

AL Adventures: Part 3- May 2002

The Principles at Work in our Learning

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My objective in writing AL Adventures is to highlight what we, managers, trainers, educators, parents and all of us learners do in our best practice learning, coaching and training experiences, namely: access the joy of effective learning in the most effective ways. In part 1 and part 2 we discussed an example of a memorable learning experience on a Scottish island and decoded it according to 6 Accelerated Learning Principles. In part 3 we will take this analysis of learning further with the tools that Multiple Intelligence Theory provides us.

It has long been clear that the classic IQ tests do not accurately identify human intelligence and potential. For example, many of the most successful entrepreneurs in the world have had neither formal tertiary education nor outstanding IQ test scores, and yet they have become CEOs of hugely successful corporations.

Another way of understanding our potential is through the tools that Multiple Intelligence Theory offers us. Howard Gardener, the developer of MI, defines intelligence as a way of solving problems and/or creating products in a particular context. What this means is that for example, a stall owner at a night market may be highly intelligent in solving problems and creating the products needed in his/her environment

By analysing how different people "solve problems" Gardener discovered that a dancer for example, may dance out her "problem" in a way that she might not be able to in words and come to an excellent solution through her dancing process. His research showed that "one size" education does not fit all, rather that the basis of effective learning lies in understanding the following principles which are at work in our individual learning styles:

1. Intelligence is multiple - multiple ways of knowing about the world
2. we all have at least 7 multiple intelligences
3. we each usually have preferred and more developed intelligences
4. we have the ability to change and develop our intelligences

Multiple Intelligence Theory thus offers us another way of analysing and understanding the Scottish Island learning example and why it was effective not only for me but also for the whole group.

First of all, the Scottish Island experience used all of our intelligences, often operating in combination with each other, namely:

Visual/Spatial Intelligence - The ability to see, an awareness and appreciation of visual images, external and internal, colour, patterns, use of space and design.

The VS intelligence was well stimulated: for example, in studying maps, surveying the scenery from the top of a hill, drawing the specimens and arranging the tents.

Body/ Kinesthetic Intelligence- Involving physical movement and touch and the knowing and wisdom that comes from this.

On the island we awakened and exercised our BK intelligence by: walking, climbing, swimming, touching and handling natural samples, grass, sand, water.

Interpersonal intelligence - This is about the ability to communicate, cooperate and relate with other people.

On the island, so much that involved this Intelligence: individual and team projects, about which we had to report and communicate, even preparing breakfast became a team "project" and in the evening during camp fire camaraderie.

Intrapersonal intelligence- Involves delving internally, a state of being rather than doing, self-reflection, questions and activities of a spiritual awareness.

The island invited use of intrapersonal intelligence: in marvelling at the wonder of the stars at night, at the perfection of thousand year old fossils, the silence of the early morning, and a deep sense of bliss at the end of the day; a time for reflecting on the larger purpose of life and what life is all about for me.

Musical Rhythmic Intelligence - Ability to recognise and be sensitive to tonal patterns, beat and rhythms.

Examples of this ability at work on the island: appreciating the tones in the dawn chorus of island birds, the waves pounding rhythmically on the beach, the rhythm of walking - in unison with the others onwards, singing alone and together, playing and listening to the guitar.

Logical/ Mathematical Intelligence- ability to reason logically, typical of scientific thinking, to determine numerical calculations and recognise abstract patterns.

Examples on this trip were: Scientific analysis, classifying species, deducing the age of a fossil, calculating distance, terrain, time and speed in planning the daily hikes, estimating how much camp food to cook for 20 people.

Verbal/ Linguistic Intelligence-Capability to express yourself in words, both written and spoken and to understand the language of others.

On the island we were constantly using this intelligence in dialogue, debate, writing: naming species, writing journals, poems and in composing camp songs.

Other intelligences: Beyond these original 7 MI, Howard Gardener has concluded that there are more, the naturalist being one. This intelligence is that displayed so skillfully by indigenous peoples who still have a strong bond with nature.

Conclusion

On the island, Individuals stood out in their ability or lack of it, in each of these intelligences, and it was also clear we all had our preferred intelligences. For some it was BK, displaying a love for the hike and the climb, for others, LM, the logical analysis of scientific enquiry, some loved VL & Inter, discussion while others preferred intra, found in silence and reading/writing.

Multiple Intelligence theory allows us to acknowledge and respect these differences without judgement and recognise that the best teams comprise a variety of intelligences working in synergy. The island experience allowed each of us to access our different intelligences and also to develop individual synergy with those that had been underutilised. Reflecting on the experience in this way suggests that providing experiences with an array of MIs is an important way of reaching all our participants.

The challenge, as parents, trainers, managers, coaches and learners, is whether we are prepared to non-judgementally, recognise that we each learn differently with different intelligences? And then do the work needed to explore the exciting possibilities therein.

Have fun taking on this challenge. And do let us know the results!

Warm wishes
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