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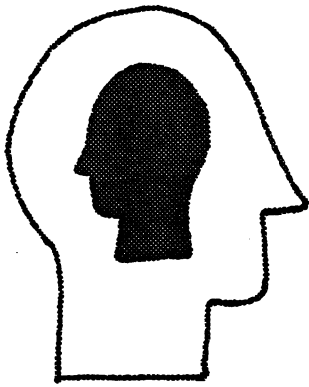
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Introduction

Meta-Intelligence

Helping Students Tap Their Full
Learning Potential at School



In a school that is a home for the mind there is an inherent faith that all people can continue to improve their intellectual capacities throughout life; that learning to think is as valid a goal for the 'at risk', the handicapped, the disadvantaged and the foreign-speaking as it is for the 'gifted and talented'; and that all of us have the potential for even greater creativity and intellectual power.

– Art Costa, *The School as a Home for the Mind*

As far as we know, human beings are the only creatures that possess the ability to be self-reflective; that is, we have the ability to step back from ourselves and watch ourselves, almost like outside observers. This capacity carries with it both the joy of freedom and the burden of responsibility. We are not victims. Once we become aware of something in our lives, our self-consciousness gives us the power to change it, if we so desire. This self-reflective dimension is at the heart of helping students understand their own multiple intelligences, how to improve those intelligences and how to use them consciously to enhance the students' own and others' lives.

The cognitive research of the last ten to fifteen years overwhelmingly supports the necessity and possibility of teaching students how to increase their skills of knowing, understanding, perceiving and learning. In his article “Thinking Skills: Neither an Add-On nor a Quick-Fix,” Art Costa (1991) makes the following observation:

For many years we thought that thinking skills programs were intended to challenge the intellectually gifted. Indeed, some thought that any child whose I.Q. fell below a certain static score was forever doomed to remedial or compensatory drill and practice.

Gaining wide acceptance, four fundamental and refreshing concepts underlie modern cognitive curriculum and instructional practices. They are: The Theory of Cognitive Modifiability (Feuerstein 1980), the Theory of Multiple Intelligences (Gardner 1983), the faith that Intelligence Can Be Taught (Whimbley 1975) and Sternberg’s thesis that traditional I.Q. scores have very little to do with success in dealing with the problems encountered in daily life (Hammer 1985; McKean 1985).

These theoretical concepts equip us with the realisation that all human beings are both retarded in certain problem-solving skills, while simultaneously being gifted in others (Link, as quoted in Makler 1980). The concepts provide us the faith that all human beings can continue to develop their intelligent behaviour throughout a lifetime.

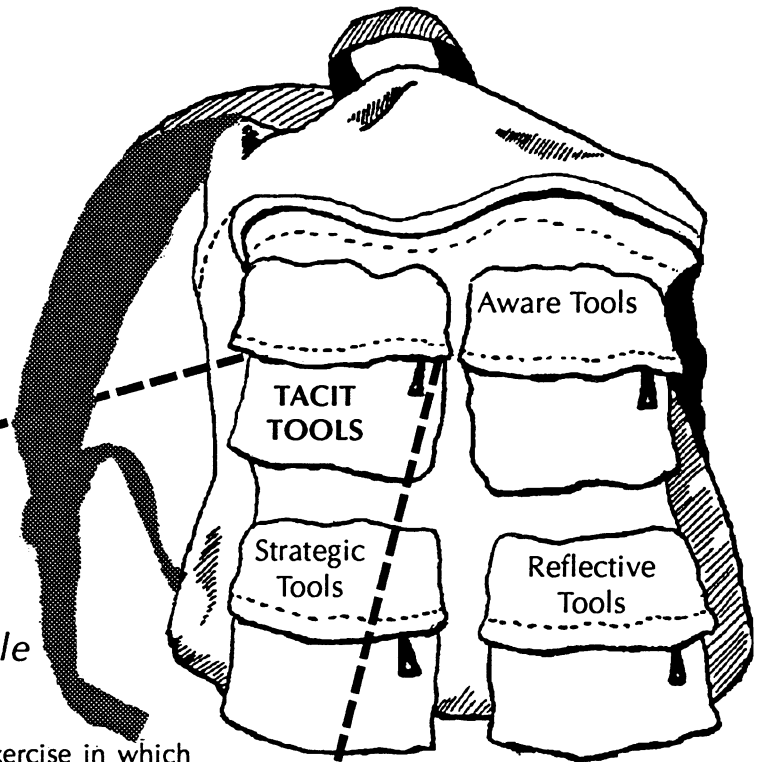
Seven Pathways of Learning is about helping all of our students continue to develop their intelligent behaviour and their intellectual capacities throughout their lifetimes. I like to call this kind of teaching and learning ‘meta-intelligence’, adapting the idea of metacognition to working with the seven ways of knowing. Stop for a moment and answer the following questions:

- Do you talk to yourself? What do you talk to yourself about?
- Do you answer yourself? Are you often your own best therapist?
- Why do you go through this process? What benefits do you get from it?

Don’t worry—talking to yourself is probably not early senility setting in. It’s metacognitive behaviour! In his article “Mediating the Metacognitive” Art Costa (1984) calls the process of metacognition “inner talking”: “Occurring in the neocortex and therefore thought by some neurologists to be uniquely human, metacognition is our ability to know what we know and what we don’t know. It is our ability to plan a strategy for producing what information is needed, to be conscious of our own steps and strategies during the act of problem solving, and to

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Activities for Tacit Use of the Intelligences



Kitbag of Tacit Tools for Teaching about Multiple Intelligences

Intelligence Scavenger Hunt: An exercise in which students interview each other about various skills and capacities related to the seven ways of knowing.

Self Report Card: A technique in which students report various kinds of information to each other using different intelligence modalities.

Wraparound Processing: A way of reflecting on a completed lesson or activity in which students use a variety of ways to express their feelings.

Intelligence Activity Posters: The use of specially designed posters that ask students to exercise different intelligence skills to complete activities suggested on the poster.

Self Behaviour Checklist: An activity that involves students in making a series of observations about themselves and different types of intelligent behaviour.

Billy was a year three student who was not doing very well at school. He had some strange ideas and some strange ways of behaving in the classroom. He rarely succeeded at assigned classroom work, on tests or on his homework. He did not have many friends because the other children thought that he was dumb and some kind of a 'weirdo'.

Billy's teacher had received training in working with the seven intelligences in the classroom. She decided to share these seven ways of knowing with the class by having the students work in small groups on an Intelligence Activities poster (see pp. 44–46). Suddenly Billy came alive; he was able to do some of the things on the poster that others in his group could not. The teacher told the class that all of the ideas on the poster are the different ways we are smart. Billy's hand shot up immediately.

He said, "These are things that I do every day. I usually feel like I'm kind of stupid. But I was really good at some of the things on the poster! I never thought of these things as making me smart in a different way!"

The teacher asked Billy's team to share some of their thoughts about and experiences of working on the poster. Some of the comments follow:

We would have failed if Billy hadn't been in our group. He could do some of the things none of the rest of us could!

Everyone in the group could do something, but no one could do everything.

I could sort of do everything on the poster, but some people were really good!

I'm glad I didn't have to do it alone!

Other groups shared similar reflections.

Needless to say, this simple activity had a dramatic impact on the class. Suddenly their perception of what makes someone smart had changed. And, what is more important, their perception of Billy and Billy's perception of himself had changed.