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If you were a kindergarten teacher and listened to Maggie making up words, playing with rhymes, and pretending to speak French, what would you say about her abilities?

If you had been introduced to the theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner 1983), which suggests that there are at least seven different capacities worthy of being called intelligences, you might suspect that Maggie was displaying linguistic intelligence and that she could do well on a number of linguistic tasks. You would not necessarily conclude that she would do well on tasks involving the other intelligences--interpersonal, intrapersonal, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, and logical-mathematical.(FN1)

Such a view of intelligence is reflected in programs and practices that seek to determine in which areas young children show the greatest strengths. Children who do well on tasks in a particular area--storytelling or reporting, athletics or dance, drawing or building--are broadly labeled as having strengths in the linguistic, bodily-kinesthetic, or spatial realms, respectively.

Such an approach, however, implies that children have a reservoir of talent in a variety of activities, shown consistently over time. It suggests that there are more intelligences, but does not necessarily call into question assumptions about the nature, display, and development of intelligence.

## **HOW DOES MAGGIE DISPLAY HER STRENGTH?**

Instead of expecting that a particular intelligence will be equally evident across related activities, here's another way of looking at the way a child displays intelligence. Maggie, for example, could be demonstrating an interest in and sensitivity to the sounds of language. Accordingly, she might not show the same linguistic strengths when telling a story. Labeling Maggie as "linguistic" is therefore not as informative as noting the different ways and situations in which she demonstrates particular linguistic strengths and interests.

Adults often display their intelligences in such specific ways (Gardner 1983). For example, some people demonstrate their linguistic intelligence by writing poetry, others by writing news reports, and still others by writing fiction. Being able to create moving poems does not necessarily mean that one can write informative

newspaper articles or inventive and engaging novels. People may show linguistic strengths across a variety of activities, but there is no guarantee that they will.

From this perspective, instead of determining how many intelligences a child like Maggie displays, we need to be sensitive to the kinds of activities and roles in which the child shows strength (Feldman 1986; Krechevsky 1991). Instead of asking how much intelligence each young child has, we need to ask, "In what ways does this child demonstrate intelligence?" To do this, we must take into account a constellation of factors--what intelligences they possess, their interests in and knowledge of particular fields, and the contexts in which they live and learn.

### **THREE FACES OF INTERPERSONAL INTELLIGENCE**

Consider how three kindergartners--Ned, Kenny, and Mark--display interpersonal intelligence. Young children cannot articulate and reflect on other people's motivations, intentions, moods, or thoughts to the degree that most adults can. But many children--even kindergartners--can show a sensitivity and responsiveness to other people in remarkably different ways (Hatch, in press).

**Ned's organization.** Although Ned is shy, he is a particularly effective organizer. He often spends his time in free play coordinating the children's activities. He may organize them in dramatic plays or direct their activities at the sand table. This skill helps make him the most popular boy in his class--so popular, in fact, that when he enters the classroom, he is mobbed by his peers. Ned's strength in organizing groups benefits from his interest in activities that are popular with his peers. For example, he knows about different play scripts and characters; this understanding provides a solid foundation for group activities. His systematic approach to many tasks may also help him keep these activities running smoothly.

In addition, Ned possesses spatial intelligence, evident in the realistic and colorful figures he draws. This talent probably helps him act as a leader at the art table, where it's not unusual to find a row of children sitting next to him, drawing the same Ninja Turtle characters that he does.

**Kenny's negotiation.** Kenny also seems to care about being the leader, but he is not always as effective as Ned is at organizing and coordinating play. Instead, Kenny excels as a negotiator. He can resolve conflicts in ways that satisfy his peers and help to advance his own interests. In contrast to other children, who may try to get their way by stating a position and sticking to it, Kenny is able to make gradual adjustments until he finds a suitable alternative. For example:

Kenny wonders who the leader will  
be today.

"How 'bout Ned?" Mark suggests.

Ned says he thinks Mark should

be the leader. Kenny protests that Mark already had a turn and adds that it should be his turn because his last turn was before Mark's. Ned argues that since he (Ned) was the leader the last time, he gets to pick the new leader.

Now Kenny says, "Actually, I was the leader the last time, so I get to pick the new one. And that is exactly ..." he pauses for a long time, "no one in this area."

Somehow, even when he appears to have no other options, Kenny manages to find an alternative. Then, a few minutes later, after the boys have forgotten the arguments, Kenny seizes another opportunity and declares himself the leader. But rather than seizing all the power himself, Kenny magnanimously declares that they can play all the games they want. The conflict over leadership is resolved, and play proceeds.

Kenny's strength as a negotiator undoubtedly benefits from his linguistic intelligence, which he displays in his clear and convincing arguments. He also seems to draw on a wide range of strategies to help resolve disputes. While other children use similar strategies--ranging from determining who said it first to voting--Kenny seems to have a larger repertoire than many of his peers, and an unusual ability to use the strategies to his advantage.

Mark's relationships. Mark shows no interest in being a leader or getting his own way. When I ask him which Ninja Turtle he likes to be, he answers, "Leonardo." But when I ask what happens when someone else wants to be Leonardo too, he responds simply: "They get to be Leonardo, and I get to be someone else."

