated more on assessing students' thinking about their own learning in the class. This was a way to answer my second research question, "What happens when I try to integrate MI into ESOL teaching at the intermediate level?," and it was a way, through reflection/assessment activities, to help the students see value teaching and learning activities that were designed in the spirit of MI and theme based units.

The idea of developing project-based curricula had already been in my mind as a structure which I hoped would help my students develop English skills and also learn critical content knowledge. But I had found it difficult to actually put it into practice. Caine and Caine's (1994), *Making Connections: Teaching and the Human Brains* reinforced for me the importance of project-based learning:

Students must be exposed to subject matter in many different ways, a great number of which must be complex, real projects. These projects must be developmental in nature and link work over time. They should assist in connecting content to the world in which the student actually lives. They can generate the sort of conversation and group interaction on which many people thrive. And they can be vehicles for teaching much more than the specific content of any one course, and the comfort and trust that are essential in the classroom for students to acquire and create knowledge. (p. 120)

Two other influences combined during my semesters of research to help me develop thematic units and projects, which represent one of the principal changes in my teaching. One was my research into the ways that teachers have used MI theory to broaden their approaches to content areas. Resources included *The Multiple Intelligence Handbook* by Bruce Campbell, "The Entry Point Approach Introduction" (Davis, 1996), "Minds at Work: Applying Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom" by Mara Krechevsky and Steve Seidel (1998) and *Teaching Through Projects* by Goodrich, Hatch, Wiatrowski and Unger (1995). All helped me to broaden my thinking of ways to develop thematic units and integrate creative group projects into the class.

The evolution of my work and thinking about MI theory also was influenced by my reading research, my fellow AMI teacher researchers, and a monthly teacher group at the Harvard Graduate School of Education called the Rounds at Project Zero (RAPZ) under the direction of Steve Seidel. This group features presentations and discussions of student projects and individual pieces of student work. The RAPZ's thought-provoking, energizing atmosphere opened the doors of possibility to project-based thematic units for me. Thanks to these influences and resources, I found new ways to extend the units I developed in my classes. And as one of the many tools in my box, MI theory helped me to develop more rich curricula.

IMPLEMENTING MI

How I implemented MI was of course bound to the questions I was asking about it. Therefore I started applying MI in my classroom from a "profiling" perspective, in order to build students' metacognitive awareness of MI theory generally and their own profiles of intelligences specifically. I used photographs of people engaged in tasks representative of different intelligences to introduce the theory, and the group discussed the related activities and skills in their own lives. Students wrote about their strengths and weaknesses on a handout I provided.

After shifting away from the profiling perspective, I focused on using MI as a tool to develop thematic units and projects. I felt more comfortable developing activities that were "in the spirit" of MI -that is, practices that MI theoretically supports. I considered other ways to interpret MI to help students come to value nontraditional approaches in the classroom. A unit on neighborhoods conducted with the Level 2 (BHCC) group is one example of my implementation of MI theory. This unit extended over 3 weeks and illustrates the type of MI-informed curriculum I worked to develop

in both my classes. The unit drew on many of the intelligences, offered multiple entry points through which the students could practice and develop thoughts about both the content area and English. At the same time it built on what they already knew and grew out of a class process with which they were comfortable. Below I outline the unit in chronological order.

NEIGHBORHOOD UNIT

- Open with a handout from Collaborations: English in Our Lives, by Gail Weinstein-Shr and Jann Huizenga (1996). I created the handout by combining teacher and student book pages from a chapter on neighborhoods. I opened with the handout because it has a little bit of many activities, (charts, photos, readings, idioms, dictations and journal writing) and the material is accessible to students at diverse levels.
- Students looked at pictures of neighborhoods from my picture file and talked about them in pairs.
- We read “In Roxbury, a Conversation,” from Neighbors Talk,” edited by Rachel Martin (1993).
- Students role-played the characters.
- In groups of 3-4 students drew on newsprint with magic markers and colored pencils. They could either draw 3 things that are different about neighborhoods in the US and the Dominican Republic (based on the conversation in the text), or they could draw 3 things that the women in the story could do in their lives here to feel more comfortable.
- Students presented their drawings to the class.
- During the entire process, the students wrote about their own neighbors in their journals, and I responded with comments and questions using a process writing approach.
- We listened to and discussed metaphor in: “In the Ghetto,” by Elvis Presley. The students read the lyrics out loud and later did a cloze activity while listening.
- We read and discussed the poem “Puerto Rican Autopsy” by Martin Espada.
- I introduced Haiku form with other classic Chinese examples.
- At the end of the course, students wrote their own Haiku poetry.
- We made a book of their work called Dialogues Between My Soul and Heart.

Developing thematic units provided an intersection between my work towards a student centered, participatory classroom, and activities that were informed by MI theory. The diversity in this unit invited and drew out student expression in many of the intelligence areas and applied Gardner’s definition of intelligence: to solve problems and create products. In this way the thematic units opened doors to diverse intelligences and more comprehensive levels of knowledge and use of English as students faced challenges related to tasks, texts, and interpersonal work.

METHODS

First group: Un Paso Mas

This class, entitled Un Paso Mas (One More Step), had 13 students at the beginning and 12 at the end. We had divided a 40-student elder life skills class so that these more serious and advanced students could have an opportunity to learn English in a more focused environment. As related to my question, I used data collection tools to cull information regarding: students’ level of literacy in their native language, students’ perceptions of effective teaching and learning, students’ intelligence profiles, and my own process of planning and teaching the class. A description of the tools follows.

- Baseline Assessment of Native Language Literacy
At the beginning of the semester, the students were asked to write (in Spanish) answers to three questions: 1) How many years did you go to school in your country? 2) Write a little bit about your life; and 3) What is the most difficult thing for you about learning English?
- Individual Surveys
I administered baseline surveys at the beginning of the semester to elicit students' responses on questions such as: 1) How do I learn best/How do I like to learn? 2) What is a good ESOL class? 3) What kinds of classroom activities help me to learn the most? The surveys were mainly in the form of pictures, with minimal words. The student circled the picture that most closely portrayed his/her idea.
- Focus Groups
Twice during the semester, I conducted a group evaluation of the students' impressions of the class work, processes, and products. In March, at mid-semester, we watched a video of their dramatic presentation of an Easter dinner party; in June, at the end of the semester, we looked at the process and products from the unit we had done on natural medicines. We discussed: what they saw as good/bad in terms of teaching and learning; which activities, curriculum, worksheets, and projects helped them to learn the most; their developing awareness of their own intelligences; and the relationship between thinking about their intelligences, the classroom activities, and learning. I completed charts with this information. In the final assessment, I also tape recorded and later transcribed sections of the discussion.
- Student Work
Individual students' surveys, literacy assessments, and writings were copied and kept in folders. Additionally, all whole class projects and products such as books, photo essays and assessment charts were collected as data along with their explanatory journal entries.
- Student Self-Report
To assess students' intelligences and create profiles I used sets of photos of people engaged in tasks which represented each of the intelligences at work in domains where the intelligences could be seen. The students guessed the categories. After they had guessed the intelligences, I told them about the theory. Later they identified areas of their lives which indicated skills, interests and experiences in these areas. We discussed their strengths and weaknesses, and later they wrote about them (in Spanish) on a handout I had made up which had a space for each intelligence and a brief description of it to remind them.
- Teacher Journal/Log
During the first semester I began each journal entry with a description of the classroom activities and process, week by week. In the second part of the journal entries I discussed related thoughts and feelings, observations, goals, problems, and my impressions and evaluations of my attempts to communicate MI concepts, to conduct specific activities, assessment tools and process, and materials/curriculum. I explored my own blocks, doubts, and frustrations, in relationship to myself, student/teacher communication, the students/class, and the challenges of interpreting MI theory. My journals ranged from 10 to 40 pages per month and are the primary source of data collection.

