

In years gone by there were terrible assumptions about the locus of intelligence within society. Upper-class, privileged, educated victors and oppressors seemed to score consistently better on intelligence quotient tests. Surprisingly, it took a long time for a critique of our testing processes and measures to appear. Even today, as I write in this country, there is a resurgence of such tests applied nationally to children in schools. The ground is still contested.

A bold critique came through the work of Howard Gardner who developed an alternative strategy for measuring intelligence. Gardner asked the primary question as to how people process and communicate information, learning, wisdom, knowledge, skills and functionality. He observed 7 different ways that people made sense of their world – 7 kinds of intelligence.

Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligence* broke the monopoly that literacy and numeracy held on demonstrating intelligence. Of course for centuries in many cultures and civilisations other measures of wisdom, knowledge, art and science had been recognised. Western Enlightenment had just found itself stuck in a rut.

The theory of Multiple Intelligences has gained wide influence in Education and Therapy. While teachers and therapists in many disciplines have been steady adaptors of Gardner's ideas, the church has been rather slow - and theology as an academic field, possibly the slowest. Still, after many centuries of so called 'Reformation', the ways in which the church does our gathering process is mostly word focussed. The measures of good teaching are usually verbally based.

This presents a couple of problems for us. Firstly, we are alienating a large number of people who process the world primarily using other intelligences. Secondly, there is a growing disparity between the communication and formation strategies used in churches and those utilised in other spaces within our culture.

* I have not outlined what the intelligences are, as there are many clear summaries of this on the web. My favourite MI activities site:
<http://surfaquarium.com/MI/intelligences.htm>

An Example to ponder

A young 9 year old boy is diagnosed with Aspergers (High Functioning Autism).

He has an extraordinary mind - remembering reams of statistical detail, acquiring an enormous vocabulary and holding an intricate cognition of complex scientific processes. But frequently, several times a day, the simple processes of life – find your pencil and book, collect your art smock and line up, try a new food – overwhelm him and anxiety leads to extreme behavioural and emotional 'meltdowns'.

What helps our young friend? He has a really high IQ in terms of the test that scores literacy and numeracy. More of that 'intelligence' isn't what is required. Strong physical sensory centring, such as a shoulder rub, helps him sort through the illusive quest for a pencil and jotter.

A different means of 'thinking' needs to be accessed for him to complete these tricky challenges. In this example we are aware of some of the luminal space, the border territory shared between pedagogy and therapy.

As followers of Jesus and participants in the Kingdom of God, we must also ask how spirituality is co-active in such a life.

There are some notable exceptions:

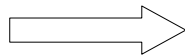
- The Orthodox tradition has long maintained practices that are multi-sensory and multi-modal.
- The charismatic movement embraces highly experiential, supra-cognitive expressions of spirituality.

Perhaps you have encountered others?

These notable exceptions draw us in two directions. We recognise that they provide a lineage of tradition for those of us who have lost access to non-verbal spirituality. But they also represent a rarefied sensorial spiritual practice. The sounds and sights and movements of these traditions have mostly lost touch with sounds and sights and aromas and flavours and movements of everyday life.

The opportunity to re-ignite incarnational, multi-sensory, multi-modal worship gatherings is still before us. The adventure is not yet done.

Top Five reasons for employing a multiple intelligence framework in our discipleship communities.



1. **Justice.** It shares agency between more than just the word-smarts.
2. **Intellect.** The Multiple Intelligences framework is not about dumbing things down for the kids. It is a framework that shows us all how to use every part of our intellect to think rigorously about God.
3. **Mercy.** Sometimes we just get stuck. We get dried out or worn thin. The spiritual disciplines that once fed us have palled and lost their power to energise us. In those times the offering of another way can be a great mercy and a precious gift.
4. **Spirit.** If the Spirit is bestowing a multitude of gifts within the body of Christ, but we are fixated on words, there's a good chance we are shutting down much of what the Spirit may be stirring up.
5. **Action.** We have all read James - *faith without works is dead*. We've all read 1 Thessalonians - *the Gospel came not only in words, but in power*. We are frustrated by a disconnect between word and action. Multiple Intelligence frameworks bring action into our gatherings along with the Living Word.

Take my intellect and use every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my moments and my days,

Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Francis R. Havergal 1874.