

Intelligence

plain
talk

it's
our
time



What is intelligence?

The conventional definition is that intelligence is a characteristic of the **mind**, as expressed in this typical definition:

A very general mental capability that, among other things, involves the ability to reason, plan, solve problems, think abstractly, comprehend complex ideas, learn quickly and learn from experience.

However, this view of intelligence has been questioned for a number of reasons. One major criticism is that intelligence, whatever it is, must have to do with the **whole person** and her or his talents, abilities, and capacities as an artist, singer, dancer, healer, parent, athlete, and so on. First Nations peoples understand that intelligence is a **holistic** concept, as expressed in the following statements published in **Redefining How Success is Measured in First Nations, Inuit and Métis Learning**:

We cannot talk about being an intelligent person without knowledge of and access to all the levels of our intelligence capacity—i.e., the intelligence of the body, the mind, heart and spirit. The intelligence of the mind, for instance, does not operate to its fullest creative, discriminating, and encompassing potential without its active partnership with the intelligence of the heart.

Intelligence has been defined for us through the eyes of the Euro-American psychological and scientific culture. Its definition is limited in its application and understanding. What we have been pursuing as Indigenous people, since our involvement in education in the contemporary experience, is attempting to measure up to their definition of intelligence. To be as productive as they are, as successful as they are, to be as intelligent as they are. In doing so, we have lost the encompassing nature of our definition of intelligence— Indigenous intelligence.

Intelligence, from an Indigenous or First Nations perspective, is an inclusive concept that embraces all of the talents, abilities, skills and understandings that distinguish us as a species. In fact, many researchers and theorists are acknowledging that all forms of human expression have value, are parts of our evolutionary heritage, and should be considered as elements of intelligence.

The neuroscientist Daniel Wolpert has proposed a startling new idea: that our brain has evolved to deal with our muscular and skeletal systems and the many ways humans engage in complex muscle control and movement—walking, speaking, talking, making tools, hunting, singing, dancing, communicating, and so on and so on.



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Richard Sennett, a sociologist, makes the same kind of argument but from another perspective. Sennett looks at crafts and craftsmanship and speculates that in the process of making objects, that is, working with our hands, performing actions, and using muscles, we have developed transformational capacities like critical thinking, imagination, planning, creativity, innovation, fantasy, novelty, ingenuity, and design.

Several decades ago, Howard Gardner, a Harvard psychologist, revolutionized the field of research in intelligence by proposing that there are at least eight different intelligences. His Theory of Multiple Intelligences is strikingly similar to ideas of Indigenous intelligence in recognizing a range of capacities (intelligences). The suggestions of Wolpert and Sennett fit in well with Gardner's ideas and the inclusive Indigenous perspective.

Gardner's **Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI)** has influenced teaching and education, and is the basis of **Smart Options** and **Smart Options Plus**—career development programs created for Canadian and American youth and adults. Gardner's hypothesis on **MI** has also been a central principle for curriculum developers and educational psychologists who work in areas of differentiated instruction.

The eight different intelligences identified by Gardner can also be termed different **Ways of Knowing**. The **Ways of Knowing** have a strong resonance with First Nations cultural traditions as well as with contemporary occupations and activities.

Knowing the Body means controlling and coordinating the body and using muscles skillfully.

Examples of how **Knowing the Body** is expressed traditionally include dancing, hunting, fishing, carving, canoeing, and kayaking. Contemporary occupations include athlete, surgeon, mechanic, crafts expert, carpenter.

Knowing Images means being able to make and understand pictures, being aware of colour, shape and form, and working with materials like fabric, clay and wood.

Examples of how **Knowing Images** is expressed traditionally include designing jewelry, the dream catcher, beading, painting, using colours, drawing, navigating, and using the medicine wheel. Contemporary occupations include web developer, hairstylist, architect, machinist, engineer.

Knowing Logic means looking for explanations for events, seeing patterns and how things are related, being systematic, and using numbers.

Examples of how **Knowing Logic** is expressed traditionally include understanding relationships between objects, understanding natural remedies and medication, dealing with governance and treaty rights, and making astronomical observations. Contemporary occupations include cook, bookkeeper, lawyer, technician, computer programmer.

Knowing Music means making up songs and melodies, understanding rhythms, and making and playing musical instruments.

Examples of how **Knowing Music** is expressed traditionally include drumming, singing, and creating songs. Contemporary occupations include musician, sound engineer, singer, choreographer, music teacher.

Knowing Nature means being aware of the world we live in, being interested in plants and animals, and being concerned about balance and respect for our world.

Examples of how **Knowing Nature** is expressed traditionally include making and using canoes and snowshoes, tracking, hunting, fishing, gathering medicines, and knowing animal habits. Contemporary occupations include farmer, forester, veterinarian, gardener, and meteorologist.

Knowing People means respecting and understanding others and knowing how to get along with others.

Examples of how **Knowing People** is expressed traditionally include parenting, concern for community well-being, negotiating, traditional justice, restorative justice, and respecting Elders and others. Contemporary occupations include religious leader, counselor, police officer, day care worker, nurse.



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Knowing the Self means having a good sense of the kind of person you are or want to be and being able to keep yourself on track.

Examples of how **Knowing the Self** is expressed traditionally include vision quest, Sun Dance, sweat lodge, controlling emotions, spiritual awareness, self-motivation, and being patient. Contemporary occupations include artist, social worker, coach, entrepreneur, writer.

Knowing Words means loving words and their meanings, and using words and language to entertain and inform others.

Examples of how **Knowing Words** is expressed traditionally include story-telling, communication, oral tradition of history and morality, legends, and totem poles. Contemporary occupations include reporter, secretary, translator, call centre operator, legal assistant.

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*When you were born, you cried
and the world rejoiced.
Live your life so that when you die,
the world cries and you rejoice.*
White Elk

