

[Theoretical and Issues Forum]

**Reframing Student Counseling from the
Multiple-Intelligences Perspective:
Integrating Talent Development and Personal Growth**

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The theory of multiple intelligences proposed by Gardner (1983, 1993, 1999) and its applications in learning, teaching, curriculum and assessment are briefly described. Counseling through multiple intelligences, as one of its potential applications, is suggested as an avenue to achieve the integration of talent development and personal growth in students. The three-stage model of counseling process in exploration, understanding, and action is reframed in relation to engaging student and teacher's multiple intelligences, highlighting the importance of personal intelligences throughout the stages of counseling process. Implications of this reframing for the use of creative arts in counseling and counselor training are discussed.

The 21st century witnesses unprecedented sociopolitical changes as well as substantial changes arising from advances in information technology and globalized economy around the world. These changes have posed tremendous challenges to the Hong Kong education system (see Chan, 2000). Schools not only have to produce a literate workforce, but also have to prepare students for their roles as citizens in a fast-changing world that is increasingly technological and democratic.

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Recent reform measures formulated by the Education Commission (2000) are intended to rise to the challenges of the present era, and to tackle some of the perennial problems through making available more time and space for teachers and students in school, offering all-round and balanced learning opportunities, and laying the foundation for lifelong learning. It is evident that these desirable outcomes are not innovative, as lifelong learning corresponds precisely to the Chinese saying of “*Huo dao lao, xue dao lao*,” and all-round development of students can be readily defined to be in line with the development in five domains of ethics, intellect, physique, social skills, and esthetics, the domains known to the Chinese as *de, zhi, ti, qun*, and *mei*.

In the current education reform movement, although it is emphasized that students’ individual needs should be respected and adequately met, and multi-faceted talents of students should be nurtured in all-round development and lifelong learning, societal concern appears to assume the top priority. Hence, individuals are expected to be “willing to put forward continuing effort for the prosperity, progress, freedom and democracy of their society, and contribute to the future well-being of the nation and the world at large” (Education Commission, 2000, p. 4).

Talent Development and Personal Growth

Admittedly, one may consider that when societal concern is addressed, individual needs are likely to be simultaneously met. However, even societal and individual concerns are flip sides of the same coin, implicit in the stated aims of reform measures is the concern to meet individual learning needs for achievement, success, and productivity, and a relative neglect of the inner growth of students. Accordingly, reformed education agenda will be developed with an eye to bringing up the next generation of leaders, scientists, and artists. If this achievement emphasis prevails, there is always the danger that education represents training for future success and nothing else. To subscribe truly to the notion of all-round development in *de, zhi, ti, qun*,

and *mei*, the focus needs to be shifted to encompass meeting the social-emotional needs of students within the context of an education system that nurtures the personal growth and development of the self.

The importance of meeting the social-emotional as well as learning needs of individual students has been increasingly recognized as teachers find themselves confronted with students who come to regular classrooms with diverse abilities and the full spectrum of emotional and behavioral problems (Chan, 1992). With the introduction of the whole school approach to guidance, Hong Kong teachers have gradually come to accept their changing roles in the education of students through teaching and guidance activities (Chan & Hui, 1998). Yet, teachers often feel that their primary responsibility is in teaching. They are first and foremost teachers who teach to enhance learning, understanding, and achievement, and secondarily teachers who guide or counsel to help students cope with social-emotional needs and for personal growth (Chan, 1992, 2000).

However, dissociation of achievement and personal growth need not necessarily occur, especially when achievement is broadly interpreted to encompass not only academic performance, but also performance in different talent domains. While the narrow view of talents as rooted in genetically determined abilities has its supporters (e.g., Gagne, 1985), a broader conception of talents has received greater acceptance among educators in recent years (see Feldhusen, 1998). In this broader view, talents are conceptualized as more than merely differentiated human abilities, but as dispositions or potentials that include notions of readiness, suitability, and proneness, and can be conative as well as cognitive (Dai & Renzulli, 2000; Feldhusen, 1998). This view has been substantiated by the salient role of practice in the emergence and development of talents (see Ericsson & Charness, 1994), and is consistent with the notion that talent development is not confined to the specific population of highly able students, but applies well to the majority, if not all, students (Feldhusen, 1998; Renzulli, 1994).

