

How to Reach All Students in the Foreign Language Classroom Using Multiple Intelligences

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Each student is born with a variety of gifts. As educators, we have a wonderful opportunity to tap into those gifts and strengths and to provide students with perhaps one of the greatest gifts—empowering all students to learn. One way to do this is through designing lessons, curricula, and assessments that tap into the multiple intelligences of our students.

What is the theory of multiple intelligences?

Howard Gardner, a Harvard University professor of education and author, claimed that all human beings have multiple intelligences or ways of demonstrating their intellectual abilities. Gardner defines *intelligence* as the ability to solve a problem in a way that is valued by at least one culture of the community. These intelligences can be nurtured and strengthened, or ignored and weakened. As educators, we can tap into our students' natural talents and help them become more active participants in their learning by providing them with opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge in multiple ways. Teaching a foreign language lends itself naturally to teaching to a multiplicity of intelligences.

What are the various intelligences and how can you recognize them?

1. Verbal-Linguistic: Example—Maya Angelou

- Ability to use words and language and to think in words, not pictures
- Skills include:
 - Listening and speaking
 - Writing and storytelling
 - Teaching and convincing
- Careers: Teachers, lawyers, journalists

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2. Mathematical-Logical: Example—Albert Einstein

- Ability to use reason, logic, and numbers, and to think conceptually and make connections
- Skills include:
 - Problem solving
 - Classifying and categorizing
 - Working with abstract concepts
 - Working with shapes
- Careers: Scientists, engineers, computer programmers

3. Musical: Example—Louis Armstrong

- Ability to produce and appreciate music and to think in sounds, rhythm, and patterns
- Skills include:
 - Singing
 - Playing musical instruments
 - Recognizing tonal patterns
 - Remembering melodies
 - Understanding the rhythm of music
- Careers: Singers, musicians, disc jockeys

4. Visual-Spatial: Example—Pablo Picasso

- Ability to perceive the visual. Ability to think in pictures and create vivid images. Thirty-three percent of all students are visual-spatial learners.
- Skills include:
 - Puzzle building
 - Understanding charts and graphs
 - Designing practical objects
 - Interpreting visual images
- Careers: Inventors, architects, mechanics

5. Bodily Kinesthetic: Example—Jim Carrey

- Ability to control body movements and handle objects skillfully
- Skills include:
 - Dancing

- Physical coordination
- Acting and miming
- Using one's hands to create
- Expressing emotions through body language
- Careers: Physical education teachers, actors, firefighters

6. Interpersonal: Example—Oprah Winfrey

- Ability to relate to and understand others and to use verbal and nonverbal language to communicate
- Skills include:
 - Listening
 - Empathy
 - Cooperating with groups
 - Establishing positive relationships
 - Building trust
- Careers include: Counselors, politicians, salespeople

7. Intrapersonal: Example—Mahatma Gandhi

- Ability to self-reflect and to understand feelings
- Skills include:
 - Being aware of feelings
 - Recognizing one's own strengths and weaknesses
 - Evaluating thinking patterns
 - Reasoning with oneself
- Careers: Researchers, theorists, philosophers

8. Naturalist: Example—Charles Darwin

- Ability to learn from living things
- Skills include:
 - Identifying living things
 - Analyzing ecological and natural situations
 - Being sensitive to the surrounding environment
 - Recognizing natural patterns
- Careers: Botanists, zoologists, park rangers

We all possess these intelligences in varying amounts. As teachers, we can empower our students to demonstrate what they know by giving them the opportunity to use their strongest intelligences as well as the opportunity to strengthen those in which they are weaker. Giving students the chance to demonstrate what they know in a way that appeals to them provides the opportunity to succeed.

How does the theory of multiple intelligences differ from the traditional definition of intelligence?

The traditional theory of intelligence states that people are born with a fixed amount of intelligence. Traditional theory has instructors teaching the same material in the same way to all students. Students then demonstrate what they know through uniform testing.

The theory of multiple intelligences implies that instructors teach and assess differently based on individual intellectual strengths and weaknesses and develop strategies that allow students to demonstrate multiple ways of understanding that value their uniqueness.

So what are the benefits of using the multiple intelligences approach?

- Students are **turned on** to learning! Those students who perform poorly on traditional tests are turned on to learning when classroom experiences incorporate artistic, musical, or athletic activities.
- Students are **more active participants** when we provide opportunities for authentic learning based on each student's needs, interests, and talents.
- Students develop **increased self-esteem** when they are able to demonstrate and share strengths and gain positive educational experiences.
- Students **manage their own learning** and begin to value their strengths.
- Student **understanding increases**.

