

Multiple Intelligences: Creatively Engaging Middle School Students in the Foreign Language Classroom.

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The goal of teaching should be to inspire a student to continue to enjoy learning and to eventually connect this inspiration to proficiency in the subject. The middle school student, by his or her nature is particularly susceptible to inspiration. He or she learns best not only when he feels successful and comfortable, but when the topic is absorbed with as little awareness of effort as possible. Why it then that some bemoan the years is spent learning a foreign language and others go on to study several languages? Is it because of a higher or lower IQ score? Or is it because the way the material is being presented does or does not match the way that particular student thinks? How much influence can a teacher have on the plodding or enthusiastic learner?

In his book, *Frames of Mind*, Howard Gardener challenges the idea that there is only one intelligence. His theory is that there are seven intelligences: Bodily-Kinesthetic, Spatial, Musical, Logical-Mathematical, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal and Linguistic. In his second volume, *Intelligence Reframed*, Gardner adds three additional intelligences. Naturalist, Spiritual and Existentialist. All students possess different combinations of strengths. Each student learns best when his or her strengths are targeted. In this manner, every student feels successful and engaged in the process of foreign language learning.

When teaching a foreign language communication function, the four skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing must be addressed, all within the cultural context of the target language. In order to engage all students it is important to conduct activities which target each intelligence. The following defines each intelligence, illustrates sample activities which encourage the student to access these strengths and how the activity focuses on one or more of the four skills. While French has been used to illustrate, the activities are for the teaching of any foreign language.

Bodily- Kinesthetic Intelligence

Strength in Bodily Kinesthetic Intelligence can be observed in those who use their whole bodies to interpret a skill, or who manipulate objects skillfully. Movement, dance or simply activities which get students out of their seats and interacting with a communication function appeal to the bodily-kinesthetic learner.

Adjective agreement for beginners: In pairs have students find four adults in the school building, two male and two female. Tell them that

they have to be back in ten minutes. They will write a sentence describing each adult:

Monsieur Smith est brun.

Madame Smith est blonde.

When they return to class, each student will read one of their sentences aloud. When all have read, ask the students if they remember each others' descriptions by asking the group "*Monsieur Smith est blond ou brun?*" The students are moving around to accomplish this activity. They are using the writing, listening, speaking and reading communication skills around this function.

Forming questions: Divide students into groups of four. Hand each group an envelope with five sets of cards in red, green yellow and blue. On each card they should write:

yellow—question word (*Où*)

green --- "*est-ce qu'(e)*"

red—subject (*tu*)

blue—verb in correct form (*vas*)?

When this is accomplished, they should hand the envelope with the cards to the group next to them in a clockwise fashion. All groups have two minutes to form all five sentences with the cards.

In addition to having spoken and written together in the target language, the students are reading to manipulate the cards to form correct questions.

Spatial Intelligence

Forming likenesses of what one sees or experiences, having a strong visual memory, and the ability to form pictures in one's mind (some call it daydreaming!) are characteristics of those learners with a strong spatial intelligence. Students may enjoy drawing and creating images of a phrase or vocabulary concept or they may respond to colorful visuals:

Expressions with "*avoir*": Have students bring in, print out or draw pictures of an expression with the verb "*avoir*". Make a poster with the picture illustrating it with the expression in a sentence. For example "*Il a froid parcequ'il n'a pas de blouson*".

Using their Spatial Intelligence, students are creating their own interpretation of an expression and targeting the reading and writing skill.

Demonstrative adjectives: Each student receives a card with a picture of a piece of clothing. The student holds up the card and says "*Regardez ce pull (or cette veste, ces chaussures, cet imper)!*" , applying the rule for demonstrative adjectives. After all students have spoken, they pass the card to another student and resume the exercise.

Students are activating their Spatial Intelligence through the use of visuals and targeting the speaking skill.

Musical Intelligence

Noted as the ability to reproduce sounds with an awareness of the patterns of rhythm, pitch and tone, students with a high Musical Intelligence have an ability to facilitate their learning with patterns set to music. These chants, or songs may be devised for the students but many enjoy creating their own. The teacher may offer an extra credit challenge to have a student or group put together a chant, cheer or song to emphasize a particular communication function:

Verb songs: The verb “*être*” can be taught by singing it along the theme song to the television show “Barney”, the verb “*aller*” can be sung to “High Ho” from the movie “Snow White”!

Cheers: Two enterprising students put together a cheer to reinforce prepositions. Another pair came up with a “Possessive Adjective Cheer” to the beat of “Go! Fight! Win!

One can devise songs to teach colors, days of the week, or any other vocabulary and grammar functions. Students are using their musical intelligence as mnemonic devices to memorize grammar rules, and while verbalizing are emphasizing the speaking of a communication function.

