

Expressions: Multiple Intelligences in the English Class by Peter Smagorinsky

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When I was a high school student, my English teachers were just beginning to tap

into learning through the multiple senses. However, my senior English teacher strove to

cater to everyone's intelligibility. For example, when she taught *The Great Gatsby*, she

included the music, fashion, culture and dance steps of the era as a part of her unit. She

ended the unit with a party where the students dressed in the appropriate "roaring '20's"

garb, learn the Charleston and present one aspect of American culture in the 1920's to

the class. Although I did not realize it at the time, my teacher was teaching through the

Multiple Intelligences.

Multiple Intelligences have become a hot topic for debate in recent years. Gardener's research, which is fairly new and very cutting edge has great potential to forever alter the way in which we teach our youth. However, many conventional teachers struggle with the practical application of the concept. While teachers may try to integrate different ways of teaching the material, most are successful mainly in integrating cooperative

learning more than multi-intellectual learning.

Because I noticed this from my own experience as a student of English, when the occasion to read a book which directly addresses the usage of Multiple Intelligences in the English classroom, I became interested. As a pre-service teacher of English at the secondary level, I am looking for ideas that would help me keep from perpetuating the misconceptions that my teachers held when I was a student.

Smagorinsky's book, *Expressions: Multiple Intelligences in the English Class* is an excellent resource, not only for teachers who are just starting out, but is also appropriate for a more experienced English teacher who needs ideas that are more innovatively in line with the newer waves of teaching strategies. The book begins with a basic overview of Howard Gardener's theory of the existence of Multiple Intelligences for those who might not be entirely familiar with the theory itself. Smagorinsky also details the need for understanding Multiple Intelligences, the argument

for implementation in the classroom through the example of Mexican-American students, and the contrast Gardener's theory provides to Bloom, Hirsch and Ravich (3). He is also careful to refute the argument of linguistic/logical-mathematical primacy with examples of other cultures and periods of time who emphasize and value other intelligences more highly (4). His summary of Gardener's theory as well as his argument for the theory is concise, yet informative. At the end of this section, Smagorinsky actively takes the position in favor of the implementation of the theory of Multiple Intelligences into practice in the classroom. However, at first I understood him to mean that this should be the *only* teaching method used in the classroom. I immediately began brainstorming reasons why other means of instruction should be used alongside the multi-sensical approach, time constraints being the first on my list. Upon continued reading however, I discovered that Smagorinsky did not mean this at all. He states, "I don't suggest that we *replace* instruction in linguistic expression with the

construction of meaning through other intelligences. Rather, I suggest that it serve as a complementary means of expression” (5).

However, this stance is not made clear until the very last paragraph of this section and a teacher who is already a bit leery of a new stylistic approach to teaching could get scared off before applicable activities are ever read.

The second section of the book is a general, intelligence by intelligence look at individual activities that could be incorporated into a high school classroom. This section is full of many great ideas. Smagorinsky gives multi-sensical learning ideas for every aspect of the English classroom: journals, writing, literary themes, drama, interviews, and literature. The ideas are well organized by intelligence and would be helpful to a new teacher who is building a collection of activities, or to an experienced teacher who is looking to spice up the “old-faithful’s.”

The third section of this book is the

Appendix. This section includes actual lesson plans about specific topics such as Puritan Ethics, Social Responsibility, Point of View, Imagery, Comparison and Contrast writing and Artistic Response to Literature. These are also valuable resources that any teacher, new or old, could draw upon. They are generic enough so that they are easily incorporated into individual classrooms. Many are even presented in such a way that the teacher him or herself could brainstorm an activity from the little prod provided. The author also includes an excellent list of “Teacher’s Text References,” complete with bibliographic information so that if a teacher wanted to read further, he or she would have a list of the resources in which to do so.

Overall, Smagorinsky’s book is an excellent resource for both old and new teachers. It is short, informative, and highly practical. *Expressions* would be an excellent spring-board for a school district to hand out to it’s teachers in order to keep them abreast of the most innovative teaching

theories and strategies. Appeals to the multiple intelligences are quickly becoming another facet of the classroom. This book is an excellent tool for teachers who want to be a part of that universal classroom. *Nanette Brown, Berry College*