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The advantages of brain based learning in ELT classes

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Abstract

In the recent years, lots of new methods and approaches have been used in ELT classes. There are lots of language educators who have realised that new techniques and approaches help language learners more than the other techniques and approaches which were used in the past. Brain based learning is not a new technique in language education, but there are new approaches which are related with brain based learning in ELT classes. This study deals with the advantages of brain based learning in English language teaching classes. Sample class activities will be handled. The useful web-sites will be suggested for brain based learning activities.

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Keywords: brain based learning; class activities; useful websites

1. Introduction

Students sometimes get bored during the class hours. The reasons of their boredom depend on their psychological situations or because of the exercises on their coursebooks. This study is based on the classroom observations of my own teaching situation to answer the question “ How can I make my class hours more joyful and useful ?” I tried to find solutions to make happier and more joyful lessons.

I always believed that happy class hours would bring more success to my classes. The purpose of this paper is to examine the advantages of brain-based learning in my own classes at Dokuz Eylul University in Izmir in Turkey.

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2. Theoretical background

2.1. What is brain-compatible teaching?

As it has been mentioned by Kennedy (2006:480) that

“Integrated language and content instruction offers a means by which students can continue their academic cognitive development while they are developing a fuller proficiency in not only their L1, But in all languages of study.”

Haley (2010:8) states that

“Brain teaching emphasizes how the brain learns naturally and is based on what we currently know about the actual structures and functions of the brain at several developmental stages. Although brain-compatible teaching is not a panacea or magic bullet to solve all of education’s problems, as teachers we must understand certain principles and use effective strategies in purposeful ways.”

2.2. Brain compatible theories of teaching and learning

2.2.1. Gardner’s Theory of multiple intelligences:

According to this theory, the following eight intelligences can be listed: (Haley, 2010:8)

- *Bodily/kinesthetic*
- *Interpersonal/social*
- *Intrapersonal/introspective*
- *Logical/mathematical*
- *Musical/rhythmic*
- *Naturalist*
- *Verbal/Linguistic*
- *Visual/spatial*

Wilson (1998) lists the most common reasons why some educators seem to be drawn to using Multiple Intelligence: <http://education.jhu.edu/PD/newhorizons/strategies/topics/mi/wilson1.htm>

- *Has been adapted and interpreted by many intermediate writers who have made it easy for both teachers and parents to see the value of the concept and its applicability to uses in the classroom. This broad range of interpretations at intermediary levels makes related techniques easy to understand and use by both preservice and practicing educators. Also, due to the proliferation of medial interpretations, related conference presentations and accessible classroom materials (in addition to associated articles for parents in current media) MI has become so popular that the concept has become much like a grassroots movement.*
- *Aids teachers in easily creating more personalized and diversified instructional experiences*
- *Offers teachers assistance in helping students become empowered learners by extending and promoting cognitive bridging techniques based on the seven intelligences; by fostering deep metacognitive understanding; and by advancing suggestions for a broad array of diversified study skills techniques.*
- *Helps teachers explain and promote understanding at intrapersonal, interpersonal and cultural levels.*
- *Taps into students' intrinsic levels of motivation through natural talents, thus helping teachers construct self-motivating educational experiences and ones which help promote the concept of flow in the classroom.*
- *Often validates teachers' insightful and intuitive assessments of students' natural talents and offers them justifications and assistance in creating related personalized educational accommodations and experiences.*
- *Provides teachers, parents and students with a more extensive and egalitarian conceptualization of giftedness.*

3. Method

3.1.1. Participants

The participants consisted of 90 university students at Dokuz Eylul University in the city of Izmir in Turkey. Their ages ranged from 19-22.

3.1.2. Procedure

The participants were asked to reply to the following questions during their lessons:

1. Do you like listening to music?
2. Do you like dancing and acting?
3. Do you like jokes related with mathematics?
4. Do you like puzzle games while learning the new words on your course books?
5. Do you like animals?
6. Do you like singing songs?
7. Do you play any instruments?
8. Do you like cooking?
9. Do you like your hometown and your neighbourhood?

