Teaching English, Accepting Multiple Intelligence Types, through Arts

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Abstract
The article discusses the importance of acceptance of the multiple intelligence types as one of the key factors influencing the (language) teaching. It focuses mainly on the possibility to introduce art as a source of material for language teaching, providing a wide spectrum of possibilities to introduce different types of activities. The author understands art not only as a source for language teaching/learning but something more than that. For her, the art can be a source for presenting moral and aesthetic values and the material, which will develop learners as a complete personality. The art can bring ethics, culture, history to the language lesson and can help learners to understand the mentality and culture of the target language country(ies) more deeply. The paper is the case study done at the secondary school (1st graders), using some materials and preparing them for achieving the states aim, by the author. This study was a space to learn more about the students’ perception of task based approach, what gave them a chance to experience a shift from ‘teacher-centred’ learning to ‘learner centred’ lesson.

Key words: Multiple intelligence, art, personality, task-based learning, learner centred lesson

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1. Introduction
Teaching English is affected by a lot of factors. The key actors in education are learner and teacher and these come to the classroom (does not matter whether traditional or virtual) with their characteristics, their predispositions, attitudes and aptitudes, their learning and teaching styles, their intelligence types. In 80s, Gardner defined 7 different intelligence types: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal; later on the spiritual and natural were added. Some authors have also added existential intelligence; however this was described by Sternberg as Intelligence.

2. The Concept of Intelligence
If we ask an average person today-Who is an intelligent?, the most frequent answer would be Somebody who knows how to behave. Asking the question-Who is an intelligent person?, we would get the answer-The one who has a lot of knowledge (it might be the case of Slovak language only). However, the psychologists would provide us with different definition(s). Most of them agree that it is “the ability for complex thinking and reasoning” (Ceci, 2001, P. 4). Detterman (2005) includes the skills gained during the human being’s life, in the definition, concluding that intelligence refers to “a general mental capability to reason, solve problems, think abstractly, learn and understand new material and profit from past experience”. Gardner (in Willingham, 2004) adds another factor, namely culture, describing 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”. There are also voices that social competence is an important component of intelligence as well as that intelligence should cover also the creativity. Piaget (1963) defines intelligence as "an adaptation...To say that intelligence is a particular instance of biological adaptation is thus to suppose that it is essentially an organization and that its function is to structure the universe just as the organism structures its immediate environment" (pp. 3-4, in: Plucker, 2004).

2.1 Theories of Intelligence
As it can be seen, various psychologists define the term psychology in different depth and breadth. This naturally results in different typologies and categories of the intelligence. In the early 1900s, Charles Spearman found that “tests of mental ability were positively correlated” (Detterman, 2005). He introduced $g$ – the concept of general intelligence that underlies all intellectual tasks and mental abilities. The second factor he identified is $s$ – specific factor that is “related to whatever unique abilities a particular test required, so it differed from test to test” (ibid). In 1938, Louis Thurstone postulated that intelligence is a set of independent factors and these are equally important (compared to Spearman’s $g$). He identified seven primary mental abilities: verbal comprehension; verbal fluency; number, or arithmetic, ability; memory; perceptual speed; inductive reasoning; spatial visualization. Raymond Cattell and John Horn applied new methods and concluded that there are two kinds of general intelligence (some of the definition in the introduction reflect it). They distinguish between fluid and crystallized intelligences. While the fluid intelligence represents the biological basis, the crystallized one can increase during the human being’s
life and it represents the knowledge and skills obtained through learning and experience. If we had mentioned that crystallized intelligence increases during the life, then considering the fluid intelligence, it increases to adulthood and then declines due to aging process. The latest popular trends in the Intelligence theory present Howard Gardner and Sternberg. Stating that Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligence types is one of the latest is not totally right as it was introduced in 1983. Introduction of the originally seven intelligence types – linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, intrapersonal and interpersonal was later added and the eight intelligence was introduced in the late 1990s - the naturalist one. The ninth one, the spiritual one is under investigation. The theory was accepted and is still very popular but on the other hand there is a lot of critique of Gardner’s theory, especially about what can and what should not be called intelligence. Some psychologists suggested talking about aptitudes or talents rather than intelligences (e.g. Bruner).

The triarchic theory of intelligence was proposed by American psychologist Robert Sternberg in 1980s. He suggested three parts of intelligence: analytic (reasoning and solving), creative (up to now, it is impossible to measure creative intelligence) and last but not least, the practical intelligence (skills in everyday living).

In 1990s, Peter Salovey and John Mayer suggested that the emotional intelligence is a complementary type to the type of intelligence measured by IQ tests. Daniel Goleman “expanded the concept to include general social competence” (Detterman, 2005).

As one can see, psychologists study the intelligence and apply different approaches to test IQ. Modern intelligence test no longer compute scores using IQ formula – mental age/chronological age*100. Originally, the first IQ test was written to identify children who would have problems with formal education in France. Modern intelligence tests “give a score that reflects how far the person’s performance deviates from the average performance of others who are the same”.

