

A Kiss is just a Kiss: An MI approach to different art forms

Eduarda Melo Cabrita / Maria Luísa Falcão
ULICES - University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies

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I – Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences Theory

In 1983, Howard Gardner published *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. In this book he challenged the commonly accepted idea that intelligence could be measured. Since 1905, when French psychologist Alfred Binet and one of his collaborators, Theodore Simon, published the first IQ tests to identify children who needed special help in coping with the school curriculum in France, IQ tests have generally been associated with classification and selection based on school performance. (Arends 2007:48).

In *Frames of Mind* Gardner defined intelligence as “the ability to solve problems or to create products that are valued within one or more cultural settings”, and challenged the common assumption that “intelligence would be evident and appreciated anywhere, regardless of what was (and was not) valued in particular cultures at particular times” (1999: 33-34).

In 1999, Gardner redefined intelligence as “a bio-psychological 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” (1999: 35). He states that “intelligences” are better described as abilities, talents, or mental skills which cannot be seen or counted (1999:33). Gardner further argues that IQ testing is not reliable as a good indicator of an individual’s intellectual abilities as it values fields in which only literacy and mathematical ability are decisive.

According to Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences theory, there is not just one but several types of intelligence blended in a way that is unique to each human being (1999:45). Inevitably, the degree of influence played by genetic and environmental factors in shaping human intelligence varies but one fact remains unchallenged: intelligences “are potentials (...)

that will or will not be activated, depending upon the value of a particular culture, the opportunities available in that culture, and the personal decisions made by individuals and/or their families, school teachers, and others” (1999:34).

II – The eight intelligences: brief definition

When Howard Gardner first formulated a list of seven kinds of separate intelligences, he defined them in the following way (1999: 41-43; 48):

- the logical-mathematical intelligence fosters one’s capacity to deal with issues logically, carry out mathematical operations, and investigate issues scientifically;
- the verbal-linguistic intelligence entails a marked sensitivity to learn and use language effectively;
- the visual-spatial intelligence enhances the ability to recognise and manipulate patterns creatively;
- the musical-rhythmic intelligence facilitates the appreciation and performance of musical patterns;
- the bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence denotes the potential to use one’s body to solve problems and fashion products;
- the interpersonal intelligence involves a person’s capacity to understand other people’s intentions, motivations, and desires thus facilitating team work;
- the intrapersonal intelligence is related to the capacity to understand one’s own desires, fears, and capacities, and to use such information effectively.

Gardner later added the naturalist intelligence, which

- helps individuals to recognize and organize patterns in a natural environment.

These intelligences translate into eight corresponding types of learners which should be taken into account by those who wish to make the teaching-learning process more effective. Questionnaires like the ones devised by Smith (1997: 60-61) and Wingate (2000: 34-35) are useful tools

to find out each learner's preferred ways of learning. Another useful reference, running along the same lines, is the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, published by the Council of Europe in 2000 as it can also be used to help learners deal with and improve their individual learning styles. Teachers are now given added support to provide *an individually configured education*, which in Gardner's words amounts to "an education that takes individual differences seriously and, insofar as possible, crafts practices that serve different kinds of minds equally well" (Gardner 1999: 151).

By taking into account the different learning styles, the multi-intelligence approach to teaching becomes highly motivating for learners and facilitates their deeper understanding of the subject material. It would be, of course, advisable to complement this teaching practice with an MI task-based assessment more comprehensive than the standardized testing methods which privilege mainly the literacy and mathematical ability (1993:161-183).

III – A multidisciplinary approach to “The Kiss” by Angela Carter using the MI theory as a framework

We will now attempt to show how a hands-on approach based on the MI theory can be used in an EFL class to diversify the discussion of the short story by Angela Carter.

Way into “The Kiss” by Angela Carter

We have devised four steps as a way into the short story in which different intelligences and types of learners have been tackled.

- Step 1 – dealing with different works of art
- Step 2 – taking a ‘mental walk’ around Klimt’s ‘The Kiss’
- Step 3 – discussing a short story on Klimt’s painting
- Step 4 – writing on Paton’s ‘Hesperus’

In step 1, the works of six different artists (Auguste Rodin, Constantin Brancusi, Gustav Klimt, Pablo Picasso, Robert Doisneau and Roy Lichtenstein) are displayed around the classroom. In groups, learners

have to match each artist up with his work of art and decide what is common to all (a kiss).

They then choose **one** of the works and imagine a story prompted by it, paying special attention to **when** and **where** (the two people were), **how** (they met), **why** (they kissed), etc. Learners tell the story they *see* in the painting and let the others guess which couple they are referring to (Bodily Kinaesthetic, Visual Spatial, Verbal-Linguistic).

