

Articles

Exploring the Application of Multiple Intelligences Theory to Career Counseling

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This article demonstrates the practical value of applying Howard Gardner's (1993) theory of multiple intelligences (MI) to the practice of career counseling. An overview of Gardner's MI theory is presented, and the ways in which educational and vocational planning can be augmented by the integration of MI theory in career counseling contexts is discussed. The Multiple Intelligences Developmental Assessment Scales (C. B. Shearer, 2007), [a research-based self-report measure of intellectual disposition](#), is introduced, and a case study illustrating the effective application of Gardner's MI theory to career counseling is presented.

For half a century, the field of career development has widely acknowledged the late adolescent years as a time of career exploration when—after a period of purposeful exploration—the primary career development tasks are to crystallize a vocational preference through the establishment of a vocational self-concept, to specify the preference, and to implement it (Super, 1957). As career development professionals have long recognized, an essential aspect in the prevention of a vocational identity crisis during the late adolescent/young adult period of development is the establishment of a *vocational identity*, which is “the possession of a clear and stable picture of one’s goals, interests, and talents” (Holland, Gottfredson, & Power, 1980, p. 1191). Adolescents and young adults who lack stable career goals and are undecided regarding their career choices are likely to display low self-esteem and inadequate educational self-efficacy (Hull-Blanks et al., 2005) and are at risk for dropping out of school prematurely (Noel, 1985).

Watkins and Savickas (1990) described the need to integrate (in both theory and practice) the distinct disciplines of vocational guidance and career counseling. *Vocational guidance* uses an actuarial method of matching the objectively measured skills and traits of the individual with data that characterize various occupations. This so-called scientific method can even be used without the intervention of another human being (e.g., counselor, adviser, instructor) via the application of computer-based career planning programs, such as the Kuder Career Planning System (Kuder, Inc., 2007), DISCOVER (ACT, Inc., 2007), or any number of

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widely available self-directed career assessments. *Career counseling*, on the other hand, places greater emphasis on the individual's subjective experience and the relationship with a counselor who "elicits occupational possibilities, not through traits, but through self-exploration and interpreting meaning. . . . These personal ideas and feelings compose the client's private-sense conceptions of self, work, and life" (Watkins & Savickas, 1990, p. 97).

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how the application of Gardner's (1993) multiple intelligences (MI) theory can be used to achieve a blend of objective assessment and subjective reflection—with a focus on an expanded definition of intellectual abilities—in the career counseling process. We argue that a process approach to assessing a client's MI profile can be used to promote career development by addressing three factors found to be vital to the career decision-making process: (a) realistic self-appraisal of abilities, (b) understanding of skills required for various types of work, and (c) the facilitation of what Parsons (1909) referred to almost 100 years ago as "true reasoning" (p.) on the relation between the two.

[AU2]

Gardner's MI Theory

In 1983, Howard Gardner published *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, in which he provided extensive research to support his contention that human intelligence is multifaceted rather than singular. More recently, Gardner (1999) defined *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).

[AU3]

To qualify as an intelligence in Gardner's MI theory, each ability had to satisfy a range of criteria: the potential for isolated breakdown of the skill through brain damage; the existence of savants, prodigies, and other exceptional individuals with this ability; support from psychological training studies and from psychometric studies, including correlations across tests; evolutionary plausibility; and a distinct developmental history culminating in a definable set of endstate performances. In addition, each intelligence had to have an identifiable core operation or set of operations, as well as susceptibility to coding in a symbol system (e.g., language, mathematics, picturing, or musical notes; Feldman, 1998). The eight intelligences identified by Gardner's MI theory are summarized in Table 1.

