

Multiple Intelligences-Inspired Behavioral Interventions

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Most teachers think that multiple intelligences theory (Gardner, 1983, 1993) is only useful for enhancing academic or career success, but this is not true. A multiple intelligences assessment can also be used to guide behavioral interventions. Understanding a student's MI strengths can provide useful information to establish rapport and also to structure the nature of the intervention. A strengths focused intervention can bridge the gap between you and the student and direct his or her attention to very practical follow up behaviors that appear to the student to be "doable." Reviewing the highest subscales on a student's MIDAS™ Profile (www.MIResearch.org) can provide a rich source of information to guide an intervention. I think of this as a process of 'triangulation' like is used during navigation to point the way forward toward your common destination. First, recognize and discuss the student's MI strengths (*"Oh, I see that Visual-spatial is your highest scale and high in Artistic Design. What kind of art or crafts do you do?"*). Second, acknowledge the presenting problem or dilemma facing the student (*"Mr. Smith sent you here because of your "bad attitude", is that right?"*). Third, work towards a creative "strengths vs. problem" solution that the student finds agreeable. The last step is the really the Next Step Forward that will answer the question, *"How can you use this strategy to*

help you now?"

The following exemplar situation illustrates how this process can work when dealing with a student with issues in anger and conflict with peers.

An Anger Management Game Plan

Jan was told to see the guidance counselor, Mr. Banks, because of recurring problems with several guys in the lunchroom. The principal noted that he seems to be carrying more of a chip on his shoulder lately. He has a hair trigger temper.

Mr. Banks asks Jan to wait a minute while he gathers his thoughts. He takes out Jan's MIDAS folder and leafs through his Profile, Brief Learning Summary, Career Plan, Self Reflections, Parent Reflections and Max Brain Power.

He's particularly interested to note that Jan is high Kinesthetically (Athletic subscale highest) and low Linguistically / Interpersonally. He's not surprised there are problems. Jan's family is qualified for free lunch and there are financial problems.

Jan- Hi Mr. Banks.

Mr. Banks- Hi Jan. How's your day going?

J- Not so good.

B- So I gather. I was looking through your MIDAS folder that you did in your Explorations class last week. I see your highest area is Kinesthetic and Athletics, specifically. That's great.

Tell me about what you do? Sports? What else?

J- Yea, sports mostly.

B- What's your best? What do you like the most?

J- I had a great soccer game on Saturday.

B- I heard about that. You had a great second half. You really came alive and dominated. What happened?

J- I dunno. I guess I just got mad at them.

B- I guess so. You were a flying whirlwind attacking on the field.

J- Thanks. I got three goals.

B- Was it only anger that got you those three goals? I doubt it.

J- I guess not. I was pretty careful how I took my shots.

B- Yea. I'll bet you play ball with your head as well as you do with your quick feet. The best players do.

J- That's what coach always says. I try but it's not easy.

B- But when it works how does it feel?

J- Awesome!

B- Exactly. So how did it feel today at lunch when you lost your temper and almost hit Zak?

J- Not really good.

B- Were you in control? (J- No).

B- Did you feel like a winner? J- No. I felt stupid.

B- Right. Not the best of moves, eh?

J- I didn't use my head.

B- So what's a better game plan for the next time?

J- I'll have to think about that.....

B- I know you can do better. I've seen you keep your wits about you in the heat of a game.

Dealing with wise guys in the lunch room isn't much different is it?

J- I guess not. I just feel so tongue tied when they say that stuff.

B- Like when the other team steals the ball?

J- Exactly. Helpless. Embarrassed.

B- But you don't attack back mindlessly, do you?

J- No. Got to regroup and plan a new strategy.

B- So you don't do something stupid in a moment of weakness....You might have a chat with the coach or your best mate before making your next move.

J- Right, but it's hard to think straight around those guys.

B- Of course. That's because you don't have a good game plan. You put yourself in a bad position without a strategy to guide you.

J- That makes sense. Where can I get some strategy?

B- Good question. Maybe coach can help?