Logical-Mathematical Intelligence

A strong Logical-Mathematical Intelligence indicates the ability to find patterns, see connections, and solve problems. Organizing and categorizing activities may be particularly successful with these students:

Categories: List ten items one would need on a camping trip. Which French words are cognates in English?

Puzzles: Make up a crossword puzzle in which conjugated verb forms that logically complete a sentence are the correct answers.

Other activities might include word searches (put together by the student or the teacher), scrambled vocabulary words, “hangman”, word Bingo, etc.

The students are engaging the reading and writing communication skills when solving or devising puzzles. When they are working with each other on these activities they are using the speaking and listening communication skills.

Intrapersonal Intelligence

Strength in Intrapersonal Intelligence is the ability to recognize the complexity of one’s own feelings, and use this understanding to guide

one's behavior. Students may use their understanding of a communication function and attempt to create similar statements on their own. They may be encouraged to take their knowledge a step beyond what has been taught.

Journal writing: Journals may be started even at the earliest level. Beginners may be able to write their birthdays and that of two friends or family members. They may indicate the season in which they were born and the weather during that season. As students progress, they may write guided compositions in the target language by answering questions related to a vocabulary or grammar topic: "What did you wear to the party you attended last Saturday?" "Did you invite a friend?", reinforces clothing vocabulary and the past tense through the reading and writing skills. The intrapersonal intelligence is accessed through the students' elaboration of his or her own activities and feelings.

My Ideal: Making a poster of an ideal is a way a student's feelings can be used to practice vocabulary. Labeled pictures of "My Dream House" "Clothing I'd like to Wear", "Places I'd like to Visit" personalize new words, while using the reading and writing communication skills.

Interpersonal Intelligence

Interpersonal Intelligence is evidenced by a facility in communicating both verbally and non-verbally with others. Students with high interpersonal skills "pick up" on clues from others, and express themselves well. They are particularly able to work cooperatively with one or more students.

Pairs Check:¹ For tasks for where there is only one right answer, Pairs Check is a very helpful activity. Student A observes and coaches Student B through the first two items of an exercise, and provides immediate feedback. The role are reversed until the task has been accomplished. Verb conjugations, textbook exercises, true/false questions, identifying pictures, are just some of the uses for Pairs Check. The immediate feedback reinforces the interpersonal skill as students are engaging in the speaking, reading, listening and writing skills according to the task assigned.

Interviews: Students may be asked to interview others in the target language on a particular topic: "What pets do you have?" "At what time do you wake up?" and record the answers. The class may analyze these answers and find differences and commonalities in the class. Students are accessing the speaking, listening, reading and writing skills with this activity while gathering and synthesizing information from each other

A highly successful project is one with a fashion or clothing theme. Students are to interview others to find a common trend among two or more groups at their school(boys and girls, different age groups, students and teachers, etc.) The report back may be in the form of a video produc-

tion, a magazine article with photos of their own making, a fashion show, etc.

Students are working with other students to gather, synthesize and report information. The information they are gathering involves discovering others' personal tastes and feelings. They are using their interpersonal intelligence while speaking, reading and writing about this topic.

Linguistic Intelligence

This intelligence is the characteristic of the traditional "good student". He or she is able to memorize communication functions by reading, speaking, writing or listening. This student traditionally does well on tests.

Many worksheet and textbook activities target the learner high in linguistic intelligence. Fill-in sentences, matching exercises, substitution drills, pronunciation exercises, scrambled sentences, all activate this intelligence by helping the learner memorize the targeted information.

Any time the target language is actively used, a student must engage linguistic intelligence. Tools for activating the target language are: having students write their own dialogues according to a topic, memorize them and present them to the class. The memorization of poems, phrases and rhymes help students comprehend the linguistic patterns and keep them "filed away" for future reference. Students reinforce their speaking, reading and writing communication skills through these exercises.

Spiritual Intelligence

With respect to Gardner's more recent work, the intelligence that seems to be most appropriate for foreign language learning is the Spiritual Intelligence. He defines those with a keen spiritual intelligence to be able to be curious about "the nature of our relationship to the wider world, and to beings who lie beyond our comprehension".

The study of the culture in which the target language is spoken can appeal to students with a high Spiritual Intelligence. Cultural activities can be generated at the earliest level.

Flags of French.: Students research the flag of an assigned French-speaking country, draw it, color in the country on a small map of the continent where the country is located. They make a small poster with this material which can be displayed in the classroom. Students should access their speaking, reading and writing skills by learning the correct name (if different from English) for the country, and its pronunciation in French.

Foreign Films: There are many age-appropriate subtitled films that can be shown to enable students to understand the target culture in a modern or more classical period. These films may be borrowed from the library or

purchased through the many distributors. Students will be reinforcing their listening skills with these activities

Holidays: Children may enjoy making masks for *Mardi Gras*, sharing a *Bûche de Noël* at Christmas. They are learning the names and pronunciation of these holidays while practicing their speaking skills.

