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A NEW MODEL IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM: HOWARD'S MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES THEORY

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Abstract

Multiple Intelligences Theory (MIT) has significant implications for educational performance, because it changes our perception of intelligence and academic achievement in the learning world. Traditionally learners are taught as if they are all the same without any regard to their unique learning needs or differing learning profiles. While Gardner's theory lit a candle for a new conceptualization about intelligence and academic abilities, it is far from achieving a widespread popularity in the traditional language classroom. More scholarly explorations are necessary to introduce its promises and potential in the English language teaching world. An example is shared from the School of Foreign Languages at the University of Mediterranean Karpasia. An experimental MIT approach is utilized in an elementary language class in the School of Foreign Languages. This paper integrated three steps in its research. First, key literature review on MIT is introduced highlighting Howard Gardner as the founder of MIT. Then, results of content analysis for two random units from the course book are shared to get a general idea about MIT practice in an elementary language class. Lastly, an innovative teaching praxis tried in an elementary language class. This innovative MIT approach is discussed to determine the future research areas to explore and further investigate the phenomenon which will inform language teaching practices.

Key-words: Multiple Intelligences Theory (MIT), intelligence, English as a foreign language, language teaching, diverse learning styles

Introduction

Multiple Intelligences Theory (MIT) is a new vision interrogated by educators and language educators specifically for its application in the language classroom. Multiple Intelligence Theory (MIT) is by no means a novel theory. It has been around since 1980s. Howard Gardner introduced MIT for the first time in eighties (Gardner, 1983), yet it received more attention in English Language Teaching field since the last decade. This awakening interest correlates with language educators' interest in maximizing the language learning. The study investigates the impact of multiple intelligences in the language classroom. Students/language learners opinions are negotiated as some aspects of multiple intelligences theory are assimilated into the teaching praxis. A content analysis of two random units in the course book is done to give more information about the University of Mediterranean Karpasia language teaching context. Finally, an experimental teaching praxis is tried in an elementary language classroom and this provided a space to weigh the outcome of a MIT based language teaching on the learning. Learner reactions and responses to the changing language praxis are studied to interpret the data and conclude from the findings. Regardless of the outcome of the MIT approach in the classroom, this research encourages the inclusion of MIT to explore possibilities in responding to diverse learner styles and needs.

Increasing popularity of English as an international language calls for innovative approaches in English language teaching classroom. It is no longer appropriate to teach all students with a cookie-cutter formula. Diversity of learners and their unique needs call for implementation of MIT to the language classroom (Dastgoshadeh & Jalilzadeh, 2011). The key achievement of the theory up-to-date is the expansion of the concept of intelligence from a previously static IQ conceptualization. MIT should be conceptualized as a 'dynamic construct' that is always changing and evolving, which emphasizes the possibility of development and improvement (Arnold & Fonseca, 2004, p.122). This definition highlights possibilities of learners as opposed to limitations. The expansion of intelligence emphasizes uniqueness of each individual and calls for preparation of individualized language instruction for the unique individual needs of learners (Richards & Rodgers, 2011). Gardner proposed a multiplicity of learner abilities and learning styles. He questioned unitary conceptualization of intelligence in educational spheres arguing that this may ignore hidden talents of diverse learners of today (Akbari & Hosseini, 2008). He also questioned the tests that are taken for granted as predictors of academic achievement such as IQ tests. According to him, multiple types of intelligence imply 'diverse abilities' and 'learning styles' and emphasized the need for tailored instruction for nourishing these specific talents (Madkour, 2009). Gardner disturbs the so-called measurement of intelligence with IQ tests and proposes a larger spectrum of abilities highlighting the pluralistic nature of cognitive abilities (Mirzazadeh, 2012). This theory rekindled a somewhat forgotten topic of intelligence and aimed to re-consider categorization of learners such as those who can and those who cannot. This tendency caused discrimination against certain classes or learners who portray set of skills that are outside the acknowledged mainstream classroom experiences. This study aims to bring a re-discussion of intelligence and achievement potential of learners.

I interrogate MIT's implications for practice with an example from my teaching context at the University of Mediterranean Karpasia. Before delving into a more detailed discussion of the teaching context in which I tried to utilize MIT, it is necessary to have a close look at the types of intelligences proposed by Gardner. The following table shows different intelligences introduced by Howard Gardner in 1980s. Each intelligence emphasizes certain unique skills learners bring into the learning environment. Initially he proposed seven different intelligences; later, he added two more intelligences indicating once more the non-static conceptualization of intelligence and diverse manifestation of these intelligences in the learner.

Multiplicity in the Multiple Intelligences Theory

1) Verbal/Linguistic Intelligence

This intelligence refers to effective use of language and good knowledge of words. These learners love expressing themselves in written or oral language. They are verbose in their descriptions and keen on participating in the classroom and expressing themselves effectively in various forms of language.

2) Mathematical/Logical Intelligence

This intelligence refers to effective use of numbers; ability to draw conclusions, logical deductions and inference of cause-effect relationships. Learners in this category recognize patterns easily and can arrive at the principles of a system such as solving the meaning of a text. These learners appreciate grammar rules.

3) Musical Intelligence

This intelligence refers to sensitivity to melody and rhythm. Learners in this group appreciate rhythm, pitch and melody alterations. They can notice subtle variations in speech production. Songs and poetry could be a great asset for these learners in the language classroom.

4) Spatial/Visual Intelligence

This intelligence refers to sensitivity to graphic forms and depictions; sensitivity to color and design. Learners in this category are good at creating images and picturesque depictions, and support their learning through imagery. New vocabulary is retrieved through mental image forms.

5) Bodily/Kinesthetic Intelligence

This intelligence refers to effective physical and bodily coordination. Learners in this category use their hands dexterously and manipulate objects easily. These learners like to move around and be active in their learning environment. Role plays and active participation in the learning appeal to them.

6) Interpersonal Intelligence

This refers to ability to understand others, their intention and moods; ability to empathize with others, and work well in group activities. These learners enjoy working with a partner and enjoy communicating with others in discovering a new language point.

7) Intrapersonal Intelligence

This refers to knowledge of the self; these learners express preference for independent learning and engaging in individual assignments. These learners enjoy introspection and self-reflection, and are well aware of their abilities and limitations as language learners.

8) Naturalist Intelligence

This intelligence refers to knowledge and care for nature. These learners enjoy learning about plant life and animal world. They are sensitive about environment, pollution and show care for the ecosystem. Topics about environment, botany and animal life could be interesting subjects in the language classroom to dwell upon.

9) Existential Intelligence

This intelligence refers to inclinations for the existentialist philosophy. They ponder upon the meaning of life and existence. These learners will enjoy discussions about religion and spirituality as they relate to the purpose of men on earth. So, including these subjects in the language classroom will grasp their attention.

Different types of intelligences imply use of many approaches in the language classroom. MIT proposes a model that aims to serve all learners in the language classroom. The continuing interest of language educators for effective language teaching compels us to continue the dialogue of MIT in foreign language teaching classroom. Each intelligence utilized in the classroom can be visualized as a hook through which English can be acquired. Relevance of MIT to the praxis of language learning has been recognized by more language educators recently since its conceptualization first by Gardner (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Almeida, Prieto, Ferreira, Bermejo & Fernando, 2010; Mirzazadeh, 2012). Language educators recognize that language learning does not occur in a one-size-fits-all model but in fact entails various factors coming into play in the language learning process (Hammond, 2008). Some of these are more apparent than others, and it is the language educator's duty to provide learners with different opportunities to understand the same language material (Mirzazadeh, 2012). An English language educator needs to acquaint oneself with these less noticeable constituents influencing student learning in order to sufficiently respond to their learning needs (Richards & Rodgers, 2011).

Language learning is in essence a verbal-linguistic endeavor with some aspects of mathematical-logical intelligence. Those who are keen on expressing themselves in written or verbal language tend to have an easier progress in language learning. It is therefore necessary to provide opportunities for other learners to represent their aptitudes for language achievement (Dastgoshadeh & Jalilzadeh, 2011; Arnold & Fonseca, 2004). Multiplicity of the teaching environment invites a variety of approaches in teaching (Ruggieri, 2002). We as educators have a challenging task at hand considering the tight teaching schedules and time limits of teaching. This budgeting of time forces the language educators to cover language material in a specified time, and this makes it challenging to know each and every one of our students and respond effectively to their learning needs. It is this tension between theory and praxis which opens a fruitful dialogue for language educators about the maximization of teaching and learning.

Negotiation of Theory and Practice of MIT

While most educators embrace the promises of the MIT, somehow the theory is not commonly practiced in language teaching contexts or other educational spheres. It is necessary to investigate the barriers between conceptualization and application of MIT. Hammond (2008) argues that the biggest problem in the application of MIT in teaching contexts is because of the over-use of one or two intelligences over others. According to Hammond (2008) majority of language teaching classrooms are based on mathematical

intelligence and linguistic intelligence. Learners who are gifted in these intelligences are the luckiest in language classrooms. Other intelligences are also utilized occasionally in the language classroom, yet they are done so inadequately. For instance, a sports theme can definitely spark the interest of a kinesthetic learner, but using a sports theme in the class does not necessarily activate kinesthetic intelligence of a learner in the language classroom. It is necessary to move students from their seats through a physical activity with a sports theme which invites them to use the language for a real application of the kinesthetic intelligence.