When students understand their intelligences, they begin to manage their own learning and to value their individual strengths. When given the opportunity to exhibit comprehension through rubrics, portfolios, demonstrations, or self-assessments, students come to have an authentic understanding of achievement.

How do we make an integrated lesson plan that incorporates multiple intelligences?

The good news is that there is no need to reinvent the wheel! So much time and energy go into planning curriculum that it is not necessary or feasible to scrap them. Often, simple but powerful changes can make a world of difference. Identify first which intelligences your lesson plan already includes and then incorporate activities that address additional intelligences as needed.

Below is an example of activities generated as part of an earlier unit developed on the Day of the Dead celebration and Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. After reviewing the lesson plan, I added activities that addressed the goals of the lesson and the intelligences of the intrapersonal and mathematical-logical learner. The added activities are in bold.

Intelligence Addressed	Activity
Verbal-Linguistic	Frida Jeopardy! TM , cinquain
Mathematical-Logical	Frida Internet scavenger hunt
Musical	Song: “La Llorona”
Visual-Spatial	Mapping, video, sugar skulls, self-portrait, realia
Bodily-Kinesthetic	Sugar skulls
Interpersonal	PowerPoint presentations, Jeopardy! TM
Intrapersonal	Self-portrait, postcard art analysis, cinquain
Naturalist	Symbolism of nature components

How can students demonstrate all they know?

One method is to allow students to select their own approaches in expressing their knowledge on a topic. Students are given the opportunity to design their own tasks and to come up with ideas for later demonstrating what they have learned. Below is an example of a student assessment design worksheet on the Frida Kahlo unit.

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Student Assessment Design Worksheet
Content Focus: <i>My task will focus on the impact of Mexicanidad on Frida Kahlo's work.</i>
Description of Task: <i>I want to study how Mexican culture influenced Frida Kahlo's work. Specifically, I would like to understand how the Mexican's view of death shaped Frida's work.</i>
Intelligences: Verbal-Linguistic — <i>Identify songs relating to Mexican culture that reflect Frida Kahlo's view of life.</i> Visual-Spatial — <i>Create a collage of elements on Mexicanidad.</i>

Adapted from Silver, Strong, and Perini. *So Each May Learn: Integrating Learning Styles and Multiple Intelligences*. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2000.

How can I write a test that respects the various student intelligences and allows students to demonstrate what they know?

Obtaining information about a student's skills and content knowledge has traditionally meant a "test" (fill-in-the-blanks, listening, verb conjugation, reading comprehension, and multiple-choice). But not all tests are equal, and new ways of testing have been developed to better assess our students.

Recent work shows that tests that provide for student choice and allow students to actively determine and fill in the gaps in their knowledge base empower students to do their best and provide teachers with a broad picture of student understanding. Such tests respect both student style and intelligences *and* allow students to choose ways in which they can best demonstrate their understanding. They require students to think critically and to seek out new knowledge that continues, rather than audits, the learning process.

Below is an explanation of a test on that same Frida Kahlo unit that allows students to demonstrate their knowledge in a way best suited to their individual strengths and interests.

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Connection and Student Explanation	Test should begin with a purpose that connects previous knowledge and previews topics to come. For example, students take several minutes to write down what they feel is important to learn from this lesson.
Emphasize Competency	If, for example, the total number of test points is 50, students choose those test questions that they feel most competent to answer. Students are given the opportunity to demonstrate what they learned.
Choice	Give students a choice. Students might be given the opportunity to choose to complete A or B. A. Describe the relationship between Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera and how this relationship affected her work. B. Describe how Frida Kahlo's interest in Mexican culture affected her work.
Involve Various Multiple Intelligences	Give students an opportunity to show what they know through a variety of intelligences. Students might select two of the following to complete. 1. Answer multiple-choice questions. (Verbal-Linguistic) 2. Frida Kahlo often included plants and animals in her self-portraits. Choose a plant and animal that you would include in your self-portrait and explain what each would represent to you. (Naturalist/Intrapersonal) 3. Write a short diary entry reflecting your thoughts as if you were Frida. Give some insight into your life and tribulations. (Intrapersonal/Verbal-Linguistic) 4. Map your knowledge of Frida Kahlo. Students will need to be familiar with the idea of mapping. (Visual-Spatial)

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Students feel empowered by the freedom they are given to use their various intelligences to complete tasks of their choice. Most importantly, students are challenged to make choices that allow them to express themselves in a style that matches their own.