

DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE TEACHING

ACTIVE AND MULTI-SENSORY LEARNING

I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.
(Confucius)

What is multi-sensory learning?

All of us learn through all our senses. Some of us learn better through one sense than another. Some pupils learn best through visual approaches; others through auditory approaches; yet others through a combination of the two.

For some pupils the written word is not an optional extra but an integral part of their learning process. Many pupils enjoy work which involves an active, physical response and learn well where such methods are employed. One of the advantages of using visual, audio and tactile materials to support textual ones is that the resulting mixture of styles means that teaching will be appropriate for a wider range of learners. It's not all that difficult, just look at what you're already doing, see what senses are already being used, see how the task could be extended to use at least one other sense too. Try to involve all the senses from time to time. Some examples:

Sight text, pictures, graphics

Sound listening to teacher and others, to recordings, videos; talking, shouting, whispering, singing, rhymes, story-telling, clapping rhythmically to indicate syllabic stress, etc.

Touch handling objects, making things, describing shapes, gesturing, using computer keyboard, etc.)

Taste sampling food and drink, 'savouring the language' (articulation? intonation)

Action manual and physical activity; games involving manipulating objects or moving about.

Why should we provide multi-sensory learning opportunities?

We need to accommodate different learning styles; not everyone learns best in the same way.

- In the past, language too often just meant text, and increasingly learners are finding text difficult and de-motivating.
- Research tells us that just telling someone something is not the most efficient way of getting them to learn it.
- For learners with special needs, understanding of concepts depends on experience rather than on 'telling'.
- Pictures provide a 'peg' to hang language on and as an aid to memory and recall.
- Frequent change of activity prevents boredom, sustains interest.
- Learners need lots of practice in manipulating the elements of the language (consolidation) before attempting to use the language to speak, listen, read or write.

Learners' need for consolidation

The most common reason for failure to progress in second language learning is lack of opportunity for consolidation. Insufficient familiarity with core material makes it impossible for a pupil to perform as desired and quickly results in lack of confidence, often leading to lack of motivation and behavioural problems. It is better to offer learners half a dozen two-minute activities which will allow them to consolidate what they have learned rather than one ten-minute activity which may not sustain their attention. The keys to success are: small steps, frequent repetition, and a wide variety of consolidation activities before productive use is expected.

Games are particularly useful in mixed ability classes since they are essentially repetitive in nature - thus aiding consolidation of language recently presented by the teacher. Their randomness and unpredictability help to maintain motivation and to sustain the interest of quicker pupils. However, it is important to ensure that all the generic language (rules, instructions etc.) is clearly understood and can be used by all pupils. Unless learners are confident of their ability to use the games-specific vocabulary they will be tempted to stop playing the game or to revert to using English.

Some pupils find face-to-face communication very difficult and do not like to be the centre of attention. Using games in language work helps to divert attention away from the individual to the materials being used and this can allow pupils to participate who would otherwise be too self-conscious to do so.

What materials can I use?

Almost anything that learners can handle can be used to engage and motivate them. Some examples:

Puppets can be bought or made inexpensively, and can be used with learners of all ages provided that their 'street cred' is respected: e.g. by asking them to make up plays and dialogues that can be used to teach younger learners. Puppets can:

- carry the fiction that they speak only the language that is being learned;
- can be blamed for mistakes;
- provide a focus of attention which is appreciated by learners who are self-conscious and reluctant to speak, or those who find it difficult to make eye-contact.

Picture cards can be used in a number of ways:

- singly, in packs, in selected groupings, in sequences;
- in combination with other elements, such as dice, spinners, text to provide practice with simple or more complex linguistic structures;
- to stimulate various activities: speaking, listening, reading, writing, mime etc.;
- to provide work for individuals, groups or the whole class.

Photocopiable visuals can be used instead of (or to supplement) the cards, in any of the ways listed above. In addition, they can be:

- copied in whole sheets to serve as boards for games;
- copied, cut, and used in new combinations for games of the teacher's or pupils' devising;
- used to make a picture dictionary; this will both create a record work done and serve as a source of reference and revision;
- enlarged for use as flashcards, worksheets, aides-mémoire, wall displays, etc;

- copied onto acetate for use with the OHP;
- provide a bank of visual material that can be used to illustrate a wide range of textual products.

Dice and spinners and other 'randomisers' can be used:

- to add an element of unpredictability to tasks;
- on their own, individually, to prompt certain linguistic responses;
- in combination with one another, to prompt more complex structures;
- in conjunction with cards or photocopied visuals.

Stile Trays can be used in conjunction with sheets of 12 visuals:

- to encourage group or independent learning;
- to teach the skills of self-assessment;
- as a challenge, to see who complete the most quickly.

Language Master systems and cards can be customised to provide a source of practice and revision of all the core vocabulary for a unit of work. They can:

- provide a model of correct pronunciation and/or spelling;
- provide, on one card, pictorial, audio and textual support for learning;
- provide practice in listening, reading and speaking
- encourage independent learning and self assessment.

ICT And, of course, there are many other ways to make learning more active and multi-sensory using computers software that is rich in visual, auditory, animated, interactive and randomised approaches...