3. The Aim of the Teaching Process

For effective teaching process to take place, not only the psychologist but the teachers as well should be aware who the students in the classroom are. For the teacher, it is an important information as one can help the students with not only providing the (encyclopedic) knowledge but by involving the students in the learning/teaching process using the advantage of knowing the type of intelligence (aptitude, talent), learner’s style and to help them with using learning strategies effectively (see Straková, 2003).

Here we should ask and answer the question – What is the aim of the educational process - to teach or to help the students to learn? To give them knowledge or also to influence their personalities? Discussing the definitions and the theories of intelligence, thus, it has been showed that the intelligence can be influenced by stimulating and motivating environment. Similarly, IQ is affected by schooling. Thus, the knowledge and skills gained at schools should help the students to develop thinking and reasoning.

“Many students could learn more effectively than they do now if they were taught in a way that better matched their patterns of abilities” (Sternberg, Grigorenko, 2004, p. 274). A lot of books are being published lately on how to teach children to learn, how to teach
and learn effectively at school, how to apply cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies in learning, how to make the students to think and not only to memorize and repeat the data and facts. We cannot expect that change comes immediately. We have to start with the pre-service teachers, to show them that it can be effective but they have to experience it. And then we can expect that they will try to apply it in their teaching practice.

“The question is not how smart people are but in what ways people are smart” (Gardner, in Traub, 1998). It can be argued that what Gardner discusses in his theory are not intelligences but we all realize that every person is unique and perceives the life and information that come in different ways. As Chen states “the goal of education is not to teach multiple intelligences, but to see them as tools to help achieve educational goals” (in McGuire, 2004). This should be the rule for all the teachers to think about the learner as about the unique human being that from his or her nature he/she wants to learn, to be creative and involved. In case the creative teacher wants his/her students to be creative, autonomous, using different strategies in learning process, he/she must try to present the material in a way that his/her student likes it. All the ideas seem to be natural, however, in practice, the teachers do not test their students’ intelligence types, learner’s styles. They do not discuss the students with the psychologists and thus, most of the teachers, most of us, based on our teacher’s belief, want all our learners to study in a way we are used to, or even the way we were taught.

4. Language Learning and Multiple Intelligences
There has been a vast body of research available language learning and multiple intelligences. The research on foreign-language learning ability (Grigorenko, Sternberg, & Ehrman, 2000; cited in Sternberg, 2002) reported that the scores on dynamic tests (where one learns at the time of test) “correlated more highly with a test of foreign-language learning ability (the Modern Language Aptitude Test – MLAT) than with a test of general ability. Scores also significantly predicted success in foreign-language classrooms at the U.S. Foreign Services Institute (FSI), an institute for teaching languages to foreign-service officers and military personnel.

In a foreign language teaching and learning process, the study skills are considered to be very important in a student’s life. This is quite clear from Sternberg and Grigorenko’s (2004: 275) claim that “When students think to learn, they also learn to think”. Thus, implementing learning strategies in the language learning, as well as the students’ cognizance of them, has its irreplaceable position in the learning/teaching process. This means that teaching needs individual approach and especially at the beginning of the schooling when students form their learning habits. It means that students should be presented various ways of work with text, words, etc. so they can find the way that works best for them. “Any concept, worth teaching, can be approached in at least five different ways that, roughly speaking, map onto the multiple intelligences” (Gardner, in Traub, 1998).

4.1 Task-based Approach
Language learning is often criticized for lack of real communication, abundance of controlled activities, rather than authentic activities or activities simulating real
communication. The origin of task-based learning is connected with Prabhu’s procedural syllabus in Bangalore project, where students were asked to solve problems e.g. by looking at a train timetable and discussing questions such as When does the Brindavan Express leave Madras. TBL understands tasks as activities, where the learner uses the target language for a communicative purpose (goal), in order to achieve an outcome. They are goal-oriented. The emphasis is on understanding and conveying meanings in order to complete the tasks successfully. All tasks should have an outcome (see Nunan, 2004; Willis, 2006).

Skehan (in Nunan, 2004: 4), drawing on a number of other writers, puts forward five key characteristics of a task:

1) meaning is primary
2) learners are not given other people’s meaning to regurgitate
3) there is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities
4) task completion has some priority
5) the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome”.

Prabhu classified the tasks, that he used in secondary school classes in Bangalore, into three categories:

1) **Information-gap activities**: involving a transfer of given information from one person to another, one form to another, or one place to another.

2) **Reasoning-gap activities**: involving the discovery of new information through inference, deduction, practical reasoning

3) **Opinion-gap activities**: involving the expression of personal preference or attitude as a response to a given situation” (Willis, 1996, p. 36)

The cycle applied in Task-based approach consists of three main stages. Pre-task (in which teacher introduces a topic and introduces the crucial vocabulary needed for task’s understanding. In the main part– Task cycle– students work on their task. They may work individually or in groups. They plan the output, the report on how they did the task and present it to the whole class. The third stage is Language focus where students discuss the vocabulary they needed and they practice the vocabulary and phrases they needed during preparing the report.

This makes language a means of communication and only in the final stage the language that was needed is discussed. Students can see the meaning and importance of learning it rather than accept it as a rotten language memorising. They perceive language learning as meaningful and useful.