- Planning Notes for Lessons/Sample Materials
I kept my daily planning notes and any worksheets I produced, copies of the materials I pulled from books, description of any materials used in class and in planning, and other manipulatives or games that I used.
- Planning Notes, Dialogue and E-Mail
I communicated with my AMI project partner, Terri Coustan, by phone and e-mail. We explored our questions about MI theory, developing curricula and similarities, and differences in our students' responses to our work. Additionally, we solved problems, coordinated our data collection tools, and read each others' monthly journals.

Second Group: Level 2

This group was made up of 15 students with varying abilities in a level called "intermediate" or Level 2, the highest level in the community based ABE program in Chelsea. I designed the data collection tools to help me uncover students' reactions to a curriculum that I designed "in the spirit of MI." Several of the data collection tools were the same as the first semester, including: individual surveys, focus groups, student work, teacher journal, and planning notes for lessons/ sample materials.

Additional data collection methods I used included:

- Mid-Semester Assessment
I conducted a mid-semester assessment of the students' ideas and feelings about the class and activities we had been doing. This data was collected individually and anonymously in free answer form using a handout. The responses were tabulated into chart form, displayed on the wall and reviewed with students for analysis and ongoing discussion.
- Group Surveys
Baseline, ongoing (planned and spontaneous), and end-of-semester surveys were done to elicit students' responses to issues of teaching and learning, classroom activities, and projects. I did these on an irregular basis, depending on the class work, more or less every 2 weeks. We looked at the units and projects, the materials we used, and products we developed and created individually and in groups, and discussed: 1) What kinds of classroom activities help me to learn the most? Why? Or more specifically: Was this activity good or not so good for learning/ practicing English? Why? 2) What is a good ESOL class? Why? 3) How do I learn best/How do I like to learn? Why? Their responses were written in chart form on paper on the wall or on the board. I recorded into my journal student responses from the chart as well as some of their direct quotes. One such session was videotaped and a portion transcribed as data.
- Student interviews
I interviewed the students individually at mid-semester and again at the end of the semester. I used a questionnaire protocol, but the interviews were relaxed and flexible. It was most important to me that the students felt comfortable expressing their thoughts about the class to me in English. I let their ideas direct the flow of the interviews. I asked them what they thought of the class and what helped them to learn. We looked over their journal writing work for the semester and I noted their thoughts on their work, progress and process. I tape recorded about half of these interviews.

- Student Work
Individual students' surveys, journals, photos or descriptions of their projects, and writings were copied and kept in ongoing folders. Additionally, whole class projects and products such as student created books, class photos and videotapes were collected as data along with their explanatory teacher journal entries.
- Daily Logs
Recognizing the value of informal student comments in the first semester, I created a daily log that I completed as we worked in the class. This was a place for me to jot down the students' spontaneous and informal actions and comments which showed a different side of their thinking than the more formal assessments.

FINDINGS

What effect does metacognitive awareness of their own multiple intelligences have on the perceptions of effective ESOL teaching and learning by students with limited native language literacy?

What happens when I try to integrate MI into an ESOL class ?

This section describes each of my findings and presents overarching contextual factors, divergent cases, and other possible explanations for my findings. In response to my research questions above I discerned several interconnected findings:

Findings

- Students initially resisted non-traditional activities which were more "in the spirit of MI"
- The teacher (I) also resisted aspects of MI theory and application
- Students developed more positive attitudes about the value of nontraditional activities that were in the spirit of MI for learning English. Contributing factors to changed student perceptions include:
 - opportunities to participate in nontraditional activities
 - opportunities for students to assess if/how activities helped them learn English
 - visibility of project work for reflection on and assessing learning
 - time to build trust and community
 - contextual factors

CONTEXT MATTERS

As I considered these findings, I recognized that contextual factors shape the effect of MI as it is filtered through teacher and student reception to and use of it. The contextual factors which I identified were variable in each class; however, my research suggests that all are important for teachers to consider if they want to integrate MI theory into their practices. They include (I have identified them with letters for later cross-reference):

- (A) Students' prior educational experience (or limitations) shape or limit their expectations for English class, generally causing them to feel more comfortable with traditional methods.
- (B) Students' socioeconomic contexts led them to specific goals and uses for English such as for jobs or lifeskills. Students resisted when the class looked like it diverged from meeting their needs or their view of an English class appropriate to their goals.

- (C) Students' goals/motivation/investment in the class caused them to have specific goals such as English for jobs and to get them out of the house into a social situation. These goals affected their investment in the class as well as their motivation to try new methods for reaching their stated goals.
- (D) My background as a teacher and what I was already doing caused me to question the role of MI in my practice in connection with other theories which already inform my work.
- (E) Institutional constraints caused situations which either made it easier or more difficult to integrate activities that were in the spirit of MI into my practice. These included things like class size, desk configuration, and use of a textbook.

Finding 1: Student resistance to nontraditional activities

In both settings I initially met with student resistance to activities that were in the spirit of MI. In assessments at the beginning of the semesters, students' responses indicated a preference for a teacher-directed, more traditional English class; that is, one that is based primarily on reading and writing, grammar, and structured conversations (to practice grammar). Students in both classes placed high value in working from a textbook, believing that these author/experts know best how to learn English.

In my baseline assessment with the Un Paso Mas group, they responded that dictation and writing on the board are the best ways to learn. They requested a cassette to practice common expressions by repetition (12/96 p.2). Using pictures showing students learning in different ways, the students identified by circling, which ways they thought were the best. Their choices and the number of times each choice was circled follow: The most frequently circled were "listen" (9), "read," "speak" and "write" (8), and "work with a group" (7). The least circled responses were "work alone" (3), "speak my language," "laugh" and "draw" (4).

The BHCC group also demonstrated an initial preference for traditional classroom practices. As a baseline assessment, I asked the students during our second meeting to state what they considered good things to do in an English class. Two students replied "Dictation." Other individuals wanted "rules about syntax," "pronunciation practice," "homework," and "practice with perfect forms."

At mid-semester the BHCC students' preferred activities were still traditional in nature: pronunciation (12), grammar (11), and conversation (10). The least favored activities were creative group projects (5) and listening to songs (4). These last two categories received the most responses for being the least liked. They were also the activities that had been more in the spirit of MI during the class up to that point. So not only did students seem to prefer traditional activities, they also voiced resistance to the more nontraditional activities.

Also, around the time of the mid-semester assessments, two students specifically asked me to use a book and to take a more teacher-centered approach. In a note Julio said, "Teacher about the class, I think it's better if you follow a book for teach, because if you follow a book you know what you have to do, because you're teacher and we think different." (11/97 p.15). And on the same day, Patricia clearly expressed her preference when she pounded the table and said: "Teacher, you are the

teacher, and you have to give us the homework and tell us to do it, it doesn't matter if we like it or if we don't like it, you know what is good for us, you tell us what to do, and that's it." (11/97 p.16).

After one November class Ricardo expressed to me privately that he had disliked a group activity making group collages portraying elements in planning a party. He said, "It's about the class. I don't like when we do that stuff." He gestured towards the collages on the wall. "It's for children. I talked with Sofia and some of the others and we prefer to do conversation." (11/97 p.5)

Other Possible Explanations

There are other factors which may have contributed to this finding of student resistance. For one, in the BHCC class, there was a group of four students who openly displayed negative attitudes towards many aspects of the class (I called these students "the groaners"). Upon closer examination, I noticed that it was primarily one student and she served as a ringleader, demonstrating a negative attitude to nearly every activity, even the most traditional. For example in September I handed out a short story for in-class reading, a seemingly traditional and safe activity, "I said that I liked the story and thought they'd think it was nice. Patricia said 'You always like the stories'" (10/97 p.3). Her three peers rolled their eyes. My realization of Patricia's general resistance diffused the power of her negative comments regarding nontraditional activities. In the final weeks of the semester, she stopped coming to class, and the resistance to me and the way I teach was dramatically reduced, including that of her fellow "groaners" who were ultimately quite supportive of nontraditional activities for learning English.