J- Can you help me now? I don't want to screw up again.

B- We'll have to reschedule for when there's more time but briefly.....We need two strategies to get you started: What to do and what to say. (J- Right).

B- When you are in those situations you need to be crafty to take control of the game. How about this. Next time someone gets in your face talking trash and you feel like hitting them instead think about stealing the ball rather than attacking. This way you can take away their power over you.

J- How do I do that?

B- First, take a nice slow deep breath letting the air out very slowly- all the while staring in the guy's eyes.

Then, take one or maybe two steps (no more) towards him all the while staring in his eyes just like on the soccer field.

Finally, with a little smile on your face shake your head slowly and say, "Dude, you just ain't worth it. Get a life."

Turn and walk smartly away leaving him in your wake without a glance back. The ball will be in your possession.

J- Wow. I never thought of doing that. I can totally do that. And then I won't get kicked off the team for fighting. Yea. That'd be cool. Thanks Mr. B. Let me know when we can get together again.

B- You better practice those new moves. Practice makes perfect. Oh, and by the way, there is still hell to pay for your little conflict with Zak. I have to talk it over with the principal but if we see some progress on your part then he might go easier on you.

J- I promise I'll practice what you told me! See ya next week. Thanks.

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Commentary

Mr. Banks uses his knowledge of both MI and Jan to initially defuse what could be a difficult conversation. The metaphor of creating a "new game plan" for dealing with conflict activates Jan's strengths and provides him with a sense of confidence that he can behave differently when

confronted with conflicts. Mr. Banks draws on the language with which Jan is comfortable and gives him specific strategies that translate what Jan does well on the soccer field to interpersonal situations.

If Jan was stronger on the Kinesthetic Dexterity and Linguistic Sensitivity subscales then he might have used the vocabulary of drama / acting or dancing rather than Athletics. The dialog might have sounded like this:

B- So how did it feel today when you lost your temper and almost hit Zak?

J- Not really good.

B- Kind of like you forgot your lines so the only thing you could do was take a swing at him?

J- Right. My mind just goes blank and I see red.

B- Like you're staring at a charging bull who's going to attack you?

J- Yes, scared out of my mind. He's a big guy. And mean.

B- Have you ever dealt with stage fright before in drama?

J- Sure. All the time, but that's different. When I've memorized my lines thoroughly I can reassure myself and talk my way through it.

B- So maybe if you had a powerful set of new lines to use in the lunchroom or whenever you're confronted then maybe it'd be different for you?

J- Yeah, maybe it would.

Knowing that Jan is in drama opens up new possibilities for responding to conflict other than fighting. If Mr. Banks knows nothing about Jan and his activities then reviewing his MIDAS

Profile main and subscales provides a “map” towards the kinds of interventions that Jan will be most receptive to trying out. If a counselor only works from his own frame of reference (high Linguistic, Interpersonal and Logical) then he may recommend strategies that seem impossible if not ridiculous to Jan.

If a student is high in an area that is unfamiliar (or weak) to the counselor then he should review the list of activities and stress management strategies associated with each of the MIDAS scales. If he provides one or two or three alternatives to the student from the list of his strengths then the student can make a choice that feels right to him. Choosing your own strategy or coming up with your own idea in a strength area enhances intrinsic motivation to put the strategy into practice. This is evident in the conversation above when Jan responds, “Wow. I never thought of doing that. I can totally do that.” I suspect that this is a much different response than if Mr. Banks gave Jan a pamphlet on Anger Management and required him to attend a group Assertiveness Training session. Jan certainly might benefit from both but not right away and definitely not with any degree of enthusiasm.

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Dr. Shearer is the creator of the Multiple Intelligences Developmental Assessment Scales (MIDAS™) that were developed as a reliable and valid measure of the multiple intelligences (www.MIResearch.org). The MIDAS Profile is used in a wide variety of settings around the world to help students and teachers to focus their attention and efforts on strengths to maximize success. He has recently completed a three-year investigation into the neural bases for the multiple intelligences that describes a robust neural architecture for each of the eight intelligences.