Current Events: Students can create a bulletin board with news articles concerning countries where French is spoken. For each article contributed, a student may be credited with a certain amount of points toward his or her final grade.

Literature: While the early foreign language learner cannot be expected to understand lengthy passages, students enjoy beginning with Nursery Rhymes and working up to short poems. A particular favorite is “*Déjeuner du Matin*” by Jacques Prévert which enacts a single emotional scene, is written in the passé tense, and is easily memorized and acted out by students. Students are reinforcing their reading and speaking skills during this activity.

Naturalist Intelligence

Defined by Gardner as exhibited by individuals who learn best by categorizing information and recognizing information according to categories, the purest form of the Naturalist Intelligence is related to the natural environment. One can apply this intelligence to Foreign Language Learning by recognizing students who learn best when information is organized in a consistent form. One may suggest that this is the way to teach the “Nuts and Bolts” of the language before moving on to the applications.

Graphic Organizers: Verb charts are the same so as to show the difference in conjugations. Vocabulary is organized by writing masculine nouns on the left and feminine nouns on the right sides of a page so that a student may visualize it later. New vocabulary can be listed in alphabetical order. Verbs of motion are listed by placing them around a building (to go in, to stay, to pass by, to go out, to return, etc) and cued by asking “Is it a building verb?” and eliciting the correct application of the rule for the past tense with verbs of motion. Anything that groups a new topic into a category engages the student with a high Naturalist Intelligence. The communication skills utilized will, of course, depend on the activity used to organize the function being taught.

Existentialist Intelligence

Gardner explains the Existentialist Intelligence as “having a concern with ‘ultimate’ issues”,² such as one’s place in the cosmos, or one’s feeling about humankind. It is hard to imagine targeting a ten-year old’s Existential Intelligence until one considers the “Why?” of studying a foreign language.

When visiting the fourth grade (nine years old) classes in the Spring before they are making their language selection that they will study for at least six years—and possibly eight, it is apparent that many students know in their hearts which language they would like to pursue. I help them crystallize this choice by highlighting that: a) no language is “easier”, b) no language is “more useful” and that c) the choice is personal, not based on which language their best friend might choose (I don’t tell them that the best friend might change!). Most students follow their hearts, and being happy with their choice are more successful with their studies. At such a young age, they might find it difficult to verbalize why they make a certain choice, but something in their personalities has led them in a certain direction.

Although foreign language study is rarely optional in the United States, students with a high Existentialist Intelligence no more question the requirement than they would that of math or science. Some have never ventured outside their home state, but they are enthusiastic about their study. They understand that the members of the world are linked by language and that communication with and understanding of other groups is paramount to the smooth functioning of humanity. Such insight carries over into a students’ engagement in the foreign language classroom.

Pen-Pals: To encourage on a young person’s existential intelligence one might organize pen-pals with children in another country where the target language is spoken so that they may exchange thoughts on the differences and similarities of their daily lives. In addition, they will be drawing on their reading and writing communication skills.

Educational media: Younger students enjoy vignettes about the lives of children from other countries. There is a wealth of videos, and educational publications that encourage children’s existential intelligence by targeting this aspect of foreign language learning. They are written in simple language so that the student may use listening and reading skills while enjoying the story.

Conclusion

When I began my career as a teacher, over twenty years ago, I knew about techniques useful in the instruction of foreign language. What I did not understand is why some students were more motivated than others to be successful, given that I teach in a rather homogeneous school. As my “bag of tricks” grew with my experience, I realized that some activities were more well-received by certain students, but if I varied my activities on a topic, all students would eventually grasp it.

Upon reading Gardiner’s work, I began to understand the theory of Multiple Intelligences and that if I used activities which target each Intelligence, all my students would have the chance to feel successful. I began to set up a file to remind myself of the Intelligence strengths of each

student. It involved the distribution of a short questionnaire to the students and by my own observations as I got to know them.

I further realized that many activities can target two or more Intelligences at the same time. For example, a song can be both Musical and Bodily-Kinesthetic, if gestures are included.

Most importantly, I agreed with Gardiner that all of my students have all of the Intelligences, but vary in the strengths of each intelligence. It is my job as their teacher to encourage the development of each Intelligence to its maximum possible level. To the extent possible I must create an environment where students feel comfortable and successful so as to inspire them to pursue proficiency in foreign language.

Notes

¹ Mimi Met "Using Cooperative Learning to Strengthen Your Foreign Language Instruction", *Institute for Educational Development* (1992), 61

² Howard Gardiner, *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century*. (New York, New York :Basic Books 1999), 60

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