Indeed, when talents are viewed as dispositions, self-actualization and the growth of the self are inherently associated with the realization of one's talent or talents. Thus, teachers, in teaching and counseling, should be able to help integrate the nurturing of talent development and personal growth, as when the rich contents and human qualities of talent domains are incorporated and highlighted in the curricula, and when education promotes personal growth through processes of self-exploration, self-discovery, and self-confirmation (see Dai & Renzulli, 2000; Grant & Piechowski, 1999).

One exemplary approach that engages students' talents for enhanced learning and understanding is the multiple-intelligences approach based on the theory of multiple intelligences. The theory was first proposed by Gardner (1983), and has been synthesized and developed in terms of learning, teaching, assessment, and curriculum by educators (e.g., Armstrong, 1994a, 1994b, 1999; Blythe & Gardner, 1990; Campbell, 1991; Campbell, Campbell, & Dickinson, 1999; Lazear, 1994, 2000). Given that it is possible and desirable to integrate achievement and personal growth in the education of students, the use of the multiple-intelligences approach should be more fully explored not only in teaching and learning but also in counseling. For an appreciation of the use of the multiple-intelligences approach in teaching, learning, and possibly counseling, a brief description of Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences is in order.

Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences

Gardner (1983, 1993) challenged the notion of a unitary general intelligence that cuts across all domains of competence, and proposed that there are multiple human abilities or multiple intelligences. Specifically, Gardner (1983), in his theory of multiple intelligences, redefined intelligence to encompass the ability to solve problems or to create products that are valued within one or more cultural settings, highlighting that intelligence cannot be considered apart from the uses to which it is put and the values of the cultural contexts. More recently, Gardner (1999) further refined the

definition to conceptualize intelligence as “a biopsychological potential to process information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in a culture” (pp. 33–34). Viewed in this manner, intelligences are potentials to be activated, depending on cultural values, opportunities in the culture, and personal decisions.

To determine whether or not a particular human capacity qualifies as an intelligence, Gardner (1983, 1993) established the following eight criteria for an intelligence to be identified:

1. identifiable core operations;
2. evolutionary history and evolutionary plausibility;
3. recognizable end-states and distinctive developmental trajectory;
4. existence of savants, prodigies and other individuals distinguished by the presence or absence of specific abilities;
5. potential isolation by brain damage;
6. support from experimental tasks;
7. support from psychometric findings; and
8. susceptibility to encoding in a symbol system.

On the basis of these criteria, Gardner (1983, 1993, 1999) initially identified seven intelligences that individuals possess to varying degrees, and added naturalist intelligence as an eighth intelligence. These eight intelligences can be defined and summarized as follows:

1. Verbal-linguistic intelligence represents the capacity to use words effectively, whether orally or in writing;
2. Logical-mathematical intelligence represents the capacity to use numbers effectively and to reason well;
3. Visual-spatial intelligence is the ability to perceive the visual-spatial world accurately and to perform transformations on those perceptions;
4. Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence includes the ability to use the body to

- express ideas and feelings, and the facility in using one's hands to produce or transform things;
5. Musical intelligence represents the capacity to perceive, discriminate, transform, and express musical forms;
 6. Interpersonal intelligence is the ability to perceive and make distinctions in the moods, intentions, motivations, and feelings of other people;
 7. Intrapersonal intelligence is the ability to act adaptively on the basis of self-knowledge;
 8. Naturalist intelligence represents the ability in observing patterns in nature, identifying and classifying objects, and understanding natural and human-made systems.

Multiple Intelligences and Counseling Reframed

Since the publication of the theory of multiple intelligences, educators in North America have attempted to synthesize and develop the theory for use in curriculum development. Although teaching and learning through multiple intelligences have gained some acceptance as useful applications of the theory of multiple intelligences in education (see Armstrong, 1994a, 1994b; Blythe & Gardner, 1990; Campbell, 1991; Campbell, Campbell, & Dickinson, 1999; Gardner, 1993; Gardner & Hatch, 1989; Hoerr, 1994; Lazear, 2000; Wolk, 1994), the efficacy and effectiveness of this framework still await rigorous research and evaluation. On the other hand, given that it is desirable to subscribe to the view of an integration of talent development and personal growth, the use of the multiple-intelligences approach in counseling students seems promising. O'Brien and Burnett (2000), for example, in a pioneering study of counseling ten children, have managed to categorize counseling narratives or text-units in Gardner's seven intelligences. In this connection, they were able to assess these children's preference for engaging in different intelligences at different stages of experiencing, expressing, and integrating. They concluded that sandplay appeared to allow the use of all of the initial seven intelligences throughout the play sessions, and that the multiple-intelligences framework was usually

useful in counseling children who have not developed the language required for more formal counseling sessions.

