

MANAGING MULTIPLE ACTIVITIES FOR SPECIFIC THEMES IN THE EFL CLASSROOM (PREK-GRADE 2)

Terry Hughes M.

*Corporación Universitaria de Santander and LET'S
(Learning English Together Services for Young Learners)
tmhughes@col1.telecom.com.co*

The theory of Multiple Intelligences by Howard Gardner is enlightening and extremely useful in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom. For starters it helps the teacher in understanding the individual differences found in the classroom and to comprehend how students go about learning. Multiple intelligences are not always taken into account even though they are very observable in children, since they are still so innocent and honest in their learning process. The purpose of this article is to discuss the importance of approaching the individuals encountered in our classroom, giving them the equal opportunity of learning another language and above all making our classes fun and resourceful so that these young learners are motivated for a lifetime.

Introduction

Children are wonderful learners, their minds are open to new experiences and they are motivated to learn in a genuine fashion.

Being a teacher of EFL young learners is a very gratifying experience because at this stage in their life it seems as if their brains are wired to learn languages. Even for the ones that seem like they are not learning, in the long run they will obtain proficiency in the language.

Taking into account their eagerness to new learning experiences, it is of utmost

importance to be very creative in each lesson that we teach them. Children learn easily but we should never overload them with information. That's why working with specific themes facilitates second language acquisition, because they become comfortable with the language and they truly assimilate it.

Theoretical framework

It is based on the multiple intelligence theory, in which each human being has his or her own way of learning and using his or her intellect. There are 7 identified intelligences:

- **Visual/spatial intelligence:**

Ability to perceive the visual. These learners tend to think in pictures and need to create vivid mental images to retain information. They enjoy looking at maps, charts, flashcards, pictures, videos, and movies.

- **Verbal/linguistic intelligence**

Ability to use words and language. These learners have highly developed auditory skills and are generally elegant speakers. They think in words rather than pictures. They enjoy storybooks, videos, and nursery rhymes.

- **Logical/mathematical intelligence**

Ability to use reason, logic and numbers. These learners think conceptually in logical and numerical patterns making connections between pieces of information. Always curious

about the world around them, these learners ask lots of questions and like to do experiments. They enjoy games such as concentration, matching pairs, counting and categorizing objects.

- **Bodily/kinaesthetic intelligence**

Ability to control body movements and handle objects skilfully. These learners express themselves through movement. They have a good sense of balance and eye-hand co-ordination (e.g. ball play, balancing beams). Through interacting with the space around them, they are able to remember and process information. They enjoy dancing, games that involve physical motion and role playing.

- **Musical/rhythmic intelligence**

Ability to produce and appreciate music. These musically inclined learners think in sounds, rhythms and patterns. They immediately respond to music either appreciating or criticizing what they hear. Many of these learners are extremely sensitive to environmental sounds (e.g. crickets, bells, dripping taps). They enjoy activities that involve music like singing and dancing.

- **Interpersonal intelligence**

Ability to relate and understand others. These learners try to see things from other people's point of view in order to understand how they think and feel. They often have an uncanny ability to sense feelings, intentions and motivations. They are great organizers, although they sometimes resort to manipulation. Generally they try to maintain peace in group settings and encourage co-operation. They use both verbal (e.g. speaking) and non-verbal language (e.g. eye contact, body language) to open communication channels with others. They really enjoy group activities and are usually the ones that like to be the teacher's assistant.

- **Intrapersonal intelligence**

Ability to self-reflect and be aware of one's inner state of being. These learners try to understand their inner feelings, dreams, relationships with others, and strengths and weaknesses. They enjoy activities where they have to work alone and usually make strong bonds with their teachers.

Exactly how does managing multiple activities for specific themes work?

This paper focuses on how to exploit these intelligences that are so obvious in preschool and elementary children and to use them as an advantage for their learning process.

The specific themes that we choose to work with must be interesting to us and to the children. American Holidays are a good bet, the ones that are in common with our Colombian holidays are easier to work with because they can relate to them in real life. Others such as Thanksgiving are a little bit more challenging.

The time we schedule for each theme differs for each one. We can work with one theme during the whole course or it can be a matter of only weeks. It entirely depends on what we are looking for.

Procedure

As a teacher we must know everything there is to know about the theme and what vocabulary to teach to the children depending on their age and level. We must feel comfortable with the words and themes.

Once we have the vocabulary, we start designing the basic commands and sentence



structures we are going to use. We have to remember that these totally depend on the activities we choose.

The games, videos, music, stories, dramatic play should be linked to each other. This gives the opportunity to use the language over and over again. Children learn through repetition and it is our task to be creative and not to become boring, which can be a bit challenging since the vocabulary is recycled over and over again.

Once we have the activities we are going to use, we need to organize them so that they go from basic to more challenging.

Resources may be a problem for some teachers but handmade flashcards, storybooks and puppets are just as good as store bought materials. Several publishers have some very resourceful books on teaching strategies that have some interesting hand-on activities and are very practical for our lesson plans (I highly recommend ideas like the ones proposed by

Hayes, K. and Creange: 2001). The Internet is also a very powerful tool in this aspect and there are endless sites for early education and they even have downloadable resources, in most cases they are free of charge.

Approaching multiple intelligences

With small children it is important to have a routine in our classes and to be consistent throughout the course and especially inside the classroom.

- Begin with the introduction of new vocabulary; forget about the old fashion way of showing the flashcard and repeating it. Be creative. Use games where they have to move (Bodily/Kinaesthetic Intelligence). Run, walk, and jump toflashcard.
- Memory games are excellent for visual-spatial and logic-mathematical intelligences, just make two sets of cards with the same picture of the vocabulary you are teaching, and have them flip them over and match two of a kind.

• For the musical and auditive intelligence make up words using the vocabulary with children's traditional tunes. They are easily found on the internet in the preschool sites; make sure they are adequate for your group. It is important the music you use be authentic and very repetitive, not to have too many new words in them. For example *Itsy Bitsy Spider* is very easy because first of all they usually already know it in their mother tongue and it repeats itself so it is easy to relate to. You can make a storybook or felt board puppets of the song, this way children get to "see" what they are singing. Finally make a small class play where they become characters from the songs or stories.

• And to wrap up the theme make a craft that is allusive to the theme. This is great for intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences because it gives them the opportunity to work alone and in groups. Be sure that the instructions to make the craft be given in English. Demonstrate each step by making one for yourself. For example, give the order "fold your paper" while you are holding up a paper and showing them what you are saying. Through repetition, these instructions will be assimilated.

Crafts approach all the different intelligence because it is a hands-on activity where children

experience through their eyes, ears and hands what you are teaching.

Conclusion

You may be thinking that it is a lot of hard work in designing multiple activities for specific themes but once you get the hang of it, it will be impossible to work in any other manner. You'll have just as much fun as your students are and before you know it, you'll have identified your students and what they like and dislike in your class.

Of course language learning is a long and slow process but through multiple activities children truly live the language and it becomes meaningful to them. They will use it to communicate with you and their classmates and they will enjoy their classes and have fun in them.

References

Hayes, K. and Creange, R. (2001). *Scholastic Teaching Strategies*. Jefferson City: Scholastic Inc.

The explanation of the 7 MI was abstracted from: <http://www.ldpride.net/ldpride.htm>