In Step 2, learners are shown Klimt's "The Kiss" and invited to take a 'mental walk' around the painting. They describe the man, the woman, their cloaks, their attitude, and the general mood the painting evokes. They then briefly tell the story they think is embedded in the painting (Visual-Spatial, Verbal-Linguistic, Interpersonal and Intrapersonal)

In Step 3, learners read Lawrence Ferlinghetti's work:

"Short story on a painting of Gustav Klimt"

They are kneeling upright on a flowered bed

He

has just caught her there
and holds her still

Her gown

has slipped down
off her shoulder

He has an **urgent** hunger

His dark head
bends to hers

hungrily

And **the woman the woman**

turns her tangerine lips from his
one hand like the head of a dead swan
draped down over
his heavy neck

the fingers

strangely crimped

tightly together

her other arm doubled up
against her tight breast

her hand a **languid** claw

clutching his hand

Reading and discussing “The Kiss” by Angela Carter

This is an extremely interesting but highly complex story, both culturally and linguistically. A blend of realistic and magical elements makes it a circular story partly told in flashback, which provides the key to decode the somewhat puzzling open ending. With this in mind, we have divided the story into five parts and given them a task or asked a question at the end of each part. The idea is to play a guessing game: learners cannot have access to the next section before they solve the enigma contained in the task/question. The five parts are:

1. the setting
2. the wife
3. the architect
4. Tamburlaine
5. back to the beginning

1. The setting

Before reading the story, in pairs, learners are given the following five extracts, which they have to complete by referring to one of the five senses given within brackets.

- (a) The winters in Central Asia are..... [sight]
- (b) We are in Samarkand...[hearing]
- (c) The peasant women's clothes are made of... [touch]
- (d) In the market....[smell]
- (f) A local speciality of Samarkand is...[taste]

All the sentences are put up under their respective headings (sight, hearing, etc.). Learners vote for the sentences that would create the most imaginative setting. Only then do they read the first part of the short story and compare their versions to the original one (Bodily-Kinaesthetic, Verbal-Linguistic, Logical-Mathematical, Visual-Spatial, Interpersonal)

2. The wife

Learners read part 2 of the story, which introduces Tamburlaine and his beautiful wife.

The story of Tamburlaine's wife is told in flashback. There's a mysterious old woman selling arum lilies in the market. Tamburlaine, the

scourge of Asia, is away at war but his impending return prompts his wife to urge the architect to finish the mosque she started to build for her husband. The architect promises to complete the work in time but she must give him a kiss, one single kiss, in return.

She is a virtuous and clever woman and she decides to put the architect to the test. She buys a basket of eggs, boils and stains them in different colours. She then tells the architect he must choose one egg and eat it.

The reading of part 2 of the short story stops here but as this is a guessing game, learners have to guess the answer to the first question: "Why does Tamburlaine's wife tell the architect to choose one of the eggs and eat it?"

The different answers provided by the learners are discussed before they read about the wife's cunning stratagem: "There you are! she said. Each of these eggs looks different to the rest but they all taste the same. So you may kiss any one of my serving women... But you must leave me alone." (Verbal-Linguistic, Logical-Mathematical, Interpersonal)

3. The architect

Learners read part 3 of the story which tells them that the architect comes back carrying a tray with three bowls apparently full of water and asks Tamburlaine's wife to drink from each of the bowls. She "took a drink from the first, (...) the second (...) but coughed and spluttered when she took a mouthful from the third bowl because (...)"

Learners now have to guess the answer to the second question: "What was in that bowl and why did she cough and splutter?". Again the different answers provided are discussed before they read on to find out that she had coughed and spluttered because the third bowl "...contained not water, but vodka(...). This vodka and that water both look alike but each tastes quite different (...) And it is the same with love." (Verbal-Linguistic, Logical-Mathematical, Interpersonal).

4. Tamburlaine

This part of the story is about Tamburlaine. Learners find out that his wife kissed the architect on the mouth and that he finished the arch in time for Tamburlaine's return. But now Tamburlaine's wife turns away from him because...

The third question is: "Why does Tamburlaine's wife turn away from her husband?"

Once again the different answers are discussed in class. The story reveals that she turns away from her husband because... “no woman will return to the harem after she has tasted vodka.”

A fourth question is then asked: “What happens to the architect?” The story tells us that Tamburlaine sent his executioners after him and... “he grew wings and flew away to Persia” which brings learners back to where it all started (Verbal-Linguistic, Logical-Mathematical, Interpersonal).

5. Back to the Beginning

Learners are encouraged to explore the last paragraph of the short story

This is a story in simple, geometric shapes and the bold colours of a child’s box of crayons. This Tamburlaine’s wife of the story would have painted a black stripe laterally across her forehead and done up her hair in a dozen, tiny plaits, like any other Uzbek woman. She would have bought red and white radishes from her husband’s dinner. After she ran away from him perhaps she made her living in the market. Perhaps she sold lilies there.

by answering the last two questions: “What does this paragraph suggest happened to Tamburlaine’s wife?” and “How does it make this a circular story?”

By now learners are expected to realise that the clues scattered throughout the story lend it the magical touch that makes the reader suspend disbelief and fully enjoy its puzzling ending: the architect grows wings and flies away, and Tamburlaine’s wife is none other than the old woman selling arum lilies in the market.

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