Following the lead of O'Brien and Burnett (2000), it is suggested that counseling in general could be more broadly reframed in the multiple-intelligences framework. In general, the ways students experience the world might be interpreted from the multiple-intelligences approach. As students receive information about the world through one specific intelligence or a combination of the eight intelligences, their behaviors could also be analyzed through the use of eight ways of knowing. Similarly, the multiple-intelligences approach could also allow teachers to see each student as an individual who might require a differing mix of counseling approaches, and challenges teachers to create counseling approaches that best suit their own counseling styles or multiple intelligences as well as the needs or multiple intelligences of their students.

Parallel to the assertion that the traditional education curriculum might be biased in its emphasis on the linguistic and mathematical intelligences with a relative under-emphasis on the other intelligences, the same could be said of the general practice of counseling in that the dominant approaches are verbal psychotherapies (emphasizing verbal-linguistic intelligence) and cognitive therapies (emphasizing logical-mathematical intelligence as well as verbal-linguistic intelligence), though self-reflection and self-understanding (emphasizing intrapersonal intelligence), and expression through the interpersonal context as in guidance activities or therapy groups (emphasizing interpersonal intelligence) might permeate the entire counseling process. It can be maintained that effective teachers as counselors could be more aware of the multiple intelligences of students and of their own, and might help facilitate engaging as many of the multiple intelligences in the counseling process as possible. In this way, students might be sensitized to untapped intelligences, and helped to foster a different way of experiencing the world through gaining different perspectives on problems and possibilities.

Counseling students through multiple intelligences could entail optimizing the involvement or engagement of as many as possible the multiple intelligences of the students in the process of counseling. Such efforts in counseling through multiple intelligences not only might provide students with multiple opportunities to explore, understand, and act, but also could challenge teachers as counselors to work with new and creative options using their untapped intelligences. Rather than blaming or labeling students as uncooperative or resistant, teachers could first examine whether they restrict themselves to their comfortable or accustomed approaches that might not effectively reach students for their talent development and personal growth, or for desirable cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes. Thus, teachers might have to learn new skills in creative arts, particularly when they need to engage students in using intelligences beyond the traditional verbal and logical intelligences in activities such as those related to the use of musical and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences (see Hays, 1999; Johnson, 1999; Mazza, 1999; Wiener, 1999). For example, to engage students' musical intelligence, it is assumed that opportunities for expression and self-realization could be achieved even when music-related activities might be initially unfamiliar to students. By involving activities in listening, performing, improvising, and composing, music might help foster a link between the inner world of the student and outside reality, enhancing the process by requiring time-ordered and ability-ordered behavior, evoking affective response, increasing sensory input, requiring self-organization, and providing an opportunity for socialization (Gladding, 1992).

While specific counseling approaches or strategies might be regarded as particularly suitable for stimulating or engaging specific intelligences, such as music therapy and musical intelligence, bibliotherapy or poetic therapy and verbal-linguistic intelligence, or adventure-based counseling and naturalist intelligence, there is no one-to-one correspondence between an intelligence and a specific counseling approach or strategy, and each counseling strategy might simultaneously engage more than one intelligence.

In this regard, the involvement of multiple intelligences in the process of counseling is illustrative.

