



More Productive ELA Classes Using “Kid Smarts”

(a.k.a. Multiple Intelligences)

Yes, that old chestnut (Multiple Intelligences--MIs) is still alive and well! Though to some it seems like an outdated theory, new research is still unearthing more “smarts” all the time. If we know the MIs of the students in front of us, we

will not know how smart they are, but how they are smart. It will enable us to differentiate our instruction, and thereby engage more students because they are getting the attention they like and deserve. Chances are we have a mixture of these “kid smarts” in our rooms and there are many surveys online that will help us determine this.

In these issues I’ll be relaying to you some of the ideas I’ve learned both from internet sources (like “Teacher Starter”) and from Thomas Armstrong’s The Multiple Intelligences of Reading and Writing. The ideas will flow across all grades, and will also include some “attention getters” (ATs): alternate techniques for refocusing the class when “1, 2, 3, eyes on me” is worn out. These ATs will be aimed at each “smart”. (You can find more tricks like them on Pinterest.)

Let’s begin with ***Musical/Rhythmic*** smarts. This one moved to the top slot because it is first developed *in utero* with the rhythm of our mother’s heartbeat! The entire brain is involved here, so use it as often as you can. And there’s a bonus: it settles children with ADD/ADHD! You don’t even have to be a musician to incorporate music and rhythm in your reading and writing classes. Here’s how:

Be sensitive to the pitch and volume of your voice. Vary your speed and tonal patterns. Alternate the speed and intonation as you read to the class.

In ELA class students could:

- make a list of (*appropriate*) songs that would suit the different parts of the text.
- choose a passage to read aloud dramatically; accompany the reading with sound effects using different objects. In primary grades, you can read it first; then have the children imitate your inflection and emphasis.

- compose an original song about the text; use an existing song for background music if necessary, but change the words to fit the story.
- decide what kind of music each of the main characters may like. Who might be their favorite artist? Why?
- choose 3 pieces of music: one that represents the mood of the beginning of the story or book; one for the conflict, and one for the resolution.
- create a rhythmic way to remember the information.
- use percussion or tapping when teaching syllables.

Teachers could:

- help little children distinguish between the sounds of “f” and “v” by saying that “f” doesn’t have a motor, but for “v” you turn your motor on.
- use familiar melodies to help students remember parts of speech as in “A-Hunting We Will Go”:

(sing): A verb tells what we do/like jump or swim or chew/Hi Ho the derrio/A verb tells what we do.

- read aloud to older students a rhythmic text such as Mark Twain’s “Punch, Brothers, Punch”. Edgar Allen Poe, Ogden Nash and Dr. Seuss provide other rhythmic read-alouds. Also consider Lewis Carroll’s “Jabberwock”.

ATs: T sings: “Red Robin”; Ss sing back: Yum

If you can’t sing, use rhythmic and/or rhyming ATs such as:

T: Hands on top; Ss: everybody stop.

T: Tootsie roll, lollipop; Ss: we were talking now we stop.

Let’s look at **Visual-Spatial** next, since a large part of the population falls into this category. These are the students who are organized, good spellers, remember by seeing mental pictures, observe rather than act, like to read; can visualize a mental model of a concept and manipulate it without benefit of tangible helps.

CAUTION: The mind of the visual learner strays during lecture or constant verbal activity.

So during ELA class students could:

- make a small collage using pictures, words, topics from the text.

- design a new front cover for the text; make it visually appealing, but also related to the text.
- sketch out what goes through their minds as they read a particularly appealing passage. Or let them close their eyes and process the passage by picturing it in their minds. HINT: *the point is not to create an art piece, so don't allow too much time, or use too big a piece of paper.* (Because we're stressed over the amount of material we must cover, we don't allow much process time in school. But some need that time, so try to allow 3 times your normal "wait time" before accepting answers. You'll eventually get more participation!)
- draw a word if they can't spell it (as in a rebus); associate pictures with letter sounds for easy memorizing (e.g. the letter *s* with the hissing of a snake). You can turn words into pictures by printing the word *tall* in long letter, and the word *short* in very small letters.
- draw a picture of a vocabulary word. When older students have long lists of words to study (some of which will seldom be encountered in their real-world), it's helpful if they have a picture of something that reminds them of the meaning of the word or part of the word.

ATs

T: Holy moly; Ss: Guacamole

T: Mac and cheese; Ss: Everybody freeze

In the next issue, we'll visit the Mathematical-Logical, the Verbal-Linguistic and the Bodily-Kinesthetic of the multiple intelligences. In the meantime, be brave and try an idea or two that may be out of your comfort zone!

