

Young Learners: activities for all their intelligences

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Classroom activities should be as varied as possible to reflect the different ways children learn and remember, i.e. to tap into their multiple intelligences. According to Howard Gardner (1983), multiple intelligences are seven different ways to demonstrate intellectual ability: spatial, linguistic, logical, kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal and intrapersonal. Each of these intelligences is associated with a different kind of learning style, and if we keep these styles in mind when teaching young children, we will be able to help them in their learning.

Students with a predominantly spatial learning style tend to think in pictures and are skilled in such things as puzzle building, understanding charts and graphs and interpreting visual images. Those with linguistic intelligence think in words rather than pictures, and are skilled at speaking and writing. Students with logical intelligence are able to use reason, logic and numbers. They are good at problem solving, classifying and categorizing information. A student with kinesthetic intelligence is able to control body movements and handle objects skillfully and learns best through hands on experimentation, creating or building. The musically inclined learners think in sounds, rhythms and patterns. They are skilled in singing, playing musical instruments and remembering melodies. Students with interpersonal intelligence are able to relate to others and understand them using verbal and non-verbal language. Finally those with intrapersonal intelligence are able to self reflect and understand their inner feelings and thought patterns. All these strengths can be used in language teaching but classroom activities and assessment should be varied so that each student, with his/her individual strengths and learning styles, has a chance to shine.

At the beginning of the year, this 10 minute activity with students will allow you to find out which intelligences predominate. You will not only see how differently they respond, but you will also have a good idea of how each child is likely to enjoy your future lessons.

“How long is a minute?”

Ask the children to do each of the following activities for the duration of exactly one minute:

- 1) Talk to as many people in the class as possible (inter-personal)
- 2) Sit in silence with their own thoughts (intra-personal)
- 3) Do some “brain gym.” Children copy what the teacher does, touching left foot with right hand etc. (kinesthetic)
- 4) Draw a picture (spatial)
- 5) Do some maths problems at their level (logical)
- 6) Listen to some music (musical)
- 7) Write about how they would spend a perfect minute (linguistic)

Watch and ask them about which activity they enjoyed most and when the minute seemed to go faster. Their answers will be very different¹.

Having established that each class has children with a variety of dominant intelligences I suggest that activities and assessment in the class follow that variety, and provide examples in the rest of this article.

-Video clips, such a Mr Bean. (spatial/logical/linguistic)

Children are pre-taught new vocabulary and told they will watch a short video clip and must remember what happens. After watching it they put in order the strips of paper that retell the story. Then they write about the story themselves.

-What happened yesterday? (kinesthetic/linguistic)

The children stand in a circle round the teacher. The teacher mimes and tells a story about yesterday and the children copy the actions. Then the teacher tells the story again and only the children do the mimes. Finally the teacher mimes and the children retell the story

-TV screen(kinesthetic/linguistic/spatial)

The frame of a TV screen is made by cutting out a square centre in a big piece of cardboard so that the borders make the TV frame. An “ON/OFF” switch is drawn on the frame together with controls for visuals (an eye); sounds (an ear); action (an arrow) and feelings (a heart). The TV screen is stuck on the whiteboard and the children draw pictures to put in the middle of it showing scenes from a story. A volunteer turns on the TV and touches different buttons. The teacher tells the story according to the button pushed. eg “the boy has brown hair and blue eyes” (because the visual button has been touched); “he is playing football and falls over” (the action button). Students then tell more stories about some of their pictures².

-Group photo strip or comic strip books (spatial/linguistic/kinesthetic/interpersonal)

The class works in small groups to make picture/story books about their day at school/the day everything went wrong/ a school mystery story, etc. Photos or drawings illustrate each page.

-“Physical prepositions” (kinesthetic/linguistic/interpersonal)

Strips of paper are put in a “magic box” for children to pull out and mime the sentence with the preposition eg “You are sitting **on** a big elephant” or “You are **under** a table”. The other students in the team guess what he or she is doing.