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Gardner (1993) believed that most real-world activities require a combination of different intelligences working in concert for success. For example, a successful attorney needs to possess skills in the areas of Linguistic, Logical-Mathematical, and Interpersonal intelligences. Specific types of attorneys will use different aspects of each of these intelligences. The trial attorney will require greater skill in spoken–persuasive language than would the research attorney who may be more adept at writing briefs and engaging in logical analysis. The trial attorney will need to be more perceptive and tuned into the emotional state of the jury and less concerned with logical analysis than would the writer of legal contracts. Similarly, skills in the area of Spatial intelligences are

TABLE 1**Multiple Intelligences Definitions and Sample Corresponding Careers**

| Multiple Intelligences | Brief Description | Sample Corresponding Careers |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Musical | To think in sounds, rhythms, melodies, and rhymes. To be sensitive to pitch, rhythm, timbre, and tone. To recognize, create, and reproduce music by using an instrument or voice. To engage in active listening and identify connections between music and emotions. | Choir director, Music teacher, Song writer, Vocalist |
| Kinesthetic | To think in movements and to use the body in skilled and complicated ways for expressive and goal-directed activities. A sense of timing, coordination for whole body movement, and the use of hands for manipulating objects. | Athlete, Choreographer, Dancer, Actor |
| Logical-Mathematical | To think of cause and effect connections and to understand relationships among actions, objects, or ideas. To calculate, quantify, or consider propositions and perform complex mathematical or logical operations. Involves inductive and deductive reasoning skills and creative problem solving. | Accountant, Computer repair, Electrical engineer, Scientist |
| Spatial | To think in pictures and to perceive the visual world accurately. To think in 3-D and to transform one's perceptions and re-create aspects of one's visual experience via imagination. To work with objects effectively. | Architect, Pilot, Interior designer, Artist |
| Linguistic | To think in words and to use language to express and understand complex meanings. Sensitivity to the meaning of words and the order among words, sounds, rhythms, inflections. To reflect on the use of language in everyday life. | Attorney, Journalist, Poet, Public relations director |
| Interpersonal | To think about and understand another person. To have empathy and recognize distinctions among people and to appreciate their perspectives with sensitivity to their motives, moods, and intentions. Involves interacting effectively with one or more people in familiar, casual, or working circumstances. | Counselor, Nurse, Salesperson, Teacher |
| Intrapersonal | To think about and understand one's self. To be aware of one's strengths and weaknesses and to plan effectively to achieve personal goals. Reflecting on and monitoring one's thoughts and feelings and regulating them effectively. The ability to monitor one's self in interpersonal relationships and to act with personal efficacy. | CEO, Clergy, Entrepreneur, Psychologist |
| Naturalist | To understand the natural world including plants, animals, and scientific studies. To recognize, name, and classify individuals, species, and ecological relationships. To interact effectively with living creatures and discern patterns of life and natural forces. | Biologist, Farmer, Meteorologist, Veterinarian |

essential for success for both pilots and artists, although they each tap into different aspects or domains of this intelligence. The pilot needs to be very strong in map reading and spatial awareness, whereas the artist requires sensitivity to aesthetic design, color, and form.

MI and Career Counseling

We contend that careful consideration of a client's MI profile of strengths and weaknesses can add specificity to the career counseling conversation beyond the typical review of interests. We also believe that using MI language can help counselors articulate the kinds of skills that are necessary for specific careers that clients are considering. Furthermore, the MI vocabulary can be used to increase clients' realistic self-appraisals of skills and abilities in relationship to their academic histories and aspirations. In addition, MI language can be easily understood by the family members of younger clients and, as such, can help focus their dialogue on the recognition and development of the strengths of those younger clients.

One complicating factor in understanding the application of MI theory to career counseling is that this approach introduces an alternative view of intelligence that runs counter to prevailing cultural assumptions regarding who is and is not "smart." Such assumptions, in turn, influence society's view of who can be successful and who cannot (see Armstrong, 1994). Addressing the basic issue of what being smart means takes time, but understanding intelligence from an MI theory perspective can play an integral role in expanding the range of realistic career possibilities that a counselee considers.

Development and Validation of an MI Assessment

To create a reliable and valid assessment that would provide counselors with a tool to apply MI theory to the process of career development, Shearer (1999) developed the Multiple Intelligences Developmental Assessment Scales (MIDAS). The MIDAS was originally developed as a structured interview to be conducted with the family members of a brain trauma survivor to describe the patient's premorbid intellectual profile (Shearer, 2007). An interview is still the preferred mode of administration, if time permits, for gathering clinically useful qualitative information to supplement the quantitative profile. In addition, the MIDAS may be administered and interpreted using a new Web-based version.