### 4.2 Arts in Foreign Language Teaching

Foreign language teaching and Arts can complement each other. Picture description and picture stories are very common activities to practise speaking and/or writing. Watt (2004) names several positive aspects of art that might be advantageous in teaching. They are:

1. It is a form of communication.
2. It says something. It’s not just pretty.
3. It takes into account our senses.
4. It reflects society.
5. It gives meaning or new understanding to the world.
6. It begins inward and moves outward.
7. It is the spirit of the time.
8. It's about making statements.
9. We know it is art by the discussion it generates.
10. If it transmits a point or message, it is art.
11. We need to understand the context within which the art has emerged to understand it.
12. It makes you think.
13. It is open to interpretation.
14. Understanding modern art is like learning a new language, except there is no Berlitz course.
15. Contemporary art is the art of our times.

5. **Using Arts in Foreign Language Teaching: Author's Experience**

After providing all the necessary background, in this section of the paper, I would like to present an experience we had with the students.

**5.1 Background to the experiment**

We decided to work with Van Gogh’s work. He was a Dutch painter and representative of post impressionism. The first stage of the block of the lessons was focussed on the characteristics of the Impressionism and the period. Students could go through the paintings and find the common characteristics of impressionism. The pictures were hanging on the wall and teacher acted as a guide giving interactive lecture on selected painting (Monnet Water Lilly Pond, Houses of Parliament Westminster; Renoir Girl with a Hoop; Degas Dancers at The Bar). Students were presented basic presentation skills and thinking time techniques.

In the second stage, students had to prepare an interactive lecture about Van Gogh and Post-Impressionism. Students became the curators of the exhibition and they could choose set of pictures (the first set—to describe the period and characteristics of post-impressionism; the second one—to describe some moments of Van Gogh’s life – the period of friendship with Paul Gauguin).

**5.2 Selected Paintings (From 1888)**

The following paintings were considered for the study-
Bedroom in Arles, 1888
The night Café, 1888
Still Life: Vase with Twelve Sunflowers, 1888
Van Gogh's Chair, 1888

Or

**PAUL GAUGUIN AND VINCENT VAN GOGH**

Paul Gauguin's Armchair, 1888,
Paul Gauguin, The Painter of Sunflowers: Portrait of Vincent van Gogh, 1888,
Self-Portrait Dedicated to Paul Gauguin, 1888
Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear
The Yellow House, 1988
5.3 Tasks and activities

The students were challenged to start with brainstorming or listing about the feelings, emotions the paintings evoke as well as the objects they could see. They were also suggested to sort them and then to compare the paintings – to find the similarities and things in common, or to find differences. They should have decided how to hang the paintings and to prepare the commentaries. To be able to prepare commentaries, they were challenged to visit gallery websites and to read (or listen) to the information provided. To find more facts, they were recommended to visit the libraries and find more info about the life of painters and period they lived in. In the final stage, the vocabulary, dealing with painting techniques, was practised focusing on emotions, vocabulary, expressing feelings and attitudes as well as past tenses.

Students gave us a positive feedback especially about the creativity aspect (even though some of them expressed they would be more happy selecting paintings on their own). They also mentioned that they would like to prepare a handout (treasure hunt) as it is used to be in big galleries and museum in abroad (students recently visited London and National gallery). That was really motivating for me as a teacher as they wanted to develop the activity and topic further.

5.4 Results

From the teacher’s perspective, based on this experiment, I may claim that students were cooperative and collaborative. We believe that this task especially allowed different people to present their skills and abilities to contribute to common output. Different types of activities allowed different multiple types of intelligences to participate in reaching the common mutual aim.

Through the tasks and activities, Linguistic and intrapersonal students could find the data whereas logical-mathematical type students could find the similarities and differences in paintings, and could sort them according to some criteria. The spatial could decide how to arrange them on the wall whereas the bodily-kinaesthetic could hang the paintings, visit the library, copy the necessary material. The musical students could find the appropriate music that would be in harmony with the paintings and interpersonal students could prepare the interactions for the guide and visitors. These are just minor task, however, they all contributed in almost all tasks, but they were the leader in those particular tasks.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, task-based approach, similarly as project work, allows students to be creative and to find language they need. The language, in fact, becomes the means of communication and activity becomes meaningful. Another advantage is that students of different intelligence types can find their position within a group and have the feeling of being important and significant in a group. This also contributes to intrinsic motivation which later reflects in students’ attitudes towards language learning. This was clear from the experiment using Arts in foreign language teaching. The author also humbly accepts that the article did not have an ambition to bring relevant data on efficacy of using task based approach or arts in language learning, but rather to share a positive experience from students’ activity.
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Ivana Cimermanová holds PhD and works at the Department of English and Literature at the Faculty of Arts, Prešov University in Prešov, Slovakia. She received her Ph.D. in Educational Technology from Constantine, the Philosopher University in Slovakia. Her thesis topic was using technologies in language teaching, which remains the major focus of her research. She is also an author of number of articles, studies and textbooks.
Works Cited: