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Multiple Intelligences in action 2

Herbert Puchta looks at the implications for teaching young learners.

As I stressed in my article in Issue 41 of ET*p*, work in ELT primary classrooms has, to a certain extent, always involved the employment of Multiple Intelligences. However, we need to be cautious not to mix up multi-sensory teaching with MI teaching. In other words, using pictures in the language class is not necessarily about teaching from the visual–spatial intelligence, just as singing a song with your children will not automatically activate their musical–rhythmic intelligence. As Howard Gardner said in an interview on the US radio show *Edutopia* some time ago:

'I remember seeing a movie about Multiple Intelligences and there were kids crawling on the floor and the legend said "bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence". I said, "That's not bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence, that's kids crawling on the floor. This is making me crawl up the wall!" … to have kids crawl or exercise their vocal cords, that's not intelligence.'

Teaching with a purpose

In the same interview, Gardner stressed the importance of deciding what our educational goals are, and, when we know what those goals are, considering how we can help our children achieve them better. Multiple Intelligences itself cannot be a goal, nor is singing a song, using pictures, getting students to move around the classroom, etc, but it can help us achieve our goals better.

If my goal is to revise a lexical set with a beginners' class of say, six or seven year olds, I can do this in various ways. Below is one suggestion that you might occasionally want to use. It is based on MI thinking and is not only an interesting and highly motivating activity for those kids whose mathematical–logical intelligence is in good fettle. As I will show later, it will be useful for *all* learners as it helps develop important thinking skills at the same time as working well towards accomplishing our goals.

Lexical revision through logical sequences

Let's assume the words you want to revise are *butterfly, frog, flower, bee, tree, ladybird* and *sun*.
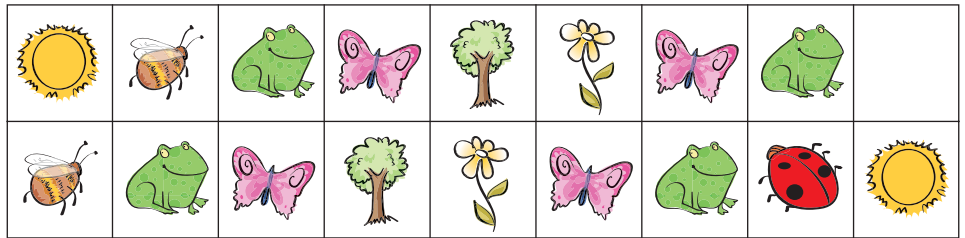
- Draw logical sequences as shown below of the words you want to revise on the board or give each student a photocopy of them. Do the first row by reading it out rhythmically together with the learners:
butterfly – frog – butterfly – frog – butterfly – frog – butterfly
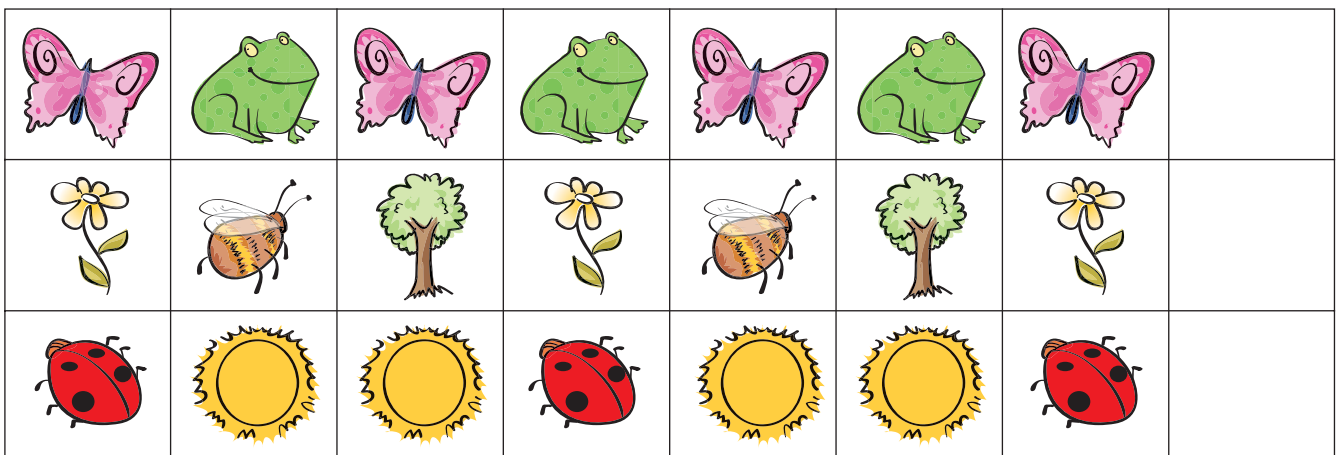
- Elicit the missing word from the end of the row (*frog*) and ask the students to complete the row by drawing a picture of a frog.