There were also instances of students who did not demonstrate initial resistance to nontraditional methods for learning English. In my baseline assessment with the BHCC group, one student thought doing dramatic scenes was good in English class and another said using the computer was a good way to learn English. In my first month with the Un Mas Paso group we had a nontraditional class, one that included sequencing photos of a dramatic presentation, discussing the process and story, and writing the story down. The students' responses showed that they valued the session: Mario said it was a good way to learn English. I suggested that we put it up on the wall, as a story, but someone else wanted it to be a book that they could study from" (12/96 p. 5). This suggests that at least some students accepted an unfamiliar, nontraditional way to learn early in the project. (But it also suggests that students wanted to connect the nontraditional activity into a more familiar, traditional learning tool, a book.)

I identified contextual factors that likely shaped students' attachment to traditional methods and resistance to other approaches. Relevant contextual issues included a lack of experience with nontraditional classes and teachers (A). With the elder group, their average length of L1 (first language) education is three years, primarily in the 1940s in Mexico, Central America, and Puerto Rico (L1 literacy assessment, 12/27/96). A colleague at Centro Latino clarified another contextual factor for this group. She pointed out that many of them attend class for fun and socializing, that it gives them a rare opportunity to get out of their lonely, tiny apartments (C). She suggested that it is not me or what I am doing in the class, but that the elders have been doing, perceiving, and thinking about things in specific and often narrow ways for 60 years (3/97 p.20).

The students also voiced that they wanted this class to look like what they perceived an English class to look like. They told me more than once that they had other places where they went to do arts and crafts, but this was the place where they came to learn English (C). This was true even with the

Level 2 group, who had had longer exposure to L1 education. But I can imagine that it was of a traditional nature. In fact, the teacher with whom many of these students studied before me is known for her traditional methods and teacher/student roles. So even once they began to experience new ways of approaching ESOL in instruction, it is not surprising that there would be dislike, resistance, and a longing to return to the known and safe. I quote from Betsy Cornwall on the AMI listserv: “Most people don’t mind change, they just don’t like being changed. Education transforms lives. Memorizing facts and putting in seat time doesn’t. What if a student doesn’t want to be transformed?” (Autumn, AMI listserv)

Finding 2: Teacher’s (my) resistance

My second finding is that of my own resistance to using MI theory. Two factors contributed to my resistance: 1) my contextual background in relation to imposing a new theory into my practice, 2) understanding assessing student intelligences, “profiling,” to be a required element of implementing MI.

Contextual Factors & Imposing a New Theory

As described earlier, I came to the AMI Project with theories which supported my instructional choices. To use MI as a “lens” onto my practice felt forced because I already looked at my practice through multiple theories or lenses. Also, good ESOL teaching already includes activities that MI theory suggests, because diverse approaches are essential to reach learners who do not share a common language.

Certainly, I had integrated nontraditional methods and project based learning into my classes prior to my work on the AMI project. However I had not struggled with as much resistance then because I looked at them through lenses which I chose. But trying to look at class activities through an MI lens caused conflict, confusion, and resistance, strongly suggesting that the context of what the teacher is already doing in the class, her goals, and her own academic background and theoretical perspectives may shape the usefulness of MI theory for her practice and/or her resistance to it (D).

In October 1997 with the BHCC class, I struggled with trying to use MI as a framework: “There are many concerns in adult education, and to try to structure them into a framework, no matter how flexible, and to try to collect data from the students, no matter how connected it is to the framework or their learning or the curriculum, well, it’s burdensome” (teacher journal, 10/97 p.1). Here when I mention “many concerns in adult education” I am referring to contextual factors A, B, C, and D and how it is my job as a teacher to consider them all.

Trying to structure a class that was explicitly MI-influenced was difficult and often became more teacher-centered than I was used to. As a member of this project I felt obligated to implement certain MI practices in my classroom. This led me to feel like I was imposing my own agenda upon the students: assessing students’ intelligences, conducting MI-informed activities, and collecting multiple forms of data about the students’ responses to the activities. Even when the content or thematic unit was of importance to their lives, one of the tenets of participatory education, research requirements meant spending a great deal of time on activities from my own agenda, and that conflicted with my philosophy of teaching. Participating in an MI research project, I felt compelled to emphasize MI, yet it made me uncomfortable, as would the need to impose any theory on my

teaching practice. Moreover, as my students demonstrated resistance to the MI activities my own resistance was augmented.

My struggles applying MI theory were inextricably linked to the context factors described above. That is, much of why MI theory felt forced and the practices imposed is because I already used a set of theories upon which I had my practices. This was particularly true because I struggled with if and how MI fit into or even added to my existent practices. In February 1998, I detailed an ongoing struggle with a related question about what is particular to MI in my practice:

“I am having a lot of trouble thinking in terms of MI this semester. It seems forced to me. It seems contrived to call my lessons MI, when I don’t think of them in that way at all. If I don’t think of them in this way and my students don’t either, then am I doing MI at all? Sure I can call what I do MI: if I have them read and talk about a story and then fill in a chart, I guess that is linguistic, logical and interpersonal, but to me it is just the way I teach and not related to tapping into diverse intelligence strengths of my students. I teach the way I do to give students a wider range of opportunities to practice with the material, and different/more ways of looking at it, understanding or talking about it, but not on an individual level of their intelligence strengths. So what makes it MI? I am really confused about this.”

“...Maybe then I can say that everything I do is MI, because MI encompasses all the ways people are intelligent. But why look at my activities through this lens, when for me other lenses are more valid and relevant to my teaching context? Why should MI get the credit?”

“...For me that is not the foundation that my curriculum is built on. Does this mean that I don’t get it? Am I missing something, after all this work and research into MI? Am I short circuiting on an essential piece which would help me to see that it really is the drawing on my student’s intelligences that makes my class helpful to them over interpretations of other theories? . . . I think this rich diversity of activities and ways to approach material has already been popular with ESOL teachers for a long time, because of the nature of having to reach students with a limited common language, and needing to help them find opportunities to express themselves, find their voices. . . Maybe that is another reason why these classroom practices do not fall under the jurisdiction of MI for me.” (2/98 p. 4).

Yes, I was doing songs and poetry and even collage in this class, but as a teacher and a researcher, I struggled with bridging between pedagogies: how to name them and who to give credit for them. Seidel and Krechevsky quote Kornhaber in their article “Minds at Work: Applying Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom” (1998). She points out that this question of labels comes up for teachers who already have theoretical frameworks for their beliefs and practices, so at least I am not alone in this wondering:

At first glance, MI appears to be compatible with many other educational philosophies and approaches, such as “project based learning.” But this leads to the question of whether adopting the theory simply becomes a new label to describe already-existing practices and beliefs. While MI may sometimes serve this purpose, it can also provide a theoretical foundation and validation for beliefs and practices, deepening/and or extending them to new domains. (Kornhaber, 1994).

Problems with Assessing Intelligences

A major contributor to my resistance to MI was the idea and process of assessing individual intelligences. I began my research assuming -and resisting- the notion that I should develop individual profiles of students in order to apply MI well. I found the notion of assessing students' intelligences definitively, and providing "profiles," difficult and hard to justify. My attempts to assess individual MI profiles were not successful.