The MIDAS consists of 119 questions that inquire about developed skill, levels of participation, and enthusiasm for a wide variety of activities that are naturally encountered as a part of daily life. Each MIDAS question is followed by six response options from which the respondent may choose. For example, the question "Do you have a good system for balancing a checkbook or figuring a budget?" has response options of A = *Not at all*, B = *Fairly good*, C = *Good*, D = *Very good*, E = *An excellent system*, F = *I don't know. Does not apply*. Responses result in scores for 8 main scales, representing each of Gardner's intelligences (e.g., Musical, Linguistic), and 26 subscales (e.g., Appreciation, Written/Reading)

- [AU5] that provide additional qualitative information. Responses also result in scores for 3 style scales indicating intellectual approaches to problem solving: Leadership (with 3 subscales), General Logic, and Innovative.
- [AU6] Each response option is given a numerical value (0 to 4) by the scoring program so that scores for the main scales and subscales and for the style scales and subscales are calculated as percentages of the total number of answers provided. *I don't know* and *Does not apply* response options are not included in the calculations. A majority of items score only on their primary designated scale; however, a small number of items are scored on two scales or, in a few instances, three scales. These coscored items were identified from factor analytic results and a qualitative analysis of item content (Shearer, 2007).
- [AU7] Numerous studies have investigated the reliability and validity of the MIDAS, as summarized in Table 2. Additional details regarding these (and other) studies of the assessment's reliability and validity may be found in *The MIDAS: Professional Manual* (Shearer, 2007) and online (<http://www.miresearch.org/>).

TABLE 2

Summary of Reliability and Validity Research of the Multiple Intelligences Developmental Assessment Scales (MIDAS)

| Reference Citation of Study | Results of Investigation |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Wiswell, Hardy, & Reio (2001) | Reliability coefficients for MIDAS scales ranged from .85 to .90. |
| Shearer (2006c, 2006d) | Scores on the MIDAS _____ Math subscale were moderately correlated ($r = .58$) with scores on the Ohio State Math Achievement Test; scores on the MIDAS Written/Reading subscale were moderately correlated with scores on the Ohio State Reading Test. |
| Pizarro (2003) | Seven factors identified in analysis of MIDAS Spanish translation on Chilean sample ($n = 429$). Mean alpha was .81. |
| Shearer (2005) | Large-scale exploratory and confirmatory analyses ($n = 23,000$) found nine factors that corresponded with MIDAS main scales and two Spatial subscales. Alpha reliabilities for scales ranged from .79 to .89. |
| Yoong (2001) | Eight factors confirmed for MIDAS Bahasa translation on Malaysian sample ($n = 644$). Alphas ranged from .72 to .91. Concurrent validity results found significant correlations between Logical-Mathematical and math achievement; science and Naturalist; language achievement and Linguistic scales. |
| Wu (2007) | Initial reliability and validity studies of MIDAS Chinese translation corresponded strongly with original English version data. |
| Shearer & Jones (1994) | A review of several concurrent validity studies concluded that MIDAS provides a reasonable estimate of the respondent's intellectual disposition. |
| Shearer (2007) | Test-retest correlations ranged from .77 to .92; inter-rater reliability ranged from 40% exact agreement to 80% \pm 1 category. Minimal differences between African American and Caucasian university students observed. Validity studies found adequate rates of discrimination and convergence with matched tests. |
| Kim, J.-S. (2007); Kim, H. (2004) | Criterion groups validity study of MIDAS Korean translation found significant and appropriate pattern of correlations among MIDAS scales and student groups. |
| Shearer (2006a) | Matched criterion group mean scale scores conformed with theoretical predictions for matched student and adult groups. |

The MIDAS Profile consists of a quantitative and qualitative report that describes the person's strengths and weaknesses in everyday language. (See the sample in the Appendix.) The MIDAS Profile is not to be interpreted as the last word regarding the person's intellectual profile; rather, it is as a starting point from which to embark on a productive discussion and critical reflection. Its purpose is to promote a dialogue that serves to enhance intrapersonal awareness and the creation of educational plans and career development strategies so that strengths may be used to maximize success both in school and in everyday life.

