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Preface

In virtually every multiple intelligence workshop I conduct, the most frequently asked question is “What about assessment?” The question takes many forms because the assessment issue has many faces:

- How can multiple intelligences be used to assess academic progress?
- What should we do about state, local, and national standardized proficiency tests?
- How do we grade MI products? And how do we report this stuff to parents?
- No matter how good MI is, you don’t get to paint a picture, sing a song, or do a role-play on the SAT! How can MI be used to prepare students for such tests?
- Will teaching and learning with MI help students get into college?
- Is all this really preparing students to function in the “real world”?
- Why waste time teaching with all the intelligences when I know they’re only going to be tested in verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical ways?
- Shouldn’t you be talking to our school board or our legislators? Aren’t they the ones making policies that are judging us and our students from a very narrow standpoint?
- MI is exciting for me. Kids like it. It helps them. But how do I find time to use it when most of my time is spent getting students ready for testing?

I naively thought my first book on assessment, *Multiple Intelligence Approaches to Assessment*, had provided at least my answers for every conceivable question on MI and assessment. *I was wrong!* Today I have far more questions than answers. In fact, as contemporary brain-mind research continues to teach us more and more about the brain’s neurology and the way it cognitively processes information, I am beginning to feel that there are no final answers to most of the questions listed above. Every so-called answer seems to generate a new set of questions.

If there is a final answer, it may be what the literature is calling “brain-compatible teaching and learning,” and the process of school reform, school restructuring, and school renewal based on making schools more brain compatible. We are changing and our schools are changing as we seek to bring them in line with the new information that is coming to us from the frontiers of brain-mind research—research that is presenting exciting new information about what a human being is and what our capacities are. I, for one, am filled with hope

for the educational profession today. I cannot think of a better time to be an educator in humankind's long journey than the current one. At the same time, there has probably never been a more frustrating time to be an educator. So much of what we know are best practices (based on current educational research on teaching and learning) and what we know about how the brain learns (and therefore how we should be teaching) are blocked by many school board policies and state- and local-mandated reforms that are rarely rooted in current education and brain research, nor in the actualities of the state of education today as we rapidly approach the turn of the century.

This book is still another attempt to answer the questions I posed earlier. It is an extension of the work I presented in *Multiple Intelligence Approaches to Assessment*; it looks at ways to create and use MI-based rubrics to enhance, deepen, and reveal understanding.

The more you use multiple intelligences on a regular basis, the more useful you will find this book; many times and in many ways throughout I make the point that instruction and assessment are two sides of a single coin. In other words, profound instruction by its very nature begs to be assessed, for the learner has an intense desire to use the information, demonstrate understanding, and tell others about it. And a truly great and authentic assessment, one that reveals students' understanding, is in and of itself the instructional tool par excellence that we have at our disposal. There is no greater learning than that which occurs when one must perform that learning for others. I suggest that the key to profound instruction and authentic assessment is rubrics—rubrics that genuinely help students further their learning as opposed to those that judge, label, and point out failure.

Allow me to say up front that I am sure every answer I think I am giving will inevitably spawn more and more questions. However, I've decided that's okay. It's all part of the exciting process of human transformation and development.

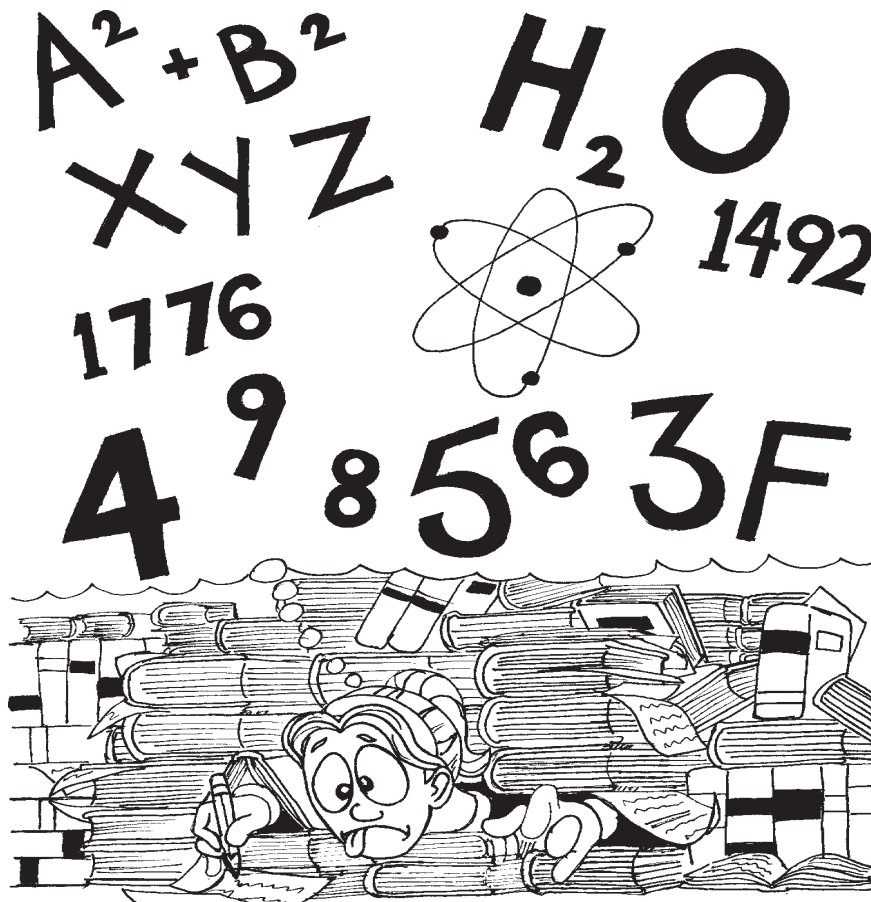
There are more people I need to thank for their assistance on this book than space allows. Nevertheless, let me mention a few. Major thanks must be given to those teachers who, on very short notice and a tight deadline, provided me with wonderful examples of MI-based assessments from their own classrooms. There is no better testimony to the power of MI and how it can and is changing our schools than this material. My thanks must also be expressed to the staff of Zephyr Press, especially my editors Stacey Shropshire and Veronica Durie for their undying patience with my chronic lateness in getting the manuscript to them. I need to express my appreciation to Shaun Bailey, a new artist, who did the drawings for this book. I am very pleased with his work. Last, but definitely not least, I want to thank my partner Jim Reedy for his continued support, encouragement, and critique of my work.