Because Mark never acts as a leader and his peers occasionally exclude him from group situations, some might conclude that he displays little interpersonal intelligence. But Mark's social strengths lie in his ability to act as a friend to many of his peers. He has been able to develop and sustain relationships with many of his classmates--even girls (with whom many of the boys hardly ever play). Mark has also made friends with Eric, one of the toughest and least popular students.

Mark's success in developing relationships seems to benefit from his interest in other people and his capacity to attend to and respond to what others are thinking, feeling, and doing. He notices and reacts to other children who are upset, and pays regular, almost constant, attention to what others are doing. For example, art is an individual activity for most of the kindergartners, but Mark turns it into a social

occasion. He painstakingly copies the work of the children seated next to him, asks for their advice, and often solicits their assistance. Mark also shows an unusually good knowledge of the social interactions around him. As a result, even though he has little to say about his own activities and is relatively quiet in general, he is a much more reliable source of information about what, for example, happened on the playground than are his classmates.

## **BALANCING STRENGTHS AND NEEDS**

In these examples, young children often display their strengths in specific activities or roles, rather than in all activities related to a particular intelligence. By continuing to pursue those specific activities, a child could master more challenging content, develop even greater expertise, and gain more confidence and motivation than he or she could in other activities.

In addition, helping children develop specific strengths needs to be balanced with opportunities to develop all the skills they need to succeed in school. This is not a simple task, particularly in a society that continues to emphasize quantitative measures of a narrow range of intelligences. Some suggestions follow.

- \* Instead of organizing the curriculum around the intelligences, organize around the child. We do not have to teach every child every subject in seven or eight different ways or ensure that every child develops every intelligence. Although we should expose children to a range of activities, every child does not, for example, need to develop musical intelligence or have mathematical or scientific concepts presented in musical form.

Further, a knowledge of each child's intelligences and the ways in which he or she demonstrates them are merely tools that can help us understand and respond to that child's needs. If a child like Mark struggles in math or English, a teacher could draw on his sensitivity to people to help him in those subjects. The teacher might give him opportunities to survey his classmates and tabulate the results, or to cowrite biographies of family and friends. If, on the other hand, Kenny struggles in English or social studies, he may benefit more from writing assignments or debates that enable him to build on his skill as a negotiator.

- \* Look for specialized strengths, but don't attach permanent labels. Just because young children display particular capacities does not necessarily mean that they will grow up to excel in activities involving those capacities. Children's intelligences, the manner in which they display them, and how successful they are, shift, grow, and vary over time.

For example, Ned, Kenny, and Mark are now in the 6th grade. There is a link between the strengths they displayed in kindergarten and their current activities, but important changes have occurred. For Ned, organization remains a valued strength. In describing a radio show he helped produce, he explains, "I'm, like, the anchor

person, who organizes and assigns everyone roles and gives everyone the script."

Kenny continues to be a good negotiator. His mother predicts he'll be a good lawyer because he's so good at arguing. His teacher says he's unusually adept at persuading her to see things his way. And Kenny himself describes a long argument in which he resolutely maintained a position and found several ways to convince his peers that he was correct. As for Mark, he continues to work well with a variety of children and still shows little interest in taking on leadership roles.

Yet for all three children, important changes have occurred. For one thing, it appears that Kenny has become as effective a leader as Ned. And Mark seems to be excluded from groups more often than he had been in kindergarten. In fact, even though he has moved to a neighboring state and has not seen Kenny and Ned in several years, he still regards them as among his best friends.

In addition to these changes, other strengths have emerged. Ned demonstrates a talent for reporting that was not (nor could have been) apparent in kindergarten. He writes news reports for field trips, recaps of kickball games ("Hornets Sting Tigers," one headline announces), and scripts for the news broadcasts of his radio shows. Kenny has also experienced success as a writer. And Mark now demonstrates an interest in science and science experiments that was not apparent earlier.

Assumptions that these children would continue to display the same strengths failed to take into account such factors as new interests, new peer groups, and the drastic change from largely social play activities in kindergarten to frequently individual academic pursuits in 6th grade.

\* Maintain and pass on information about children's strengths. Although many parents and even peers may have a pretty good sense of a particular child's strengths, most teachers must begin every year without that knowledge. When I asked Kenny and Ned's 6th grade teacher what she knew about them when they arrived in her classroom, she responded, "I think I knew that they were hard workers and relatively bright. That's probably all I really knew." With few sources of information other than grades, tests, and typical school records, the teacher had no way of getting the specific information that could help her respond to her students' strengths and needs.

Portfolios that the children and their teachers construct could help to pass along valuable information. The portfolios would display children's strengths and could even include a few paragraphs that the children write. Arranging for teachers and children to work together for two years instead of one also helps address this problem.

## BEYOND INTELLIGENCE TESTS

To go beyond current intelligence tests and formulate much more useful hypotheses about the kinds of activities in which a child does--or will--excel, we must take into account not only the child's specific interests and development, but

also the opportunities and resources available to that child. Further, we must constantly question our assumptions about that child's strengths and about intelligence in general. And we must be willing to understand and respond to that child as an individual.

Added material

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## FOOTNOTE

1 Recently, Gardner (1995) has argued that there is an eighth intelligence--naturalist intelligence--the capacity to draw on materials and features of the natural environment to solve problems or fashion products. He cites Charles Darwin as one example of such a person. Gardner (in press) is also exploring other possible intelligences, including a spiritual or existential intelligence.

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