An MI perspective on how a client's profile relates to various career possibilities can be beneficial to the client in several important ways (Luzzo & Shearer, 1999; Wu, 2004). The use of MI language helps to focus and elaborate the client's thinking about the ways in which his or her chances for vocational success may be maximized. The MIDAS Profile may be used by itself to promote career development or as one piece of an assessment package that may include traditional career assessments and other useful information (e.g., grades, interest inventory, aptitudes assessment, personality preferences). The MIDAS Profile can serve as the basis for the creation of a richly detailed personal narrative describing the client's intellectual and creative life. This narrative uses everyday language that can be related to study strategies and future career aspirations that match a client's unique profile of MI strengths and limitations.

During the career counseling process, clients should be encouraged and guided in the critical evaluation of the validity of their profiles. After comparing their profiles with other sources of information (e.g., grades, feedback from teachers, test results, discussion with friends) and engaging in personal reflection, clients should create and sign their verified MIDAS Profiles. Signing the profile is done to ensure that clients will gain ownership of the information before using their verified profiles as working documents to focus career exploration and academic planning (Shearer, 1999).

The Case of Tara

To illustrate the manner in which the integration of MI theory into career counseling takes place, a case study is provided to clarify several of the aforementioned concepts and their relevance to the career counseling process. Tara (a pseudonym) is a ninth grader at a suburban midwestern high school and is enrolled in a 9-week career exploration course required of all ninth graders. Tara is an outgoing student who relates well to her peers and participates enthusiastically in class group activities. Near the middle of the career exploration course, the instructor (a local counselor education graduate student) noticed that each time the class discussed the concept of "future careers" Tara exhibited a relatively high level of anxiety. As a result, Tara's instructor suggested that Tara make an appointment to talk with her school counselor.

Within the next 3 weeks, all students in the career exploration class completed the MIDAS, received their profiles, and participated in several group exercises designed to inform them about (a) MI theory, (b) their own unique MI profiles, and (c) implications of their MIDAS Profiles

[AU8]

for both academic and career planning. Tara took the process very seriously, fully completing the Brief Learning Summary that accompanies the MIDAS Profile.

When the time came for Tara to meet with the school counselor, she took her MIDAS Profile (see the Appendix) along with her Brief Learning Summary to the meeting. The counselor was surprised when Tara began the session by saying,

I don't know why I'm here. I'm doing great now. I feel much better about myself and my future. I used to think I was such a loser because I get terrible math grades, but now I know that I'm just smart in other ways that are just as important. After I showed my MIDAS Profile to my mom, she made me realize that I can have a great career working with animals. And maybe people, too. It'd be awesome to be a veterinarian! I think I'll even be able to concentrate better during Algebra knowing that it might help me get into vet school someday. I have all of my high school classes planned out now. I hope you'll approve the plan. I know just what classes I want to take every year. I think I might sign up for the Health Sciences concentration.

After a successful high school career, during which time she earned above-average grades in her classes and became actively involved in several student groups and clubs, Tara entered college with every intention of becoming a veterinarian. During the latter half of her sophomore year, Tara slumped into the office of one of the university's career counselors one day feeling dejected, rejected, and lost. She had been turned down for veterinary school because of low scores on her graduate qualifying exams, and she wasn't sure what would come next in her life. Before long, after reviewing the results of Tara's MIDAS Profile, the career counselor provided great insight:

Tara, based on your MIDAS Profile, your strengths are clearly working with people and caring for animals. Have you ever considered working at a zoo or farm? We have a great Animal Sciences program here at the university that just might be worth looking into.

After several informational interviews with the recent graduates of the Animal Sciences program and multiple conversations with program faculty members, Tara applied to the Animal Sciences program and was readily accepted. Last year, she has served as a volunteer at the local zoo, and earlier this year, she landed a paid internship at the zoo. Now in her senior year, Tara is excited about the many job opportunities she has been offered in a field that has already brought her much satisfaction.