The following excerpts from my journal express some of my concerns related to assessing intelligences and developing individual profiles for my students. The first excerpt below shows my struggles defining intellectual "strength:"

"I prefer to think that pretty much everything is a combination of various intelligences and strengths that we have. Also part of the combination of intelligences, or how we manage in the world, create products, and solve problems is not actually strengths at all, but coping mechanisms for dealing with areas that we have to deal with in which we do not have intelligence strengths. Do strategies for how to manage our areas of actual intelligence WEAKNESS fall into other intelligence categories, or are they somehow just general strengths and courage? In a way, overcoming a lack of linguistic intelligence and still surviving in this society is a fierce intelligence all in itself, isn't it? Whether people with this makeup manage by using and depending on their other intelligences I don't know." (teacher journal, 4/23/97)

The excerpt below demonstrates the seeming elusiveness of identifying an individual's intelligence areas:

"One of my students...crochets beautifully. She must do it every night because almost every week she brings in a gift for someone, a delicate item which she has made. But in her case, she may have more bodily kinesthetic and logical mathematical and linguistic intelligences associated with her skill than spatial, because she always works with a pattern, so she is manipulating the materials with her hands, reading & interpreting the pattern. This seems to be different than inventing the pattern herself, sculpting the crocheted items, which would be the spatial intelligence, I would think. On the other hand, she has told me that she sometimes gets the patterns by watching other people do the work. She watches the Spanish TV station and there is a handiwork show on, and she learns to make new things from that. So this could also be interpersonal, her ability is to watch and listen, as much as it might be spatial, an artistic, sculptural interpretation. So, what may seem obvious is actually very complicated and specific" (teacher journal, 4/97).

I also struggled with the notion that we don't always demonstrate our intelligences at promise. How does one observe and assess intelligences that are hidden or dormant? I explored these issues in my April 1997 journal:

"Additionally, as Gardner pointed out in his keynote address, all the domains and the intelligences are culture specific in emphasis and valuation. For domains and

intelligences which are not valued or praised or are even ignored, have little outlet in our specific cultures, families and socioeconomic brackets, these may be underdeveloped, stifled, atrophied or long forgotten in even people who do possess them strongly. In this case, people may not even be able to use intelligences which might have been in fact their strongest ones.”

“For example, in my own case, I have a very low logical mathematical intelligence, and especially low is my own opinion of my capabilities. But when I was in Junior High school, I was very good at math. In fact, so good that I was tracked into the high algebra group with the good math kids. However, ever after that, I was terrible at math, the class was too fast and abstract for me. I ended up with bad grades, frustrated, confused and finally stopped taking it. From there, I developed fear and self deprecating feelings about all things mathematical. I had a business for 12 years with out ever once balancing my checkbook! So now as an adult, I have a limitation which was once a strength. Is it because of an unnoticed error on the part of the school...or is it because my math intelligence was only good up to a certain level of abstraction, then it reached its limitation? Did I have a high affective filter with the higher level teachers for some reason which prevented my accessing the material? is it because it was the mid “70”s and I wanted to spend my time sewing miniskirts and stringing beads instead? Was it uncool for girls to be good at math? Perhaps I was rebelling against my parents. . .who knows? The point is that if I don”t know, no one does. I would venture to say that every adult student has stories of the development or estrangement of their intelligences which are at least as complex and difficult to untangle as mine. For me this is really starting to call into question the part of MI that stresses that individuals investigate and become familiar with their own intelligence profiles. This is a complex process that depends on many things. Given the usual context of the 4-6 hour a week adult ed class, well, it”s a tall order to think that teachers and students can put enough emphasis on seeking these profiles to arrive at something which might be accurate enough to be applied helpfully in other areas of life and learning.”

“Additionally, we must also consider the most important of all intelligences here, the intrapersonal. I am able to look at and consider this connection between my math intelligence and my past, but many adult learners seem to have limitations in their experience with the metacognitive domain, and self analysis in connection with an abstract theory. This also may be a factor of culture (or age, in the case of my elders). This is just to say that in my opinion, especially when talking about MI with adults, the importance of: cultural values, practices and taboos, prior education: duration and experiences, socioeconomic status, family history and individual role, expectations expectation and self confidence/past successes and failures intrapersonal skills and experiences, goals, teacher/student relationship, trust, warmth, comprehension. . .cannot be ignored. I am starting to think that the

intelligences are a lot more complicated and jumbled than we can hope to assess in ESOL classrooms.”

Assessing students’ strengths and “profiling,” represent a particular interpretation of MI theory, and one that did not jibe with me, my students, my context, or my goals. Once my thinking about MI evolved beyond that point, I no longer experienced this type of resistance to using MI theory. Moreover, as my research progressed, with time and building experience and community, and with changing the assessment emphasis to a more student directed process, the students began to show acceptance and high value for the diverse activities in the class. As their opinions changed and were articulated to me, my own resistance diminished.

Fnding 3: Student’s perceptions changed

Change does not happen easily: challenging assumptions and setting out to explore new territory can be painful and cause resistance which takes many forms. Therefore, if I am going to show a change from resistance to acceptance of nontraditional methods of teaching and learning, we will have to see some growing pains.

After weighing possible reasons for students’ seeming discomfort with nontraditional activities, such as a shift in balance of power in the classroom and ongoing assessment of what helps them to learn, I comment in my journal, “Traditional ways of teaching offer a path that is more relaxing and less responsibility... Supposedly books and teachers have already thought about what is a good way to learn. I can see that my asking them questions about this is unsettling to their ideas of teaching and learning” (teacher journal, 11/97).

“Even at midsemester my findings were disappointing. Assessments showed up a desire for the traditional, and then I felt bound to honor their wishes. The results from the assessment seemed to be a step towards the traditional, rather than towards the diverse activities we had been doing. I was conflicted over whether to honor students’ wishes for the traditional or push on with less traditional activities, hoping for later acceptance. I wondered wonder whether I would end up using a textbook because 90% of the students expressed a desire for one. ‘Why do I do these mid semester assessments every semester and then never fail to find out that they want more grammar?’” (11/97)

Ultimately my data demonstrated that students’ perceptions had shifted with respect to effective ESOL teaching and learning. Specifically, they became more accepting of nontraditional activities as valuable to learning English. I identified several factors responsible for students’ changed perception:

- Participating in theme-based or project-based activities that are “in the spirit of MI”
- Self-assessing learning activities, emphasizing what helps them learn English
- Prominently displaying products from nontraditional activities
- Allowing time for trust to develop and for community-building
- Contextual factors

Students Participate in nontraditional activities

I used MI theory to develop thematic units and creative group projects, extending students' exposure to content areas. These activities also offered students more diverse entry points to understanding, learning, and practicing the material. Thematic units also helped to overcome the problem of various levels in the class, helping to ensure language acquisition opportunities for all students.

Thinking about the definition of intelligence from an MI perspective helped me to integrate MI theory into my practice: I asked the students to make content connections across various activities in the units, which is a form of problem solving. Additionally, in each unit, there were aspects of creating products. I believe that these thematic units also helped to maintain the students' interest in the text/content area over a longer period of time, giving them an opportunity to go deeper into the material in areas of both form and function: more depth with thinking and content, as well as with practicing English structures and self expression.

Additionally, I learned through the assessments described below, that it works better for students if I extend the non-traditional off of the more traditional activities. This appeared to help the students feel comfortable with their capabilities in the newer areas. Having first had a chance to access the materials in a way that they felt comfortable with, they were more open and willing to try a more unusual approach. Following is a list of activities from a unit I conducted in the elder class. The unit offered diverse materials which I expanded by keeping MI theory in mind.

Health and Natural Medicines Unit

- Doctor's office and health vocabulary words and pictures from the Oxford Picture Dictionary
- Manipulatives activity combining the pictures with vocabulary words on strips of paper
- Pronunciation practice with Spanish/English health related cognates: cion/tion endings emphasizing rhythmic patterns
- Devise a visual memory strategy for remembering pronunciation (underlining the strongest syllable in the word)
- Simon Says
- "Trip to the Clinic" board game and assessment/natural healing discussion
- Natural Medicines book: Gather ingredients and preparation tools; vocabulary practice from drawings for necessary nouns; make and photograph the recipes in progress; put jumbled photos in sequential order; discuss the steps of creating the recipes; grammar exercises with necessary verbs; sentences and cloze activities with manipulatives; manipulatives activity with relevant sentences to be reassembled from word strips; process writing and editing of recipes in two languages; read aloud the recipes in Spanish and English; draw pictures for the cover and vote for the favorite; write the introduction using a LEA process; and read the finished book.
- Assessments: pictorial chart to assess individual and group responses, and discussions which were tape recorded and written quotes highlighted.

