

USING BODY-KINAESTHETIC ACTIVITIES IN THE READING CLASSROOM

O Uso de Atividades Cinestésicas em Aula de Leitura

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyze the reactions of a group studying English towards the application of activities involving kinaesthetics in reading classes. This proposal is based on the belief that the use of such activities will involve more action in the reading classes and consequently motivate the group of students. In this way, the issue of promoting the learning process by involving more action in the reading classes will be developed by focusing on the aspect of motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Lightbown & Spada, 2000) and on the development of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993). The results indicate that the group investigated presented a positive reaction to the activities proposed.

Key-words: *reading; motivation; multiple intelligences; English.*

Resumo

Este estudo analisa as reações de um grupo de alunos de língua inglesa quanto ao uso de atividades cinestésicas em aulas de leitura, baseado na expectativa de que aulas de leitura envolvendo atividades mais dinâmicas serão mais motivantes para os alunos. Para atingir tal objetivo, este estudo estará embasado nas questões de motivação discutidas por Gardner & Lambert (1972) e Lightbown & Spada (2000) e também no desenvolvimento de inteligências múltiplas apresentadas por Gardner (1993). Os resultados indicam que o grupo pesquisado reagiu positivamente às atividades propostas.

Palavras-chave: *leitura; motivação; inteligências múltiplas; inglês.*

1. Introducing more action to reading classes

Reading has been largely discussed in terms of its concepts, processes and models. However, when transposed to the classroom, it is still difficult for the teacher to implement active reading classes. Conventionally we would say that the act of reading itself is, in terms of body movement, viewing from the outside, necessarily static, that is, readers most of the times are in a still position to be, at least, able to fix their eyes on the printed page. However, this state of stillness, which usually does not last long, can sometimes generate some difficulty in concentrating on reading, and is related to a dynamics that our bodies are used to performing every minute of our lives. For instance, we are constantly changing positions: standing up, sitting down, stretching, arms up and down, moving our heads, scratching, sneezing, coughing, eating.

Therefore, for those who are developing habits for reading (students in formal classes, for example), there is a need for the introduction of reading classes that are different from the academic traditional ones. Considering that usually classes concentrate on the development of intelligence of restricted areas, logic and linguistics, this study proposes the discussion of issues like motivation and multiple intelligence for the investigation and testing of the use of multiple intelligences in a group of undergraduate students.

2. Motivation in the process of a second language

A high percentage of the students' success in language learning is due to motivation. Garner & Lambert (1972) say that success in language acquisition would neither be restricted to a biological ability nor to a profile of abilities or aptitudes developed differently in students. As social psychologists, they see the process as a sum of intellectual capacity, language attitude and the student's attitudes to the target language group, to the extent of self-identification to the behavior, language and nonlinguistic aspects of that group. Therefore, motivation would be a result of both the students' attitudes and readiness to the

process. The authors have described language success involving an integrative motivation or/and an instrumental motivation. The former is concerned with the learner who wishes to identify with another ethnolinguistic group by reflecting his/her interest in the people and target culture, and in the latter, the learner is motivated to learn a second language for utilitarian purposes, that is, for practical value.

Cook (1997) brings into discussion the sort of motivation that is good for second language learning. She states that among a series of studies involving motivation, Dornyei (1990) has proposed that instrumental motivation, which is related to the future careers of the students, has showed significant results, while integrative motivation developed as the learners became more acquainted with the language.

However, it still seems difficult to say exactly how it operates, as Lightbown & Spada (2000) claim. Besides factors like students' communicative needs and their attitudes towards the target language, which play important roles in the process, the authors also argue that factors such as activities appropriate to students' age, interests, cultural backgrounds, and situations in which students experience success seem to generate motivation to learning.

Therefore, having discussed some of the issues involved in motivation to learn a language, this paper proposes to find alternative situations to motivate students to learn a language. This piece of research proposes that such motivation in learning can be sought by applying multiple intelligences to reading skills, which will be described below.