Future Research

On the basis of approximately 20 years of MI theory application to career exploration, planning, and assessment, we believe that the evidence clearly points to clients benefiting in a number of ways from the integration of MI theory and its measurement (e.g., the MIDAS) into career counseling. A basic premise of this approach to career counseling is that an in-depth consideration of their MI profiles will assist students with the career decision-making process and promote personal develop-

ment. Various pilot and research endeavors have provided evidence that these goals are achievable (see Shearer, 2006b).

As with the advent of any new tool or methodology within the domain of career counseling, many questions remain regarding the effective application of MI theory to enhancing the career counseling and decision-making process for clients. Future investigations of the incorporation of MI theory into career counseling should address two primary evaluative goals. First, researchers and practitioners need to engage in a thorough evaluation of the use of the MIDAS to describe and delineate which elements of the MIDAS process are particularly responsible for promoting clients' career development. Evaluating the effectiveness of the MIDAS as a stand-alone career intervention versus its effectiveness when used in conjunction with other modalities (e.g., combined with the use of other career assessments) would be helpful in this regard.

Second, we believe that developing and evaluating model implementation strategies and MI materials that can be applied across culturally diverse groups is important. We have learned that gathering important information about clients and their MI profiles is only half of the battle. These profiles and their implications must be thoroughly understood by counselors and effectively communicated to clients (as well as to parents and teachers, when appropriate). We contend that social-cultural factors can play a mediating role in any career exploration process and thus deserve careful study in relation to both MI theory and MIDAS assessment. We invite researchers, career counselors, and teachers to engage in collaborative efforts to further explore the usefulness of MI theory as a framework for career counseling and educational planning.

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APPENDIX

Sample Multiple Intelligences Developmental Assessment Scales (MIDAS) Profile

MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCE DEVELOPMENTAL ASSESSMENT SCALES
MIDAS Version 2.0 Processed 09-23-1999

for
Tara Student

Sex: F Grade: 9
ID number: 407 Code: 1 Birth Date: 1984

The following Profile represents areas of strength and limitation as reported by you at this time. This is preliminary information to be confirmed by way of further discussion and exploration.

Scales

| | |
|----------------------|-------|
| Musical | ***** |
| Kinesthetic | ***** |
| Logical-Mathematical | ***** |
| Special | ***** |
| Linguistic | ***** |
| Interpersonal | ***** |
| Intrapersonal | ***** |
| Naturalist | ***** |

The following Profile represents your intellectual style. These scales indicate if you tend to be more inventive, accurate or social in your problem solving abilities.

Scales

| | |
|---------------|-------|
| Leadership | ***** |
| General Logic | ***** |
| Innovative | ***** |

APPENDIX (Continued)

Sample Multiple Intelligences Developmental Assessment Scales (MIDAS) Profile

MIDAS Profile for

ID: 407

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The MIDAS subscales are listed below from highest to lowest. They are useful for identifying specific areas of skill that you describe as your strongest and weakest.

| Specific Skill | Category |
|--------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>High</i> Animal Care | Naturalist |
| Working with People | Interpersonal |
| Social | Leadership |
| Management | Leadership |
| Effectiveness | Intrapersonal |
| Sensitivity | Interpersonal |
| Plant Care | Naturalist |
| Science | Naturalist |
| Athletic | Kinesthetic |
| Art Design | Spatial |
| Personal Knowledge | Intrapersonal |
| Instrument | Musical |
| Vocal | Musical |
| Rhetorical | Linguistic |
| Working with Objects | Spatial |
| Everyday Problem-Solving | Logical-Mathematical |
| Appreciation | Musical |
| Persuasion | Interpersonal |
| Logic Games | Logical-Mathematical |
| Written/Reading | Linguistic |
| Everyday Math | Logical-Mathematical |
| Spatial Awareness | Spatial |
| Communication | Leadership |
| Composer | Musical |
| Expressive | Linguistic |
| <i>Low</i> Dexterity | Kinesthetic |
| Spatial Problem-Solving | Intrapersonal |
| Calculations | Intrapersonal |
| School Math | Logical-Mathematical |