I learned from their written and oral assessments that students from both classes found a diversity of activities helpful for learning English. In the assessment at the end of the medical unit, three Un Paso Mas students affirmed that it was good to have done so many different things to learn the words. They commented: "Everything helps a little bit"; "Everything helps for learn"; and "A little bit of everything is good" (chart/taped assessment).

As time passed, the BHCC students became more open to the in-class group projects that they had at first resisted. I believe that this openness came in part because they were doing real work together on solving problems and having to find ways to form and communicate their ideas in English. For example, group projects encouraged them to: interpret and analyze the assignment, refer to a text, photo, or classmate for ideas, decide how to work together to manipulate/ draw/act/write/make a chart to express and organize the information, negotiate ideas and work progress, and present the group's project.

Several of the BHCC students indicated during an oral assessment in early December 1997 that they appreciated the diversity of the class process, and Sofia even said that it had helped her to learn English faster. I had written on the board the aspects of the class that I wanted them to consider in their answers to the question: "What do you like the best in English class?" The aspects were: journals, handouts (grammar, readings and classwork in students' notebooks), and projects whose products are displayed on the walls. A representative comment was, "All three points of what you write on the board help. Because you have to try many different way how you can learn more fast. For me I like to try a different ways. I like this" (12/97 p.13).

To my next question, "What helps you to learn the most?" Ricardo replied, "Everything in this class helps us. Believe me, because ah, you know everything is interesting. And for myself, I can say that writing I learned so much because when before I came here, I write just a little, but now I can write a lot. Because I speak more than writing. Everything in this class is good, myself I can say." Roberto added that, "...All is good, grammar helps make writing more clear, and everything together is good" (12/97 p.15).

The Key Role of Student Assessment of Learning Activities

Once I established that metacognitive awareness of intelligences was irrelevant to our classroom work and goals, I discontinued related assessment activities. I redirected classroom assessment practices, aligning them more closely to my beliefs about student directed learning. I focused on learner self-assessment that asked students to think about teaching and learning from a personal perspective: What helped them, individually, learn English? This not only enabled me to hear students' perceptions, but I also observed related changes in students' responses toward nontraditional, MI-spirited activities. I think more importantly these findings show that actually doing the assessments played a role in changing the students' ideas about good ESOL practices.

I do not have direct student comments that they valued having done the assessments. But I will show substantial documentation for this finding that aspects of assessment contributed to the students' and my changing perceptions about the value of MI-spirited activities. These aspects are: giving students opportunities to see and articulate their opinions of diverse approaches to curriculum, encouraging students to take control over their own learning, helping students think about their learning, in effect building metacognitive awareness, and contributing to trust- and community-building.

Students initially resisted the assessment activities. The process of questioning students in itself was unusual and uncomfortable. Asking students about teaching resulted in an accompanying shift in the balance of power in the classroom towards teacher/student equality. This caused confusion and disrespect. Student resistance and requests to use a book made me think that "Maybe they think that because I keep asking them if they like things or if they think things help them to learn, maybe this gives them the idea that I don't know how to do it (teach), so I have to ask them!" (11/97)

“Does this really contribute to creating a democratic feeling in the classroom, a new perception of some level of power and self awareness, or a feeling of taking control over/responsibility for their own learning?,” I asked myself. “These are supposed to be part of the goals of this mid-semester evaluation of the class. Or does it only contribute to the maintenance of the old linguistic logical/mathematical paradigm of language learning because when they tell me that they want grammar, and I have taken the time to ask them, then I feel bound to do it!” (11/97)

These cases show that assessment itself is not always a smooth process in the class. The process was questionable for the students and for me. And the assessments often gave me disappointing information that demonstrated students’ preference for traditional ways of learning. Time, developing trusting relationships and building a safe classroom community are all things which helped to build students’ positive opinion regarding the assessments, and to the nontraditional activities they assessed. I discuss these below.

Participation in oral assessments exposed students to a rich diversity of opinions about effective ways to learn and about what is beneficial for an ESOL student. Hearing others could not help but contribute to students’ recognition that such diversity exists. And through their participation in the assessments, by definition a “metacognitive” process, the students developed new capabilities to think about and explain their opinions, in this case about the effectiveness of a diverse ESOL class for teaching and learning. That is, actually doing the assessments -checking in with my students- helped them to learn to think about and articulate their feeling about learning and teaching. In so doing they were really thinking about what and how they were learning. In turn, this helped them see the value of nontraditional activities in relation to their learning English.

In the following section, I present data which shows students became more able to articulate their ideas over time. For the BHCC class having had to solve the problem of how to voice these thoughts in English also represents a developmental step in language acquisition.

With the elders I struggled with assessments in the beginning. They said that everything was good and appeared to be trying to please me. However, by the end of my work with this class, they were able to articulate clearly what they had found helpful about the medical unit, and why, giving positive comments as well as negative. The following are examples of student responses that show not only an ability to articulate, but a highly developed awareness of their preferences in learning:

About the game

“It was medium, it helped a little bit because you put your mind in the game.”

“I never liked games, never played games, but it was good. Good for a short time but not too much.”

“I liked the game, until I had to sing.”

About the aloe drawings and vocabulary

“These are words we use every day, it’s useful.”

“Very good, we learned a lot of words. I’d heard the word blender, but I didn’t know what it meant.”

About reading out loud and talking about the recipes

“Writing and pronunciation help a lot. The best is writing and talking about it.”

“Very good. Good to have help from this Luz. Better to talk first and practice after.” “Very good, I learned various words. It’s a good idea to talk to students first about words. Give us ideas about the

words, after, write. Pronunciation is the best. I can't understand it from the dictionary, but to talk is the best."

The BHCC students also were more willing and able to articulate their knowledge of their own teaching and learning preferences at the end of the semester than at the beginning. After the baseline assessment students began writing me unsolicited notes to let me know how they were feeling about the class and what they wanted to do in the class. Julio's unsolicited note was a request to use a book. Ricardo wrote to me in his journal "Thanks for your patience with us. You are excellent teacher." Celia commented about a specific activity, "Thank you for the tape, teacher, it help with pronunciation and new words. Keep use them!"

The elder class also became more comfortable in telling me what they wanted in our class as a result of ongoing assessments and my respecting what they said. Earlier in the unit, after we had done a manipulatives activity with medical words and played Simon Says, Martha wrote her affirmation on the board: "Centro Hispano tech pley" and when I asked her to read it to me, she said "Centro Hispano teacher play." I said "good, that's great!" and she replied with "thank you teacher." But the best part is that then, she wrote under her first sentence on the board: "good" (teacher journal, 4/97).

Another example of students' growing comfort stating their opinions occurred in the elder class. During the latter part of the chart/tape recorded assessment of the medical unit, students changed the topic completely and told me that they needed me to discipline them more for more effective learning. Mario: "But if we let her go on, listen while she is already giving the class, and when it is finished, begin with the questions-- but we are not letting her give the class, we have to ask the questions when it's finished." Yvonne: "But she tells us to pay attention." Frank: "Yes." Luz: "And we answer like children." Frank: "Yes, I am like a little boy with this." Luz: "If she tells us to pay attention, then I'm not going to draw. You're not going to XXX, he is not going to be writing." Mario: "Yes, clearly, knowing, knowing that we have problems that we can't learn, and because. . ."

The students are discussing my need to discipline them. Mario says that they have so many things to pay attention to in their homes when they try to study, the kids, the work, the kitchen, but here in class they need to take advantage of the opportunity. But Frank says that because they are elderly, they have special problems with paying attention, and they need to be disciplined more. The conversation continues as the students voice their opinions adamantly, sometimes banging on the table. My journal entry states, "Certainly with students who are usually so complimentary and respectful of the teacher, for them to critique me this strongly and unanimously is significant" (teacher journal 6/97).