3. Using the multiple intelligence concept as a motivation trigger in the language classroom

Traditionally, psychology has defined intelligence as both a logical/mathematical ability and a linguistic competence. However, Gardner (1993) broadened the concept of intelligence by introducing the idea of multiple intelligences. These intelligences refer to the ability of solving problems or elaborating products that are important to a specific environment or cultural community. He describes seven different

types of intelligences that usually operate in combinations, rather than as an isolated fashion. They are based on cognition, the science of knowledge and neurosciences, with emphasis on the functionality of different areas of the brain in relation to learning. In other words, the left hemisphere of the brain processes analytically, while the right hemisphere would respond to music, art and spatial relationships. In this respect, these intelligences are classified as musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, logical/mathematical, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Musical intelligence habitually regards to the ability to respond to music stimuli easily and with satisfaction, i.e., the ability to play music. Bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence refers to the ability to use the body as a means of expression, like dancing or playing sports. Logical/mathematical intelligence is described as the ability to work with figures, like reasoning, calculating, evaluating and working with pro-solution situations. Linguistic intelligence is concerned with the interest in words and the ability to use language for expression. Spatial intelligence is defined as the ability to form mental maps of the spatial world, like visualizing objects from different angles, for example. One last important point to be raised concerns the personal realm, about which Gardner takes the position that people can have interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence. The former is defined as the ability to identify and interact with the different moods of other people, and the latter is explained as the capacity of easily accessing people's feelings and from them understanding their behavior.

Parallel to this discussion, Fletcher (2000) describes some activities for the classroom to illustrate the intelligences classified by Gardner: *musical*, use a CD in class; *bodily-kinaesthetic*, use mime to explain a procedure; *logical/mathematical*, categorize a group of concepts; *linguistic*, conduct a story-telling activity; *spatial*, rearrange the layout of a page from a poster; *interpersonal*, do activities that require the capacity to work with different temperaments and moods; and finally, *intrapersonal*, ask students about their own feelings so that they can understand and guide their own behavior in class. Fletcher, in his studies, also exploits the learning styles in the classroom. They are: 1) visual style, which refers to the use of written language or in picture form; 2)

auditory learning style, which refers to learners who are able to hear clear sounds, like voices, music or natural sounds; 3) kinaesthetic, defined as the learning style in which the learners need to physically respond to a task; and finally 4) olfactory (the smell) or gustatory (taste) systems, which can also have an impact on our brains in a positive or negative manner.

Therefore, based on the quest of having more motivated students in reading classes, this study proposes to verify the reaction of a group of undergraduate students learning English towards the use of multiple intelligences, as will be described below.

4. The experiment

4.1. The subjects

A group of 19 Brazilian undergraduate students, taking evening classes in 2002, studying business English, constitute the subjects of this research. Bearing in mind these characteristics, this study carried out a series of three reading experimental classes.

4.2. Procedures

Considering the group's reading preferences, as described by Sardo and Esher (2001), who stated that interesting topics, concise and clear texts make the reading class more interesting, a selection of texts was made. In order to reach the objective of this research, each class tried to verify the students' reactions towards specific procedures for reading, following traditional reading classes procedures, regarding activities involving logic and linguistics, and non-traditional reading classes procedures, referring to the use of the intelligences proposed by Gardner (1993).

4.3. Analysis

In the first reading class, a traditional one, the procedure adopted was a pre-reading speaking activity, and then an activity of reading followed by comprehension exercises. The topic of the text was the bar code system in products. The focus was on linguistic intelligence, as it was testing solely language understanding of a text, and on the visual learning style, because it was presented on a printed page. After that, the second class started with a contextualization led by the teacher, introducing the topic of the text, which was mass marketing and famous brands. In the next step, students read the text, watched a video tape related to the topic and worked in groups as a follow-up activity, based on the musical and interpersonal intelligences, and on the visual and auditory learning style. The following class, the third reading class, started with a kinaesthetic activity. The teacher brought some objects to the class related to the topic of the text. The students had to handle the objects, to exchange them among the groups and later on to discuss some questions. The topic of the text was culture and the objects were a French perfume, a box of Chinese tea, an American mug, a Brazilian cup of coffee, an Italian scarf, among others. Then, students read the text and did some comprehension exercises. The point here was to exploit the use of the bodily-kinaesthetic and interpersonal intelligences and the kinaesthetic and olfactory leaning style (needless to say, all the classes emphasized the use of the linguistic intelligence). The next section presents the data collected and the analysis.