-Class survey and bar graphs (logical/linguistic/spatial)

Children work in pairs asking each other “Do you like...? questions from a questionnaire and writing “Yes” or “No” as their partner answers. They write their partners names on 8 white sticky labels. The teacher puts up a big card on the board with a bar graph format. The horizontal axis is divided into sections with “football” “chocolate” “homework” based on the questions they have been asking each other. The vertical axis is numbered one to twenty. The children stick their partner’s names next to the things they like and build up the bar graph. The teacher can then ask “How many children like...?” or “What do children like most?” etc

-Treasure Hunt revision envelopes (linguistic/logical/kinesthetic)

The teacher prepares vocabulary or grammar revision envelopes before the class with a word or a question/gap fill on the front. (eg “Find the monkey” or “Find the tallest boy” or “.....you do your homework yesterday?”). Inside the envelope are 3 pictures or words that could match the vocabulary word or answer the question. The teacher then hides these envelopes round the classroom (making a note of where they have been put!!)

The class is divided into 2 teams. One student from each team is called out at a time. The teacher gives clues where they will find the revision envelopes eg “It is next to the window.” The student that finds the envelope and chooses the correct picture/word wins a point for her team³.

-Shopping game and song (musical/linguistic/kinesthetic)

Students work in small groups with 10 items of food (flash cards or realia) on the table. Students close their eyes and a “shopkeeper” takes away the food item he/she is selling and hides it behind his/her back. The customers have to guess what is missing singing “Can I have an...apple, please? (to the music of “Polly puts the kettle on”). The shopkeeper holds out the food and says “Yes, you can” or “No, you can’t”

-Revision song (to the tune of “On the first day of Christmas”) (musical, visual, kinesthetic and linguistic)

Lyrics:

“On the first day of Christmas my teacher said to me
IS for the singular
 On the second day of Christmas my teacher said to me
Are for the plural
 On the third day of Christmas my teacher said to me
 Don’t forget the **S**
 On the fourth day of Christmas my teacher said to me
 Do you....? Does he....?
 On the fifth day of Christmas my teacher said to me
DO YOUR HOMEWORK!!
 On the sixth day of Christmas my teacher said to me
 Adjectives come first
 On the seventh day of Christmas my teacher said to me
HE is for boys
 On the eighth day of Christmas my teacher said to me
SHE is for girls
 On the ninth day of Christmas my teacher said to me
ED for the past
 On the tenth day of Christmas my teacher said to me
DID for past questions
 On the eleventh day of Christmas my teacher said to me
WILL for the future
 On the twelfth day of Christmas my teacher said to me
 Remember **PLEASE** and **THANK YOU**”

12 visual cards to make and hold up during song:

<p>IS for the singular There IS a dog.</p>	<p>ARE for the plural There ARE 2 cats.</p>	<p>Don’t forget the S She likeS football.</p>
<p>Do you...?, Does he...? Do you like apples? Does he like apples?</p>	<p>DO YOUR HOMEWORK!! Page 10 exercise B</p>	<p>Adjectives come first The GREEN door.</p>
<p>HE is for boys HE is a tall boy.</p>	<p>SHE is for girls SHE is a pretty girl.</p>	<p>ED for the past I watched TV yesterday.</p>
<p>DID for past questions DID you go to school yesterday?</p>	<p>WILL for the future I WILL pass my test tomorrow.</p>	<p>Remember PLEASE and THANK YOU Can I have a sweet PLEASE? THANK YOU</p>

This song can be adapted to whatever you want to consolidate, and the rules really stick in their heads. Even the parents were singing “Is for the singular” when they left the Christmas show!!

Children need variety in classroom activities not only because of their limited attention span but because they are all individuals with different intelligences. They need the opportunity to learn and display their knowledge in the best way that they, as individuals, can.

¹ I would like to thank Bonnie Tsai for introducing this activity at the CELTA YL extension course.

² Again, thanks to Bonnie Tsai for this suggestion.

³ I would like to thank Lee Scurr on the CELTA course for this idea.

References

Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of Mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York: Basic Books. Basic Books Paperback, 1985. Tenth Anniversary Edition with new introduction, New York: Basic Books, 1993.