Assessment helps students assert themselves and take control of their learning.

At the end of the semester, the students had not only taken the initiative to speak up for what they wanted in the class and from me, they had given me: very specific reasons why they considered these strategies helpful to their particular situations, examples of when it had been helpful from past classes, and ideas for ways that I could carry out their suggestions in a way that would benefit them in their learning processes.

Additionally, in conversation about the Easter dinner dramatic scene, two of the elders were very clear that they did not find the activity helpful. Luz is recorded on video saying after the first run through of the scene, "This is for children." Later in the formal assessment where I filled their

responses into a chart I asked them if they felt that doing the scene had helped them to learn English a lot, a little bit, or not at all. I had a chart on the wall which I filled in with each of their responses. They all said “a little” but Grisel said “not at all.” Her reason was very heartening, however. She said that she does not need English to talk to friends in her house, as she always would do this in Spanish, so it did not help. I asked if it would be helpful to do another scene in a location where she needs to use English, and she said yes. She suggested a store, the street and the hospital. They all decided to do a hospital scene, but they wanted me to write out the dialogue for them so that they could memorize it (teacher journal, 3/97).

In the discussion about the dramatic scene the students were able to take control over the direction of their learning and tell me that another context for a dramatic scene would be more closely related to their real life needs for English. The student’s request exemplifies the participatory approach in that she wanted the content of the class to build on her needs. This also points to the importance of considering the context of students’ socioeconomic situations and motivation for attending the class when planning activities. After her comment, we began the medical unit in this class. These direct statements about preferences of teaching and learning did not happen at all or at least not in this detail at the beginning of the semester. The students’ awareness of what they want and their comfort level with expressing their needs are both in part the results of our ongoing process of assessment in the class.

In two documented instances, students expressed interest in doing further work of a non traditional nature in their future English classes. I believe that these comments show that they are interested in the potential that a diverse, project-oriented class can offer them for acquiring greater control over English. Additionally, they developed an investment in this type of student centered class which encourages their thoughts about and is responsive to their needs as learners. Without the support and respect for their voices that ongoing assessment provided, these students would not have been able to express their ideas in these ways, or have had enough practice to develop the ideas.

With the BHCC group, in December 1997 after we watched the video of their drama scenes, Celia and Sara in particular showed a relaxed attitude and self confidence that was new for them in asking for more and specific drama work in the next class. There was a lot of talk of how they looked and the idea of doing more drama in the next semester. Celia asked me about a play that she knew about a Puerto Rican in New York who has to go to jail and learns to read in jail. She described it in depth! Did I know it, or could I find it? She said “Maybe it will be easier for us to work with a drama that has the words written, and this one is about a Puerto Rican experience.” I told her that this is OK with me, but that way, they would have to memorize and use new words. . . . She liked this idea, but Sara preferred to improvise: “I prefer to improvise, to work in a group to decide what we want to happen in the drama. Maybe we practice some times first so we can do it better and know the words to use.” I reminded them that next semester we will have many new students in the class, and that we will have to see if they want to do drama as well. He said, “We can tell them how fun is, and show them the video, they going to want to do it.” I said that maybe if they didn’t we could have two groups in the class and do different things. (I partly said this because also, I don’t know if all of this class would want to do drama as a focus in the next class, wanted them to feel that their control and participation over their class is not running away from them.)

They talked about bringing in a camera to videotape rehearsals before the performance when a research team would videotape. The discussion was rich, they were excited with the possibilities for their future semester in the class. We watched again:

“I don’t like to see myself on TV.”

“Can I have a copy of the tape to show my family?”

“She is realistic on the video, her attitude is informal and it look like life.”

“I don’t like to do too much this kind of thing. Better when other people talk more.

Better I small part. I no talk good.”

Then it was the end of class, they left because we had run over. One student stayed to ask me for a copy of the tape. Their enthusiasm about the tape and wanting to take the drama further really showed me that they are ready to take more control over their learning process. They are able to see what they like to do, what they think helps them to learn, how they like to learn and how they can learn by interacting with each other, not only with the teacher. Also, the freedom to choose that they have had in this class has given the liberty to ask for what they want in class. (teacher journal, 12/97 p.19-20).

Finally, in the elder class, when we talked at the end of the class about their book, Natural Medicines, the students connected the work in our class to other classes. Additionally, they articulated the importance of our work to their lives outside of English class, and of uniting together to advocate for a continued ESOL class:

“This is a source of pride for us. I took the other books we made to El Salvador and showed them to my children. Yvonne and I get two copies, because we are two, so I leave one there with them and keep one here for us. I told them that this is the work we do with our teacher. They read them. We read them together.”

“My daughter looks at these books like literature. She reads them at home and studies them. This book is like literature for us, we feel proud of it.”

“This is our literature.” (holding the book up for the others to see)

“Every book we make is better. The first ones were good, and this one is even better.”

“Yes, we are getting better.”

“We have other teachers but no one makes books with us like this. This is our literature.” (teacher journal, 6/97).

Visibility of Class Projects Informed by MI

Another aspect of our thematic work was displaying related products prominently in the classroom. As we did collages, assessment charts, games, photo work, group writings, we hung them on the walls of our room. I found the visibility of the project work was important in four respects:

- 1) It validated and marked progress in student learning.
- 2) It helped to build a community of learners in the class.

- 3) It helped students to overcome their book centeredness.
- 4) Having the unit products in plain view made the process of assessing learning activities easier for both students and teacher.

With the BHCC class, there was a marked change in their perception of the physical space in which we studied: from a dreary place that was dirty and ugly to an inviting place where warm feelings and good learning could come together. This was in part because we put their work (which was personal as well as visually appealing and grew out of our classroom processes) on the walls. They decided to bring in pictures of places from their countries, warm places, since winter is coming. Also some students wanted to bring in pictures of flags (teacher journal, 9/97).

Gradually the students grew attached to our room and took initiative themselves to hang things on the walls. These actions showed a pride in their visual work and collaborative processes as well as pride in our learning space. In early October, following the drawing activity: “Antony suggested that we hang the drawings up on the wall, so after class, he and I did that” (teacher journal, 10/97). Later in October, following the collage activity, I noted --I didn’t have time to assess afterwards, but it was clear that they were a little proud of their collages, saying “Group 3 was the best!” and they were even eager to help each other hang them on the walls! (teacher journal, 10/97)

And further, on December 9th, the first day students wrote their Haiku poems in class, Two students hung theirs on the wall written on large poster board without my encouragement; I didn’t even notice them until later in the semester. Finally, at the end of the semester, the basement and the work we did there together inspired the students to write this introduction for our Haiku book together while I scribed it for them on the board:

The mystery of the basement: Before nobody liked it, now it inspires us to write these short poems called Haiku. Before the basement was like an empty planet, then in the last 3 months of 1997, everyone contributed something to the planet. Now, we’re going to miss our planet.

Additionally, we hung the products of our activities on the walls in the Un Paso Mas class: the garden theme photos and writings, pages of the dramatic scene book, the boards with their “17 things that parents and grandparents can do to help their children and grandchildren,” the assessment charts and pages from the Natural Medicines book. In the final class, I asked the students what was your favorite thing about this class? Two students said “Having things on the walls to display our work” (teacher journal, 6/97).

I found two other positive results which came from displaying our project work on the walls. The first is that because the projects showed our work and their progress, I believe their visual presence helped the students to overcome their book centeredness. The progress shown by the displays contributed to a feeling of satisfaction that their work amounted to something, similar to the feeling of completing chapters in a book. In the final assessments with both classes, not one of the students mentioned the lack of a book or the desire to work from one, (except our student-made books from class). The second result was that having the products of our classes on the walls made assessment much easier. The two worked hand in hand, because the visual presence helped students think about our work project by project and cumulatively at the end of the course to be less abstract, more tangible and accessible to the students.

Time, Trust & Community

Are there other possible explanations for this finding that students' perceptions were changed by a combination of the three factors above (thematic activities, assessments, and visibility of work)? What other factors may have contributed to this finding? I have to say that I think the attitude of the teacher has a lot to do with what the students ultimately accept and don't accept as good for their learning. Teachers with vastly different methods and theories which inform their curricula development can all have students who like their classes and find them helpful, if they are warm, open, supportive and enthusiastic with their students.

I believe that the character and attitude of the teacher can go a long way to helping the students appreciate what she chooses to do in the class. I tried to be enthusiastic, supportive, encouraging, personal, understanding and dynamic in relationship to all that we did in the class and each student. I was honest with them and openly appreciated when they were honest with me. I tried hard to give them a great class that met their needs, and they were aware of my efforts. Amparo and Celia both pointed out in class discussions that they could see that I do a lot of work for the class and Sun repeatedly told me that I didn't have to spend so much time on her journals.

In the final assessment of the elder class that I discuss above, (what was your favorite thing about this class?) Grisel said "Knowing you." For both my groups of students, the change in perceptions took time, so that they could bond together as a class, and develop trust in me as their teacher. Trust developed and helped change perceptions because they saw that even though what I was doing in the class did not look like it was in their best interests, they saw over time that it was.

I have always put a strong emphasis on building trust both among the students and between students and myself in my classes. The bonding process, building a community of learners and making the classroom a comfortable, safe space in which to create knowledge are essential aspects of my work.

Caine and Caine also state that these qualities are essential in a teacher: "Teachers need to facilitate bonding, encourage student leadership, communicate on different levels and in different ways, and respect cultural differences. And they must genuinely appreciate and feel a sense of the community that they seek to establish for students." (p. 127)

Caine and Caine also discuss comfort and trust in the classroom as related to risk taking. For the ESOL context, risk taking is an essential part of the language acquisition process. This is true on the surface level of the students' need to take risks with language in the class in order to communicate, and risk taking is even more important on the deeper levels of personal change and cultural adaptation that many ESOL learners are struggling with. They quote Doll (1989):

To engage in complex forms of learning, students often have to endure long periods of uncertainty, which can be threatening. There are times when the unknown is positively exciting and people are willing to take risks-- if they feel a specific type of safety (p. 141).

The assessments helped them have a metacognitive perspective on their learning. In combination, they were effective in helping the students experience and become accustomed to non traditional activities, learn to trust each other and their own voices, and understand that this new kind of English class was helping them all access and practice the materials from multiple angles.

Another extension of the connection between time and trust is the students' ability and willingness to work through situations that were particularly challenging for them in terms of problem solving and creativity. In *Making Connections*, Caine and Caine support my theory that trust and a high level of comfort are conducive to students' ability to use their imaginations and explore unfamiliar areas of their thinking.

Creativity is facilitated by "autonomy, greater interest, less pressure and tension, more positive emotional tone, higher self esteem, more trust, greater persistence of behavior change, and better physical and psychological health" (Deci and Ryan, in Caine and Caine 1987, p. 77).

This relates to one of the BHCC group's strongest goals: to think in English, a developmental step for which creativity, imagination and relaxation are essential. In her final assessment on the video, Celia said, "I liked the journal because in this case I learned to divide the paragraphs." She said that she likes the most recent wall project (reordering photos of paragraph theater and writing captions) the best because "I learned to speak English together, I learned to think in English" (12/97 p.11). I need to note here that her comment was followed by a huge, glowing smile.

Over time, they developed confidence and began to trust themselves, each other, the activities and me. An additional benefit of the oral assessments was that hearing each other and building on what classmates said and thought also helped their bonding process and deepen their self awareness. And students' ability to use their imagination in their problem solving processes is an indication of feeling safe and relaxed.

There are three examples where the BHCC students expressed their valuing of the opportunity to use their imaginations to develop their capabilities in English. First, in the second class when I asked the students (baseline oral assessment) to tell me what are some things they think are good to do in an English class, Celia and Ricardo said "Do things in class where you need to think in English." We talked about this when Celia said it, and I clarified it to understand it more specifically, that they wanted to be forced to think in English. We got it farther, that this might happen if they have to imagine situations in English as part of the class. (teacher journal, 9/97)

Later, we did an activity in which they had to talk with a partner about a photo: Afterwards, I asked them how it had been to talk about the photos, and they were very enthusiastic. They pointed out that it seems easy at first, but to talk to others about it, you have to listen to their opinions, and then think again about your own thoughts about it. Sara and Celia liked it because they had to use their imagination about the life of the person in the photos (teacher journal, 9/97).

With the *Un Paso Mas* class I don't have any data where the students explicitly discuss imagination in connection with effective to ESOL teaching and learning, however in June at the very end of our work together when we talked about the poem *Comida/Food* by Victor M. Valle, (teacher journal, 6/97) the discussion of the metaphors was a rich exploration of their imaginations in connection to both the poem itself and the deep interconnection of foods and their world in their lives. Our analysis of the poem involved a stretch of their imaginations. The students told me they had never seen a poem or encountered metaphor before.

In the next class, after reviewing the poem, a student said:

“I took this poem home last week and showed it to my husband. He reads a lot, all the time in English and in Spanish, and he couldn’t understand the connections. But here in this class, we can understand it together” (teacher journal 6/97).

Her comment serves to emphasize the importance of a trusting community in an ESOL class. This finding is essential because without community in the classroom, students may not feel comfortable enough to acquire language or even communicate. Without this level of comfort, the effect of MI or any other approach will be lessened.

However there were comments from two students in the BHCC class that they didn’t feel comfortable in the groups at times because other classmates made them feel badly about the way they speak English. For example, in her mid semester interview, Sara said, “I don’t like to work in groups because some people make fun of they way I speak English” (On cassette). And in his final interview, Roberto gave four specific examples of how his English had improved in his home and work outside of the class, but finally he said: “In the class, I am shy to talk even now, because some people are not that tolerant of all the accents in the class and how slowly classmates talk, but I see that in the street and in my life, I improve. Not a little, and not a lot, but the progress is with me. Little by little I learn more English” (teacher journal, 12/97).

So these could be looked at as negative cases that run counter to my finding that trust and bonding helped them change their perceptions of an effective teaching and learning situation. It must have been other things aside from feeling comfortable developing their communication skills in groups that changed the minds of these students, or else they managed to benefit from this work in spite of their lack of comfort.

Contextual Factors

Context may play a defining role in whether nontraditional approaches are accepted and appreciated in the classroom. Probably more accurately, context interacts with other factors in the resulting “fate” of nontraditional activities. For example, the combination of doing MI-influenced thematic activities, displaying products, and ongoing reflection on and assessment of the learning activities seems to be the primary forces responsible for my students’ changed perception. But I would argue that my relationship with students, my attitude, as well as the positive institutional aspects contributed to my students’ appreciation for the role these more nontraditional activities played in their learning English.

I identify institutional factors (E) and teacher factors (D) as playing roles in students’ ultimate acceptance of the nontraditional activities. In the cases of these two classes, the institutional contexts were supportive of my attempts to explore with the students the effectiveness of MI in the classroom: class size was moderate (12-17 students); closed enrollment allowed us to have a stable group for building trust and community. Also the institution determined classroom space: the students worked at tables so they had enough space to do projects and the tables were in a U shape which facilitated conversations and building of community through being able to have eye contact. Both classrooms I have discussed allowed me to hang our class projects on the walls. These physical and situational contexts determined outside the classroom contributed to the potential of MI theory’s effect.