Multiple Intelligences and the Three-Stage Model of Counseling Process

While there are numerous models on the process of counseling, helping professionals generally find it useful to conceptualize the counseling or helping process in terms of a three-stage model of exploration, understanding, and action (see Gilmore, 1973; Hill & O'Brien, 1999; Inskipp, 1993). Despite the commonality, there are variations within the framework of the three-stage model. Carkhuff (1987), for example, has elaborated the model to include the helper's stages of responding, personalizing, and initializing to correspond to the helpee's stages of exploring, understanding, and acting. Egan (1998) has also evolved a helping model of exploration-understanding-action to encompass stages of current scenario, preferred scenario and action strategies. In general, Hill and O'Brien (1999) suggested that this three-stage model is grounded on the knowledge and experience accumulated by clinicians and theoreticians such as Rogers, Freud, Erikson, Mahler, Skinner, Ellis, Beck, and many others who have provided insights into human nature, the process of change in counseling, and the strategies and techniques for facilitating individuals to realize their potential and achieve their goals. More specifically, they suggested that the person-centered, psychoanalytic, and cognitive-behavioral theories have primary influence for the stages of exploration, understanding or insight, and action, respectively. Nonetheless, reframing the three stages of counseling process from the multiple-intelligences perspective might open up new vistas for effectively helping students achieve talent development and personal growth.

Exploration

In the first or exploration stage of counseling process, counselors aim to establish rapport, develop a therapeutic relationship or alliance with clients, encourage clients to tell their stories, help clients to explore their thoughts and feelings, facilitate the arousal of client emotion, and learn about the clients.

In counseling students through multiple intelligences, the student and the teacher could explore experiences in terms of the eight intelligences. The student, with the help of the teacher-counselor, could use one or more intelligences to explore, recall and express experiences. One student, for example, might prefer to use methods related to the interpersonal, the bodily-kinesthetic, and the visual-spatial intelligences, while another might prefer the use of methods related to the musical and the logical-mathematical intelligences. The teacher, on the other hand, could help by using one intelligence to unlock another intelligence (Lazear, 1994). As a result, students might come to achieve deeper levels of understanding by talking and storytelling (verbal-linguistic), drawing a flow chart (logical-mathematical), drawing a picture (visual-spatial), dancing a story (bodily-kinesthetic), singing or composing a song (musical), or simply telling how the experience makes them feel (intrapersonal). All this could be done through the use of a variety of media in an interpersonal context (interpersonal).

Experiences at the exploration stage might be regarded as somewhat separate verbal, logical, spatial, kinesthetic, musical or personal events, and might not be in a conscious way connected meaningfully to the self, the interpersonal or intrapersonal intelligences. As counseling proceeds, the student's configuration of experiences might change somewhat, as he or she could choose a way to express what has been experienced, and could be encouraged to explore and express experiences in the interpersonal context with the teacher-counselor.

Understanding

In the understanding stage, clients, in collaboration with the counselors, construct meanings and reframe experiences, and come to achieve a new awareness, understanding, and perspective about their inner dynamics as well as their roles in causing and maintaining their problems.

Counseling through multiple intelligences at this stage might be seen as a social interpersonal act in which the student could learn that it is safe to share and understand experiences in order to learn about oneself. Thus, interpersonal intelligence could impinge and assist in clarifying and confirming past events, which could be experienced through one or a number of the eight intelligences, and could influence the student's perception of each of the other intelligences. Through the use of reflection and integration, students might be helped to integrate experiences into the concept of the self (intrapersonal intelligence). The student's reluctance to consciously examine issues about the self might reflect that intrapersonal intelligence has not been adequately engaged.

When students more fully understand their thinking, feelings and behaviors, they could seek to integrate this learning and understanding into knowledge of the self. Integration could be achieved through multiple exploring of their new awareness and new perspective, using as many of the intelligences as possible. Thus, the student might be asked to know their experiences cognitively, emotionally, and kinesthetically, using the multiple ways of knowing. For example, the student could write up what has been learned about the self in a logbook (verbal-linguistic and intrapersonal), draw a picture about his or her understanding (visual-spatial and intrapersonal), plan for future interactions and rehearse them through role-playing with the teacher (intrapersonal, logical-mathematical and bodily-kinesthetic), find a piece of music or sing a song to reflect the feelings and content of the new knowledge (musical, intrapersonal, and verbal-linguistic).

Action

In the action stage, counselors help clients move toward making decisions and changes that reflect their new understanding of their thinking, feelings, and behaviors. Collaboratively, counselors and clients determine the necessary skills, desirability, meanings, and obstacles to changes.

