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Editor:
J. Sundarsingh, Ph.D.

Multiple Intelligences and Second Language Learning

S. Diravidamani , M.A. Candidate

Language acquisition is an interactive process. Language is a social interchange, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences interact in complex and subtle ways during the communication process. Interpersonal intelligence can be seen to play a key role in second language learning as well.

There happens to be a lot of ELT theories being practiced in the class room situation for learning a second language. All theories focus only on language acquisition but not leading to the development of intelligences.
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The Focus of This Paper

This paper focuses on using multiple intelligences in acquiring second language. I take a few stanzas of the poem 'The Fly' by William Blake and analyze the poem linguistically and involve my student-friends to interact so that inter and intrapersonal intelligences can be built in.

This is possible in a class room situation where students can easily be made to develop their intelligences and learn the language.

Multiple Intelligences Theory

Multiple Intelligences Theory, proposed by Gardner (1983), redefines the intelligence by valuing many more abilities that seem to be irrelevant for intelligence test but actually are essential for life. Thus, we have more than one intelligence and each one is responsible for a different domain and therefore they make everyone unique and special.

These intelligences are

1. Linguistic Intelligence (Word Smart)
2. Logical – Mathematical Intelligence (Number / Reasoning Smart)
3. Spatial Intelligence (Picture Smart)
4. Bodily Kinesthetic Intelligence (Body Smart)
5. Musical Intelligence (Music Smart)
6. Interpersonal Intelligence (People Smart)
7. Intrapersonal Intelligence (Self Smart)

Varying Degrees of Possession

According to Gardner, each person possesses all the seven intelligences to varying degrees. This does not mean that we may be highly developed in all seven areas – it is particularly important to remember this in relation to second language learners.

We may be highly developed in one or two intelligences, moderately developed in one or two and underdeveloped in the rest. Each intelligence functions in ways unique to each person; no one is the same as anyone else.

We All Can Develop All Seven Intelligences

Gardner suggests that everyone has the capacity to develop all seven intelligences to reasonably high level. This is encouraging for language educators.

Second Language Learning and Multiple Intelligences

Success in helping the second language learners including linguistic intelligence is a combination of the right environmental influences and quality instruction. Both of these are factors we can help control. Intelligences work together in complex ways. Because no intelligence exists by itself, language learning activities may be successful because they actively encourage the use of several intelligences.

Teaching a Poem to Develop Multiple Intelligences

I have taken few stanzas of William Blake's poem, **"The Fly"** for the analysis of intra and interpersonal communication.

Little Fly,
Thy summer's play
My thoughtless hand
Has brushed away.

Am not I
A fly like thee?
Or art not thou
A man like me?

After giving a small introduction to the poem the student-friends were asked to analyze the poem. They came out with a lot of ideas. This made them learn the language unconscioulsy. Also this activity helped them to think and develop their intelligence.

After getting the responses from the student-friends, I gave my own analysis of the poem. This is a chance given to the individuals to interact with their own self and thus to express their ideas.

How These Intelligences Help in Learning the Language?

- Individuals are made to think
- Interaction comes through the expression of ideas
- Language plays a major role in the process of thinking and expressing
- Thus language gets developed without the knowledge of the individual

Traditional Activities and Learning a Second Language

The two traditional language learning activities like "Twenty Questions" and "Strip Story" help to learn language easily. Perhaps one reason they are so popular is that several intelligences are needed to carry out each activity.

In "Twenty Questions," students have to name the object or animal pinned on their backs. Everyone else knows the word on the student's back, but the student does not. Students find out by milling around, asking classmates "yes/no" questions until they discover who or what they are.

In the "Strip story" activity, each student receives a slip of paper containing part of a story. Students memorize their parts, give back their slips, and then proceed to line up and put the story back in the proper order. In these activities the students use linguistic, spatial, interpersonal, bodily-kinesthetic and logical-mathematical intelligences.

Conclusion

This approach of Multiple Intelligence proves very effective in second language learning. I am also very positive that if this methodology is being adopted in classroom situation, there will be a lot of opportunities for language learning. In addition I also witnessed that there happens to be a lot of interaction among the student community because this approach invites students to readily partake in the language role play. This method of teaching helps motivate the students to involve themselves in the process of language acquisition.

S. Diravidamani , M.A. Candidate
Bharathiar University
Coimbatore
Tamilnadu, India
boss_babies@yahoo.co.in