5. Data analysis

In order to verify students' choices and preferences regarding the three reading classes, a questionnaire was applied. Initially, students were asked which of the three texts read in class was the most motivating. According to their answers, 73.68 per cent of them preferred reading activities used with text 3, applied in the third class, and 26.31 per cent favored the activities used with text 2, applied in the second class, as presented in the chart below:

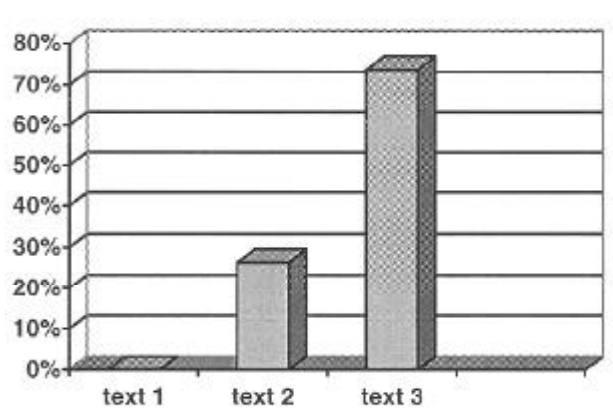


Chart 1- Relationship between the texts and students' motivation

From the percentages presented above, it can be seen that text 3 was the most interesting.

In question number 2, students were also asked which reading class seemed more interesting,. 68.42 percent of the students said they liked the third class the most, whereas 21.05 per cent preferred the second reading class and 10.52 per cent preferred the first class. As it can be seen, most of the students enjoyed class 3, involving kinaesthetics, while class 2, involving visual and auditory intelligence was interesting for fewer students and class 1, using basically linguistic intelligence was favored by even fewer students.

In question 3, students were asked to rank eight techniques they use for a better understanding and recall of the texts' ideas. This study adopted the definition of reading as an interactive process in which the learner uses both bottom-up and top-down processes to understand the text (Stanovich, 1980). The analysis of the ranking, which will be presented below, shows the most and least used techniques by the students.

For the most used technique, 47.36 per cent of the students chose *using videos and pictures*. 26.31 per cent ranked as their favorite technique *handling objects* related to the topic/word studied, and 2 students (10.52 per cent) pointed out *oral exercises in pairs* as the favorite

ones for a better comprehension. For the other alternatives, 5.26 per cent of the students chose *individual written exercise*, 5.26 per cent of the students ranked *oral exercise in groups* as the most used and 5.26 per cent of the students preferred *drama* other than the other possibilities. According to the data, a significant number of students use visual techniques, a smaller number of them use kinaesthetics, and few of them use linguistic techniques.

On the other extreme of the ranking, students pointed out the least used techniques for a better comprehension. 36.84 per cent of the students said that the use of *analogy to smells* was not often used, 26.31 per cent of the students said that *drama* was also not often used, and 21.05 per cent of the students said that *oral exercises to the whole group* was not very often used either. 5.26 per cent of the students ranked *written individual exercises* as the least used technique, 5.26 per cent of the students chose *oral exercises in pairs* as the least used and 5.26 per cent of the students said *handling objects* was not preferred as a technique for memorization, as presented below:

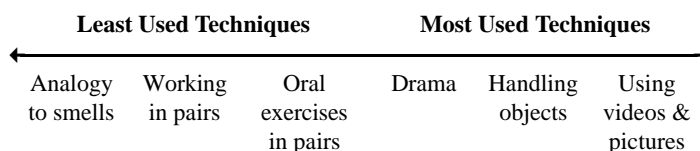


Figure 1 - Techniques students use more or less often

From the data shown above, it is possible to observe that techniques involving action were the most used, corroborating the initial proposal of this study, which claims that active reading classes can be motivating.

In question 4, students had to say what other techniques they use for a better comprehension of ideas in texts, besides the ones discussed in question 3: 21.05 per cent of the students stated that they either make their own dictionary or check words in the dictionary, 15.78 per cent said that they read books and articles in order to learn new words, 10.52 per cent of the students stated that they listen to songs,

10.52 per cent said they play games and make posters and put them around the house, and 10.52 per cent said that they read aloud in a “learn by heart” technique. This means that students read the text several times until they think they have understood it. One student (5.26 per cent) said that she records the text with her own voice and listens to it afterwards. Another student (5.26 per cent) said that she makes comparisons between English and German, as the latter is her second language. The equivalent of 21.05 per cent of the students stated that they do not use any other technique to improve their understanding and recall, but would like to know more about techniques including oral exercises, the handling of objects, and songs. As it can be seen, the percentages vary, presenting the use of the dictionary as a preference, but it seems that students still have not developed many techniques for learning more about the language.