According to the answers of the above questions, class activities were applied in different classes. In a class, students were asked to bring jokes and quotes which give positive energy. In a class students listened to different English songs while they were doing the exercises on their books. In 3 different classes, 90 students were asked to draw the pictures of the words they learnt during their course hours.

3.1.3. Materials

Sample activity for listening classes

Students listen to 3 or 4 different songs. After listening, the following questions were asked:

1. What kinds of things did you imagine?
2. Did the songs make you feel happy or unhappy?
3. Can you describe the sounds you heard in the songs?

Sample activity for reading classes

Before reading, students did skimming and scanning on the reading passages. After reading they were asked to reply to the following questions: (Haley, 2010: 173)

1. What is the story about?
2. What do you think will happen next?
3. What has happened?
4. How did your predictions turn out?

Sample activity for writing classes (Clanfield & Benne, 2011: 102)

1. Think of the most impressive or beautiful building in your town or a town nearby. Write a short paragraph describing this building for an English travel brochure. Your paragraph must have at least three sentences.
2. Work in pairs. Compare your paragraphs.

Sample warm up activity

Before the activity, students were asked to bring photos to class. They were asked to reply the following questions to learn gestures:

1. Do you think people are happy on the photos you looked at.
2. Which adjectives and adverbs can you use for the photos you looked at.

Sample websites and videos on brain based learning

- Brain Games & Brain Training:
- <http://www.fitbrains.com>
- Fun web-based learning games - math, animals, geography :http://www.sheppardsoftware.com/web_games_menu.htm
- Lumosity: Brain Games & Brain Training: <http://www.lumosity.com>
- What's Going On? | Brain Games | National Geographic Channel:<http://braingames.nationalgeographic.com/episode/6/>
- Teachers TV: School Matters - Brain Based Approaches:http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiHWHSBkb_w

3.1.4. Objectives

- To give students the chance to practise English as much as possible
- To teach students how to become more optimistic while studying their English courses
- To teach them how to use and pronounce the new words effectively
- To teach them how to speak English fluently
- To teach students how to write paragraphs and compositions effectively

*3. 2. Findings**3.2. 1. Students' attitudes*

Most of the students in my classes were very active and bright students. They were interested in learning English as a second language and they were interested in developing their reading and speaking skills. All the students in my classes accepted learning and using gestures in the global world would be useful and enjoyable for their professional developments. They liked learning the new adjectives and adverbs while listening to some songs. They also liked telling the Turkish jokes in English as they loved acting and dancing in their private lives.

3.2.2. Students' perceptions

All the students found the experimental tasks very useful and they realised that they improved their language skills. They brought their course books, pictures and photos regularly and informed me that their interests increased rapidly day by day. Their fluency and accuracy also improved day by day while they were doing their pair work activities with their pictures and photos. They also informed me that telling jokes in the class hours made them happier.

4. Conclusion

Up to here, the definitions of brain compatible teaching have been given. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences has been handled. A research study in my classes was explained. Sample class activities have been suggested. This paper proposes that the role of brain based learning will help students and colleagues to study their

lessons more effectively and help them to be more successful. Hope this study will help new colleagues to prepare useful lesson plans. It is also hoped that this study will help colleagues to do more enjoyable classes.

5. Discussion

5.1. Discussion questions for teachers or professors

1. Do you think brain based learning is useful in ELT Classes? Why/ Why not?
2. What do you do to understand the reading passages you read?
3. Do you think using one book will be more useful while teaching English?
4. Do you think you can teach English effectively without using any workbooks? Why and how?

5.2. Discussion questions for students

1. Do you think you will improve your English if you listen to English songs as much as possible?
2. Do you think you will be more successful, if you learn grammar very well?

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