DISCUSSION

As a result of collecting, analyzing and writing about so much data, I have learned a lot about my own teaching practice as well as my students as individuals and as learners. I believe that MI is a theory that can be applied to teaching ESOL students in a way that will help them to understand, practice and acquire language. However, it is not a universally applicable theory. Perhaps this is stating the obvious and we already know that of course it will not be effective in every situation. Historically in the language teaching field, there have been trends which many teachers have adopted into their practices in hopes of making their teaching more effective. The Audiolingual Method and Competency Based Education (CBE) have been two of these trends. While each has its factors to recommend it, we can see with hindsight that neither will be the answer to our language teaching questions. Theories and new approaches must be interpreted critically and individually by practitioners who take the time to evaluate and problem pose the theories and assumptions which underlie these methods as well as the effect of these practices on their students. As a theory which is recently being adopted and researched in the field of adult education, MI and its practice need to be treated in the same way.

For me, MI theory was not needed. It might be that creative teachers, who do not have a lot of knowledge of other theories of adult education, second language acquisition and ESOL methods to inform their teaching, would grasp and assimilate to MI theory quickly because it explains, validates, and gives a language to describe what they are doing and seeing as successful. For these teachers, the effect of MI theory itself might be greater because it does encourage teachers to use diverse approaches to the curriculum, value their learners' strengths, and work with learners towards understanding how they learn.

But for me, I already had language to talk about what I do and why I do it. A member of the AMI Advisory Council said "MI is only one thing under the umbrella of what informs teaching. It is not the umbrella itself." This is true for me and the way I see it. It is only one aspect that I draw on that is under the umbrella of my teaching (teacher journal, 11/97). For teachers like me who do already have a strong theoretical base, MI may simply be one thing they add to their list of inspirations in lesson planning.

Contextual Factors

In advising other teachers, I feel it is important to detail some of the contextual factors which can determine MI's usefulness as a lens through which to look at a teaching practice and design curricula. I hope that this information will be of use for other teachers who wish to use MI theory to inform their work. The main point is that there are many factors in our classrooms and outside of them that we cannot control, and some of these may influence the receptivity of students to activities and curricula that are designed in the spirit of MI.

I have not thus far discussed data collection or the context of my class in the Spring semester of '98, the third semester of my research. This class was a continuation of the BHCC class from the Fall semester, with about half of the same students and half new students. From the beginning of my work with this class, I struggled with the contextual factors I saw influencing this group, and found myself bumping up against them on so many fronts that it was not in the best interest of my work with this class to emphasize MI or look at my work in the class through an MI lens.

The social and institutional contexts of my class were not conducive to emphasizing MI and the thematic units, project-based activities, visibility of projects, assessments, and building of community that had created a space for students' acceptance of non-traditional methods of teaching and learning. The following excerpts are taken from my journal, as I did not collect data from students in this semester.

A) Students' prior educational experience

I had a partially new group of students from the other teacher in the program. She uses traditional teacher methods and creates a traditional teacher/student power dynamic in the class. The students demanded the use of a book at the beginning of the semester so strongly that for the first time in all my teaching, I gave in and used one.

This was a contextual factor that greatly influenced the possible effect of MI, in terms of my trying to develop activities that were in the spirit of MI, and in terms of the students' ability to change their experience with and receptivity to nontraditional work in the class. Using a book for the first time presented me with challenges, especially in the area of my evolving interpretation of MI. It was difficult to develop thematic units the way I had done before, using songs, literature, process writing and creative group projects because the students wanted to work from the book as opposed to focusing on the other materials I brought in which connected with the books' themes. The only supplementary materials they requested were in the area of grammar practice.

B) Socioeconomic context of students and C) Students' investment/motivation: I quote from my journal in March 1998:

"What can I say, this class has 25 students, and three of them are very tired from having worked the night shift the night before. Two are pregnant for the first time, so they are also tired and distracted. One just got married. I have a lot of competition. I can't do much of anything that they will all be interested in or think is helpful. It's hard on me" (teacher journal, 3/98).

And later on in the semester a student had a seizure in class and had to go to the hospital. I reflected on the often relatively small contextual role that English class plays in some of my students' lives. I pondered the conflict between their priorities and mine in my journal:

"I went to visit him and that was a heavy scene in itself, and after that, I thought that I really have no idea of all the problems that my students face in their lives outside of the class, and my multifaceted worries over how they learn or don't learn are really only connected to a very small part of their lives, even if to me they seem like huge issues.

This puts the metacognitive inquiry into perspective, because really, although they really do want to learn English, they don't have lives that offer them the opportunity to give this task priority focus. I am looking at a tiny part of a tiny part of their lives and asking them to look at it with me. And the students, when they are in class, they don't want to stray or digress or read things that don't seem relevant in an immediate way to their goal -- learning English. This is after all only one thing that is going on for them, and even if it is important, it is on a physical and tangible level, like 'can I get a

better job now, yes or no?,' not on the level of theory about issues of teaching and learning, not on the level of literature and poetry and art, not on the level of 'What are my learning strengths and how does my mind work to solve problems and can this help me learn English any faster or better?' It just isn't. They only see 'I want to learn English so I can get a better job.' Extrinsic motivation. That's why they came here and left their beloved homelands and families, even leaving young children behind. That's why they put up with wrenching loss and cold and estrangement. To get a better job and make money. Opportunity. They see English as the ticket to that. Other functions are side streets with nothing on them but empty shacks, not interesting when the store, laundromat, and work to earn money are on the main drag. That's why they like tests and dictations and grammar. They are measurable. They show them that they are making progress and learning" (teacher journal, 3/98).

(E) Institutional constraints

I had 27 students in the class, which is generally considered to be too many for an effective ESOL class. Also, the students sat in rows because in our new school there are big heavy tables which cannot be moved into a U shape easily at the beginning and end of each class. The students could not hear each other when we conversed as a whole class which made it difficult to build a community. They were able to bond with each other mainly on the level of small group work. Additionally, in our new building, we were not able to hang things on the walls. Finally in April I wore down the building manager and was able to hang our collage project on the wall, but there was no cumulative effect of this process as I had seen in the last semester.

CONCLUSION

MI theory supports good ESOL teaching, but here at the conclusion of my research, it remains only one theory that is under my "umbrella." I am left with many questions as to how relevant it is to my teaching context. As with the consideration of any theory, it is important that the teacher consider the contextual factors which are at work in her class and think critically about MI and how it integrates with her practice.

I have shown how I myself struggled to find a way to interpret the theory in a way that would in the end turn out to be effective for myself and my students. Maybe I'm slow, but this has taken a year and a half of research, the questions are still very large for me. The most important things that I will take away from my work on this project is the realization that critical interpretation of theories is essential, it takes time, and that I need to trust and heed my own instincts, hunches and background as a teacher.

It has been worth my struggles to implement project-based learning and to do the assessments of students' feelings of the value of the diverse activities we did in the class. Although these things were effective, in the future, I will choose to do them in moderation. Ultimately, I still continue to struggle with the mesh of the constraints of doing teacher research and the student centered focus of participatory education.

For me, the most valuable part of the entire project that I would want to share with other teachers is the process of keeping a detailed journal. It showed me the ups and downs of teaching: the cycles

that my students, curricula planning and activities had. The journal helped me to brainstorm themes and activities that I wanted to develop so that they would be the most helpful in my teaching context. It was a place for me to really puzzle out the connection between teaching theories and my practice, as well as between second language acquisition and cross-cultural theories and my students. It provided a forum in which to work out my struggles to be a better teacher and was a place to explore issues that came up as I tried to develop a participatory model in my class. The journal enabled me to be a more thoughtful, articulate and effective teacher and teacher researcher.

Research generates further research. I have had astounding successes and magnificent failures which leave me with new questions and issues to explore, not only about MI, but about adult ESOL pedagogy, students, and my role as a teacher in general. This is not a factor particular to MI; I feel quite sure I would be left with as many questions after a year and a half of this much research on any theory in connection to my practice.