Counseling students through multiple intelligences could assist teachers to look at how the cognitive interacts with the affective and kinesthetic, and how changes in behavior might be achieved through preferred means of expression in terms of engaging one or more intelligences. Students' awareness of their own behaviors and action could be enhanced through teacher attention to the interaction of the eight intelligences. The multiple-intelligences perspective not only could lend itself to an understanding of how thinking, feelings and behaviors are processed, but also could suggest how the teacher might help the student make sense of the new awareness and perspective for action and changes, which could occur in at least eight or multiple combinations of ways. Thus, the multiple-intelligences perspective might provide new and creative options for students to act on their new understanding in ways that could engage their strengths or relatively untapped intelligences. Further, as counseling proceeds through the three stages, teachers and students might find that there could be a consistently important integrative role of both the intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences (i.e., personal intelligences) with other intelligences.

Beyond Talent Development and Personal Growth

In summary, given that each student has a unique profile of strengths or multiple intelligences, teachers in helping students could consider using different pedagogic and counseling approaches through multiple intelligences to provide students with more opportunities to learn and cope with problems through their strengths. The multiple-intelligences approach could thus allow teachers to integrate talent development and personal growth through teaching and counseling (Dai & Renzulli, 2000).

The commitment to individual differences in multiple intelligences might also have implications for the need to accommodate different students' strengths and weaknesses in exploring and expressing experiences, different teachers' counseling styles as well as multicultural sensitivity and

competence, and the importance of using creative arts in counseling (e.g., Gladding, 1992).

Reframing the three-stage model of counseling process in terms of multiple intelligences enhances understanding of the stages in which different intelligences might be engaged. The counseling literature endorses that the counseling process is essentially perceived as a social or interpersonal act, and Rogerian person-centered counseling seems to have entrenched in the literature the value of this interpersonal contact. While the three stages are informed primarily by the person-centered approach, the psychoanalytic orientation, and the cognitive-behavior therapies (Hill & O'Brien, 1999), the multiple-intelligences perspective suggests that both the interpersonal and intrapersonal nature of counseling could be emphasized. Thus, this reframing might have implications for the training of future generations of counselors and teachers, who could aspire to integrate talent development and personal growth in the education of their students, and for the current education reform in Hong Kong.

Finally, this reframing should be appropriately ended with a cautionary note. The multiple-intelligences framework provides one perspective, among many, to help teachers conceptualize talent development of students, to help counselors conceptualize personal growth of clients, and to help teacher-counselors conceptualize the integration of talent development and personal growth of student-clients. While this perspective might facilitate enhanced understanding of the process of teaching and learning as well as that of counseling, expert teachers and effective eclectic counselors not openly advocating this multiple-intelligences framework might still have engaged as many of the multiple intelligences of their own and those of their students in teaching and counseling without being fully aware of the options of utilizing the whole spectrum of intelligences. Therefore, the assessment of the utility of acquiring this perspective, and of the extent to which conscious awareness and utilization of preferred intelligences or

strengths of students and counselors could bear on the efficacy and effectiveness of student counseling should become priority concerns for future research. It is only through rigorous evaluation of the multiple-intelligences framework that this reframing will go beyond speculations. Such attempts might start with identifying the preferred intelligences of teachers and students (e.g., Chan, in press), examining their differential engagement of these intelligences in the different stages of counseling, and exploring the possible enhanced efficacy and effectiveness of the counseling process through matching and engaging the preferred intelligences of teachers and students. While these efforts might still be a far cry from establishing evidence-based practice for specific student problems in the school setting, they nonetheless could provide some modest empirical support for the plausibility and utility of applying the multiple-intelligences perspective to student counseling.

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**從多元智能的取向看學生輔導：
結合才能發展與個人成長**

本文簡單介紹了 Gardner (1983, 1993, 1999) 的多元智能理論，以及該理論在教學、課程和評鑑等各方面的應用。多元智能理論其中一個可行的應用範疇，就是透過多元智能進行輔導，務求有效地結合學生的才能發展與個人成長。本文在注入學生和教師的多元智能因素，並強調個人智能在各個輔導階段的重要性的基礎上，重新演繹輔導過程的三個階段——探索、了解與行動，且據此討論了從創作藝術的角度進行輔導和培訓輔導員的意義。