David G. Lazear
Chicago, Illinois
1998

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Current Evaluation Methods

Exploring the Current Biases _____



In the United States especially, with its focus on quantitative markers and its cult of educational efficiency, there has been a virtual mania for producing tests for every possible social purpose. . . . The United States is well on the way to becoming a “complete testing society.” We could encapsulate this attitude thus: *If something is important, it is worth testing in this way; if it cannot be so tested, then it probably ought not to be valued. Few observers have stopped to consider the domains in which such an approach might not be relevant or optimal.*

—Howard Gardner
Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice

How often have you experienced one or more of the following situations?

- A student can draw elaborate pictures that illustrate understanding of certain concepts you are teaching. Yet you can't let her draw in a formal testing situation because you can't establish criteria for a grade.
- You have a discipline problem in the regular classroom. But in music class, this student behaves well. The music teacher never sees any of the behaviors that are so disruptive in your class.
- You spend an inordinate amount of time preparing kids to be successful on standardized, time-efficient district or state proficiency tests that test only verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical abilities.
- A very likable student has lots of friends and is a good friend to others. In groups he makes sure everyone succeeds, but for some reason he rarely succeeds himself.
- A student consistently demonstrates her understanding in and through various classroom activities, but she can't demonstrate understanding in a formal testing situation.
- You know that standardized tests do not really give an accurate picture of what your students can do and what they really know, yet you're in trouble if your students don't perform well on them.

All these situations are common in classrooms. We know that most of our students are brighter than our assessments of them imply. Every educator has had many experiences with students who understand the material in classroom discussions, who have a good “working knowledge” of the information, who know how to apply it and use it, but who cannot produce it on a written test. Grant Wiggins poses a provocative question about such situations: “Who has really failed when this is the case?” He notes that *the failure in these types of situations is the test*, not the student and not the teacher. Current assessment tools keep us from accurately assessing students' abilities or their understanding of material. So what are the problems with these instruments?

Deficit-Based Assessment

In my first book that deals with assessment (Lazear 1994), I suggest that the number one problem we face in almost all of our approaches to assessment in the Western systems of education is that we approach it from a deficit base. This approach is most prevalent in two areas: ability testing (sometimes called “diagnostic evaluation” or “intelligence testing”) and academic evaluations.

Diagnostic Evaluation and the Search for Disabilities

The deficit-based approach to ability assessing is administering often a whole battery of ability tests that, by design, are really hunting for students' “disabilities,” their weaknesses, what they can't do. And then, of course, under the guise of



“being able to more adequately provide services” to address the “learning disabilities” we think we have found, we affix labels to students. Thomas Armstrong (1987), noted author and lecturer on multiple intelligences, notes the following about such assessment tools: “It’s clear that these assessments do not objectively test a child’s ability . . . Learning disability specialists use a ‘test until find’ approach in their work, where testers administer assessments to

a child until they locate a suspected disability—at which point they stop testing and label the child. If they don’t locate a disability after two to three tests, they administer up to fifteen or twenty other tests until they either find a disability or exhaust their entire battery. This way of working with children encourages fault-finding and minimizes the chances of discovering strengths and abilities” (30–31).

The logical extension of this kind of deficit testing is the prescription of remedial education programs to help students “overcome” their “deficiencies.” But what do we in fact prescribe? More of what they already can’t do! In other words, we *remediate at the point of the weakness*. We hammer away at a student’s weakness, thinking that somehow we’ll be able to drum things into his head. In a recent workshop I conducted on assessment, the participants and I got into a lengthy discussion about remedial education, especially in language arts and math. A participant raised her hand and said, “The way we approach remediation in our schools makes about as much sense as trying to communicate with a person who is totally deaf and prescribing, ‘Let’s all talk a lot louder!’”

Reread the paragraphs starting with “diagnostic evaluation testing” and consider our approaches to “gifted” education. They are fraught with many of the same problems that occur at the other end of the labeling process. I am not opposed to programs for the gifted and talented, but I have serious questions about *why we don’t provide them for all students*. It seems that the students who aren’t doing well in the regular classroom are precisely the ones with whom we should be trying different ways of teaching and learning. We also need to do some serious soul searching about what we mean by “gifted.” Students qualify to get into most gifted programs by scoring well on various kinds of verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical tests. There are obviously some students who excel in the so-called “academic” areas and can often handle an accelerated learning push. But why are these students considered more gifted than those who achieve at high levels in so-called “nonacademic” areas?