

## Child Development: Learning Styles or Multiple Intelligences

### Introduction

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ... For the body does not consist of one member but of many.” (I Corinthians 12: 12, 14)

There are many different talents, gifts, learning styles and areas of need represented in God’s family, the Church. In many ways, our Church is as diverse as the human family as a whole. We must consider this diversity as we follow Jesus’ admonition to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

The *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC), the Vatican’s “instruction book” to those involved in catechetical ministry, states, “Perfect fidelity to Catholic doctrine is compatible with a rich diversity of presentation” (122). This means that we can present authentic Catholic teaching in many different ways. The *GDC* goes on to state, “...the “variety of methods is a sign of life and richness” as well as a demonstration of respect for those to whom catechesis is addressed” (148). This means that when we use many different methods to teach the faith, we show that our message is living and rich, and we show that we respect those we are catechizing. One way in which our variety of methods can show respect for those being catechized is the way in which the activities we use reflects an understanding of the various abilities and learning styles that exist within a group – even a group of same-age peers.

The Gospel is for everyone, and it needs to be communicated in ways that result in real understanding, reflection, and application. There are important reasons, therefore, to use *multi-sensory methodology* – activities that use various senses and abilities. Some people learn best by seeing, others by hearing, and still others by doing.

## First Question

How do you best learn something? By seeing, hearing, or doing?

## Article: Multiple Intelligences

Read the following article and respond to the questions:

In his 1983 book, *Frames of Mind*, Harvard University psychologist Dr. Howard Gardner proposed a new theory of intelligence, called the “Theory of Multiple Intelligences.” Dr. Gardner asserted that there was not just one type of intelligence, but many different ways in which a person could be “smart.” He proposed eight types of intelligence. The eight intelligences work together to make each person’s own distinct combination of intelligences and learning styles. They are listed in the chart below, along with corresponding abilities and teaching suggestions for the different abilities.

On the page below is the list of Gardner’s eight intelligences and the abilities associated with each, along with some suggestions for using them to teach:

<b>Intelligence</b>	<b>Abilities</b>	<b>Teaching Suggestions</b>
<b>Verbal/Linguistic</b>	Learns languages, writing, reading, and speaking	Use stories, poems, word puzzles, riddles, written explanations, writing activities.
<b>Logical/Mathematical</b>	Solves problems logically, scientifically and mathematically	Use timelines, the Liturgical calendar and seasons, in older children comparisons and analyses of case studies.
<b>Musical</b>	Creates, appreciates, and performs music, recognizes rhythm, tone, and pitch	Use music, songs, simple instruments.
<b>Body/Kinesthetic</b>	Coordinates body movement; will learn best by doing	Use sacred gestures, Liturgical dance, movement (e.g. Stations of the Cross, echo pantomimes, movement games and activities).
<b>Visual/Spatial</b>	Recognizes patterns, appreciates images, color, and shapes	Use icons, pictures, statues, pictures in child's text, art activities.
<b>Environmental/Natural</b>	Recognizes and appreciates objects and events in the natural world	Create environments, prayer corner or a ritual to create an environment, use nature examples in teaching, assign outdoor activities.
<b>Interpersonal</b>	Understands and communicates effectively with others	Do shared and spontaneous prayer, group activities, work in pairs, social action projects with people.
<b>Intrapersonal</b>	Understands one's own feelings and motivations	Use reflective exercises, guided meditation, journaling, imagination activities, silent meditation.

We know from our own experience that everyone does not learn the same way. That goes for young people, too. It is important to plan lessons that include uses of multiple intelligences to best accommodate each child in the class. Do not rely on one method. Observe the activities that seem to engage the children's attention. Offer alternative activities, for example, "You may draw a picture of \_\_\_\_\_ or write a paragraph or word map." Be aware that what works well with one child or one group may not work with the next one. When you plan your lessons using methods and activities that capture the interests of your students, it will make a difference and leave them with good memories of their religion classes.

### **Reflection Questions**

- What intelligence styles do you most use as a religion teacher?
- Name two ways you will incorporate this theory into your classes.