In question 5, the questionnaire also investigated what other factors may have contributed to a more effective comprehension of the ideas in the text. Results revealed that 42.10 per cent of the students interviewed said that more exercises with objects, pictures and videos would have contributed to a more effective comprehension. Another 26.31 per cent of the students stated that they considered more writing activities as well as careful study of new words necessary. The remaining 31.56 per cent of the students belong to a group that had some other ideas about the activity: 5.26 per cent of them said that reading other books would have been convenient, 5.26 per cent said that activities involving creativity could have contributed, 5.26 per cent stated individual activities would be a good idea, 5.26 per cent said that, in general, all the activities developed in class were fine, 5.26 per cent commented that a better interpersonal relationship in class among students of different levels of proficiency could have helped, and 5.26 per cent did not answer the question. The graphic that follows presents students’ preferences:

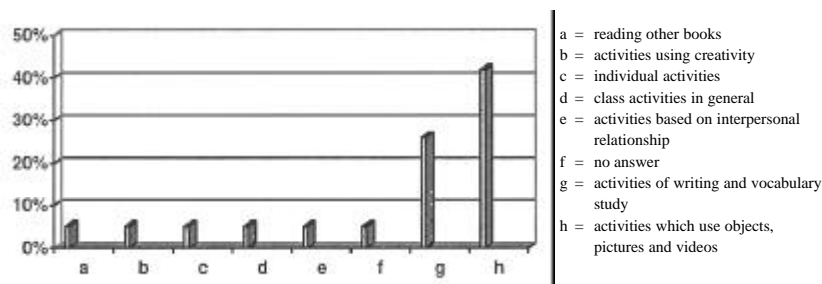


Chart 2 - Preferred activities for a more effective learning

In the chart above, one can notice that students show the need of having more input from videos, pictures, objects and books as well as the need for a more formal study of the language.

Students were also asked about the factors which may have disturbed them in these reading classes in question 6: 52.63 per cent of the students claimed that the text may have been uninteresting because it presented too many new words and, therefore, they felt they did not know the required vocabulary for reading it, 15.78 per cent of the students commented on the lack of necessary attention, as well as the noise made by the other students in class. A further problem, raised by 10.52 per cent of the students, was the impossibility of using the dictionary. In addition, the video activity, which originally was meant to help with the reading activity, has probably overloaded students' understanding due to the amount of information presented, according to 5.26 per cent of the students. Another 5.26 per cent said that they missed the application of the individual written exercise, and 5.26 per cent stated that their difficulties diminished with the teacher's help in contextualizing the topics before reading the text. Finally, 5.26 per cent of the students interviewed did not answer this question.

6. Final remarks

From the analysis of the students' profile, which shows their reading preferences concerning topics for reading, as well as topics and activities to accompany reading, it was possible to prepare activities

involving multiple intelligences and test their reactions to them, which constituted the aim of this research paper. From this experiment, we could observe that most students appreciated activities characterized as kinaesthetic.

However, despite the fact that students enjoyed the activities, a lot still needs to be done in our reading classes. From our observation of the classes as well as from the percentages presented in the discussion section, reading combined with active activities were positively accepted by the group. Besides, there is also the possibility of further application of activities involving kinaesthetics. A variety of activities can be implemented based on the application of multiple intelligences, depending on both the teacher's creativity and the profile of the students involved in the activity.

Another particularly crucial aspect is that the proposal for more active activities involving reading helped to motivate students, especially the evening group under analyses. Very often, it is difficult to maintain their attention because most of them work all day long and in the evening they go to the university. Class 3, which offered activities involving handling objects, was pointed out as one of the most motivating classes. One explanation to the success of this class may be the fact that, the moment students were asked to perform some physical actions in class, a greater amount of oxygen was supplied to the students' brain, helping in the concentration to the activity, as well as bursting a typical evening feeling of lethargy (Fletcher, 2000). Interestingly enough, the power of media means is still very strong, considering that students often referred to the use of video as the most motivating activity among the group.

To conclude, it is our expectation that this study will contribute to change the view of a "static" reading classroom by introducing kinaesthetic activities. The insertion of these procedures, however, may sound strange to some teachers/instructors, practitioners of traditional approaches to reading; on the other hand, it may seem even simple to others who, at first glance, may not understand these activities very clearly. The greatest contribution, though, we assume, is the aim of elaborating reading classes involving a variety of possibilities, exploring new senses that are very often left aside as students' academic life progresses. As Fletcher (2000: 64) says, "we start life as 'right hemisphere' dominant learners – rhythm, songs, bright colors, patterns

intuition provide us with a stream of stimuli. Time goes on, and the input pendulum swings more towards 'left-hemisphere' approaches." Such evidences may encourage teachers to motivate their students to find alternative ways to learn a foreign language and, at the same time, they may provoke learning from different perspectives by the use of multiple intelligences.

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