Gardner's multiple intelligences - principles and interpretation

Howard Gardner asserts certain principles relating to his multiple intelligence theory, which are explained and interpreted here, along with implications and examples:

The multiple intelligences theory represented/represents a definition of human nature, from a cognitive perspective, ie., how we perceive; how we are aware of things.

This provides absolutely pivotal and inescapable indication as to people's 
preferred learning styles, as well as their behavioral and working styles, and 
their natural strengths. The types of intelligence that a person possesses 
(Gardner suggests most of us are strong in three types) indicates not only a 
person's capabilities, but also the manner or method in which they prefer to learn 
and develop their strengths - and also to develop their weaknesses.

So for example:

- A person who is strong musically and weak numerically will be more likely to 
develop numerical and logical skills through music, and not by being 
bombed by numbers alone.

- A person who is weak spatially and strong numerically, will be more likely to 
develop spatial ability if it is explained and developed by using numbers 
and logic, and not by asking them to pack a suitcase in front of an 
audience.

- A person who is weak bodily and physically and strong numerically might 
best be encouraged to increase their physical activity by encouraging them 
to learn about the mathematical and scientific relationships between 
exercise, diet and health, rather than forcing them to box or play rugby.

The pressure of possible failure and being forced to act and think unnaturally, 
have a significant negative influence on learning effectiveness. Happy relaxed 
people learn more readily than unhappy stressful people.

A person's strength is also a learning channel. A person's weakness is not a great 
learning channel. Simple huh?

When you add in what we know about personal belief and confidence it all 
 begins to make even more sense. Develop people through their strengths and we 
not only stimulate their development - we also make them happy (because 
everyone enjoys working in their strength areas) - and we also grow their 
confidence and lift their belief (because they see they are doing well, and they get 
told they are doing well too).
Developing a person’s strengths will increase their response to the learning experience, which helps them to develop their weaknesses as well as their strengths.

Having illustrated that sensible use of a person’s natural strengths and types of intelligence is a good thing it's important to point out that intelligence in itself is not a measure of good or bad, nor of happy or sad.

The different intelligences - in Gardner’s context (and normally in most other interpretations and definitions of the term) - are not a measure or reflection of emotion type. Intelligences are emotionally neutral. No type of intelligence is in itself an expression of happiness or sadness; nor an expression of feeling good or good or bad.

In the same way, the multiple intelligences are morally neutral too. No type of intelligence is intrinsically right or wrong. In other words intelligences are amoral, that is, neither moral nor immoral - irrespective of a person's blend of intelligences.

Intelligences are separate to the good or bad purposes to which people apply whatever intelligences they possess and use. Intelligences are not in themselves good or bad.

The types of intelligences that a person possesses are in themselves no indication or reflection - whatsoever - of whether the person is good or bad; happy or sad, right or wrong.

People possess a set of intelligences - not just one type and level of intelligence. This was a primary driver of Gardner's thinking; the fact, or assertion, that intelligence is not a single scalable aspect of a person's style and capability. Historically, and amazingly a perception that still persists among many people and institutions and systems today, intelligence was/is thought to be measurable on a single scale: a person could be judged - supposedly - to have a high or low or average intelligence; or a person would be considered 'intelligent or 'unintelligent'. Gardener has demonstrated that this notion is ridiculous.

Intelligence is a mixture of several abilities (Gardner explains seven intelligences, and alludes to others) that are all of great value in life. But nobody's good at them all. In life we need people who collectively are good at different things. A well-balanced world, and well-balanced organizations and teams, are necessarily comprised of people who possess different mixtures of intelligences. This gives the group a fuller collective capability than a group of identically able specialists.

Incredibly many schools, teachers, and entire education systems, persist in the view that a child is either intelligent or not, and moreover that the 'intelligent' kids are 'good' and the 'unintelligent' kids are 'bad'. Worse still many children grow up being told that they are not intelligent and are therefore not of great
worth; (the "you'll never amount to anything" syndrome is everywhere).

Schools aren't the only organizations which, despite all that Gardner has taught us, commonly still apply their own criteria (for example IQ - 'Intelligence Quotient' - tests) to judge 'intelligence', and then label the candidate either worthy or not. Adult people in work in organizations and business are routinely judged by inappropriate criteria, and then written off as being worthless by the employer. This type of faulty assessment is common during recruitment, ongoing management, and matters of career development and performance review.

The fact is that we are all intelligent in different ways.

The most brilliant scientific professor may well have exceptional intelligence in a number of areas (probably Logical-Mathematical, and one or two others) but will also be less able in other intelligences, and could well be inept in some.

By the same token a person who struggles with language and numbers might easily be an excellent sportsman, or musician, or artist.

A hopeless academic, who is tone-deaf and can't add up, could easily possess remarkable interpersonal skills.

Many very successful business-people were judged to be failures at school. They were of course judged according to a very narrow definition of what constitutes intelligence.

Many very successful and fulfilled people in life were also judged to be failures at school - brilliant scientists, leaders, writers, entertainers, sports-people, soldiers, humanitarians, healers, religious and political leaders - all sorts of happy, fulfilled remarkable people - they too were judged according to a very narrow definition of what constitutes intelligence.

Each one of us has a unique and different mix of intelligence types, and commonly the people with the least 'conventional' intelligence (as measured using old-fashioned narrow criteria), actually possess enormous talent - often under-valued, unknown and under-developed.

Gardner, and others of course, pointed out that managing people and organizing a unique mixture of intelligence types is a hugely challenging affair.

It starts however with the recognition that people have abilities and potential that extend far beyond traditional methods of assessment, and actually far beyond Gardner's seven intelligences, which after all are only a starting point.

Gardner was one of the first to teach us that we should not judge and develop
people (especially children, young people, and people at the beginnings of their careers) according to an arbitrary and narrow definition of intelligence. We must instead rediscover and promote the vast range of capabilities that have a value in life and organizations, and then set about valuing people for who they are, what they can be, and helping them to grow and fulfill their potential.

**Other intelligences and models**

Gardner said from the beginning that there could be additional intelligences worthy of inclusion within the model, and I certainly agree. Notably Gardner discussed Naturalist Intelligence (perception of and relationship with the natural environment); Spiritual or Existential Intelligence (as would concern one's relationship with the universe or God, depending on one's personal philosophy); and Moral Intelligence (one's relationship with other living things and their well-being).

Thus the model is extendable to modern ideas beyond those listed in the seven basic intelligences. As already discussed, defining additional intelligences is not easy. But they do exist, and people do possess capabilities, potential and values far beyond the seven original 'multiple intelligences'.

*Source:*
http://www.businessballs.com/howardgardnermultipleintelligences.htm