

REAL Kids: Pioneer of M.I. Approach
by Dr Esther Yong (Educationist)

Ever heard of this interesting story?

A young boy was not able to speak any understandable words until he was four years old and only began to read at the age of seven. His parents and teacher considered him 'sub-normal' or 'slow'. Later, he was even expelled from school because his scores were very poor. However, remarkably, this young boy grew up to be someone who shaped the world of science and even won the 'Noble Prize in Physics' in 1921. His name? Albert Einstein!

Well, the reality is that many children today are just like Einstein, whereby they struggle in school until they are able to find the right ways to realize their areas of strength or capabilities. Therefore, educators and parents need to recognize that a child's potential or intelligence may not be realized fully through the traditional way of an 'academic-focused' teaching approach in school.

Believing that every child is talented and has his or her own potential, parents and teachers would have the basis to develop all children. The role of preschool teachers is to bring out the best in each child. This can be done if teachers create learning activities or lessons that involve children's different strengths or 'intelligences'. As Thomas Armstrong, the author of 'Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom' says, "*Children will bloom in a thriving environment and teachers must help to nourish the intelligences of their students*".

Dr. Howard Gardner, the founder of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI Theory) suggests that intelligences can actually interfere with learning. A student who has strong logical intelligence may do well in conceptualizing a mathematical problem but may not be good at language learning. He may have to use the logical or analytical way to learn reading and writing or even in appreciating the formation of meaningful words. Einstein is a great example of this notion. In this case, a teacher needs to find a way of teaching or learning that fits one's intelligence.

Thus, for this reason, many educators are looking at Dr. Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences to enable them to help children develop their potential more effectively. It was upon the foundation of Gardner's definition of intelligence that many educators began to realize that there is no one set of teaching strategies that will work best for all students at all times. Instead, MI Theory opens the door to a wide variety of teaching strategies that can be easily implemented in the classroom. The discovery of MI Theory helps to broaden good teaching into excellent or effective teaching. That is why many educators in the US, Britain, Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and others began to adopt MI as an approach to effective teaching and to realize the potential of students.

Why the MI (Multiple Intelligences) approach at REAL Kids?

1. *MI is a better approach.*

- MI is a better approach compared to the traditional approach. It is more 'student-centred' whereas the traditional approach is more 'teacher-centred'. In the traditional approach, teachers tell and students merely listen or follow

(talk & chalk method). However, under the MI approach, children are encouraged to actively participate in learning activities while teachers serve as facilitators.

2. *MI approach enables us to teach more effectively.*

- The MI approach is more effective as it involves teaching to different 'intelligences' through a variety of ways. There is no 'one size fits all' approach in teaching because students have different learning needs due to their different intelligences. The MI approach is multi-faceted and is therefore able to address the different learning needs of children.

3. *MI approach helps us to assess children more holistically.*

- The MI approach enables us to assess children's capabilities in a more holistic manner. An IQ test assesses children's capabilities only in language and mathematical aspects while the MI approach assesses children in at least EIGHT areas of intelligence. This testifies that each child is intelligent in his or her own way. Just look around us – there are so many talented musicians, artists, environmentalists, designers, performers, and athletes who make this world a better place to live in.

4. *MI approach makes learning more meaningful and enjoyable.*

- Many children do poorly in school because they are only exposed to the traditional 'talk and chalk' method. In many cases, this method is not the best way to learn, causing them to lose interest in learning. As the MI approach involves mainly experiential and hands-on learning, the essence of real learning is brought out. Research has also shown that children learn best through experiential learning. This makes learning more meaningful and enjoyable, and creates a lifelong love for learning.

5. *MI approach helps us to identify the various 'intelligences' in each child.*

- One main feature of MI is to identify and recognize the different strengths and intelligences of every child. MI Theory suggests that every child can be intelligent in many ways and that each of them is unique. Once teachers are able to identify the various intelligences of each child, they can help to develop these intelligences more effectively.

Recognizing the value of diversity and an individual child's differences, REAL Kids believes in the impact of the MI approach in preschool education. Being the pioneer in using the Multiple Intelligence approach in preschool education in Malaysia, REAL Kids' curriculum is designed based on the MI Theory in order to address the different learning needs of children. All REAL Kids teachers are also properly trained to deliver the MI approach using multi-faceted teaching, in order to nurture multi-talented children.