- Give them a few minutes to complete the other rows. If they cannot complete any of the patterns, get them to walk round and talk to at least three other students about *their* solutions and why they have come up with them. These discussions naturally will happen in the students' mother tongue.

- When they have all finished, ask various students to read out the solutions to the class so that they can all check.

- Ask them all to put numbers against the rows: 1 against the top row, 2 against the one underneath and 3 against the bottom row. They then put their worksheets on their desks face down.

- Ask one student to turn over their worksheet and read out any one of the rows. When they have finished, the others look at their worksheets and say which number they believe the row was. Carry on like this for some time.

- Then challenge them to say which of the rows has been read out *without* looking at the worksheet. Give them about a minute or so to look at the worksheet and try to remember the rows before they put it face down on the desk again.

- Hand out a strip of paper with a copy of three empty rows to each student and ask them to create their own logical sequences using any of the words they already know in English that can also easily be drawn. (Alternatively, and with slightly higher-level classes, students could also write the words.) Tell them to leave one or two frames free for each row or pair of rows. Ask them to write their names at the top. Collect all the paper strips.

Adding an element of challenge

- Tell the class that you are going to read out some logical sequences and some rows of words that are *not* logical sequences. Again, use combinations of the target vocabulary. Ask the students to listen carefully and knock on their desks whenever they believe they have spotted an odd-man-out sequence.

- Hand out randomly the slips of paper with the logical sequences created by the students. Tell them to complete the logical sequences they have been given.

- The students close their eyes. Ask one of them to read out a row of pictures. The others listen and check if it is a logical sequence. If they believe it is, they raise both their arms. Carry on like this for some time.

- When your students are at ease with simple patterns like the ones presented above, you may want to present them with more challenging ones, eg a double row where the pattern is, for example, a diagonal one (see above). Give them time to think silently and raise their hands when they think they have found the answer (*ladybird*), but not to call out the word. Ask those students to whisper the answer in your ear while others still have silent thinking time.

- After some time, ask your students how they have managed to solve the task. Then, students can again create their own logical sequences, if you hand out an empty frame for a double row.

What has been achieved

The above activities serve a number of purposes on top of helping to achieve the linguistic purpose you have set, revision of vocabulary.

- When you read the words in a row out rhythmically, and your students gradually join in, you invite them to activate their musical–rhythmic intelligence. This helps them to discover the pattern of a logical sequence. Pattern recognition is an important sub-skill of the mathematical–logical activity. It is also the basis for recognising the structures of a language. Students will need these pattern recognition skills for any kind of language-awareness activity.

- When children create their own logical sequences, they first have to create a pattern mentally and then apply it on paper. We use similar cognitive routines all the time, such as when we write a sentence or a text.

- When children try to remember a row of words, they practise important visual and auditory memory skills.

- When children walk round and find out from others how they have solved a task and why they have come up with their solution, they get invited into both their inter- and intrapersonal intelligence (which they will, for example, use when they compare how others got to their solution, and how they themselves did).

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Language teaching activities based on Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences are an excellent way of accomplishing linguistic teaching objectives through a variety of means that go beyond language. These means offer great opportunities for us as educators to reach more children in our classrooms, motivate them to understand concepts more deeply and apply them successfully, and, at the same time, help develop their thinking skills. Multiple Intelligences is all about *teaching for thinking!* ETp

The text of the interview with Howard Gardner, which I recommend highly, can be found online at www.edutopia.org/radioshow/edutopia_111402.pdf

Herbert Puchta is a teacher trainer and writer of coursebooks and resource books. His latest publication, co-written with Mario Rinvolucri, is *Multiple Intelligences in EFL: Exercises for secondary and adult students*, published by Helbling Languages 2005.

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