Another reason for not adequately using the MIT in language classrooms is because of the time concerns of language educators. Generally, language educators pay more attention to covering the language material as planned instead of presenting it in a lively or creative format. Unfortunately concerns of time take away from one's effort of creative language teaching, thus it becomes even harder to tailor the lesson for diverse learning needs of learners (Currie, 2003). If we were to teach according to MIT principles, we need to come to terms with diverting from our usual teaching route. With this in mind, our fear of treading into an unknown territory constitutes another dilemma and is an important reason why educators do not embrace MIT more commonly in their teaching. Even if some teaching practices do not work perfectly in our teaching contexts, we continue using it, simply because familiar is safe and unfamiliar is risky. As educators, we all have our learning and teaching styles which work best for us. Once we are trying something new such as the application of MIT in our classroom, we need to come to terms with letting go of our security blanket. We need to accept several trial-error applications and embrace uncertainty if we are to benefit from a potentially enriching application.

Even when language teachers think they use MIT in our classes, they might not be doing it effectively or inclusively. A language educator needs to include as many of these intelligences as possible in his/her teaching portfolio in order to appeal to a variety of intelligences. Subconsciously teachers focus on one or two intelligences at the expense of others. Richards and Rodgers (2001) argue that teachers tend to bring a specific intelligence to their classroom. Oftentimes, this is their favorite intelligence through which they learn the best. Thus, they hope that it will do the trick and do wonders for their learners in the language classroom. Yet, this is bound to respond to only some learners who portray this specific intelligence. Each learner brings a different set of skills to the language classroom. To maximize each learner's potential is more challenging than imagined.

A thorough planning and preparation is necessary on the part of the language educator/ teacher to achieve MIT application in the language classroom (Vincent & Ross, 2001). A needs analysis is a first step in a teacher's agenda. There needs to be a series of steps to consider if we want to successfully include a multitude of intelligences in our teaching practices. This is a crucial step because each language classroom is different so as the needs of learners. Language educator needs to familiarize him/herself with learners and their needs. Strengths and weaknesses of students should be identified by the language educator/teacher. Some strategies as the following can be proposed for the MIT application:

- 1) A dialogue with learners can shed light into specific intelligences they learn with.
- 2) A written survey of teaching scenarios can be given to students, where they circle the best learning situation.
- 3) It is also a possibility that students are not aware of their strengths and weaknesses. In these

situations, student survey results and dialogue inputs should be cross-examined through various classroom language activities. Their performance in these activities will provide valuable information about students and their needs.

- 4) A thorough analysis of textbook(s) can be another strategy to find out the prevalent intelligences present in the course content. Depending on the outcome of this analysis, it is necessary to alter the course content to counteract this gap. This means altering the teaching materials to better respond to specific needs of learners.
- 5) The previous item is a bit challenging because of the generally predetermined nature of the syllabus content. The curriculum designer might not be thrilled about the changes you propose. So, this requires ongoing communication with language teachers, coordinators and the director.
- 6) Full support of the teaching team is necessary to succeed. This step highlights the importance of a collective action plan. More people with the idea on-board increases one's chances of success. Thus, the director, curriculum designer and other teachers/educators should be on the same page with the new initiative.
- 7) In an ideal educational context there is no reason why this plan should not work. But most educational and language programs have their unique characteristics of strengths and weaknesses. Thus, it is necessary to communicate your goal clearly and plan meticulously.
- 8) A detailed planning and supportive teaching unit will enable effective application of a teaching practice with a multitude of intelligences approach.

The following section describes the teaching context of the University of Mediterranean Karpasia's School of Foreign Language. After the introduction of the university context I am teaching at, my experimentation of the MIT approach in an elementary language classroom is described:

School of Foreign Languages (SFL) Context, University of Mediterranean Karpasia (UMK)

I have taught an Elementary language classroom at the University of Mediterranean Karpasia during the period October 15, 2012-December 2012. In the School of Foreign Languages there are seven different language modules. Students take a Proficiency Test at the beginning of their degree and are placed in the School of Foreign Languages according to their language proficiency score. The test assesses various language proficiencies such as reading, writing, listening and grammar skills. The language modules taught at UMK are A1 (Beginner), A2 (Elementary), B1 (Pre-Intermediate), B1+ (Intermediate), B2 (Upper-Intermediate), C1 (Advanced), and C2 (Proficiency). Students go through an intensive language instruction as they move from one module to the next. Once they complete all modules successfully and pass the proficiency test, they start their university degree or graduate degrees in their chosen fields.

I have taught an Elementary language classroom, which consists of multi-cultural and multi-lingual learners between ages 18 and 26. Our students come from different countries such as Tajikistan, Pakistan, Turkey, Nigeria and Azerbaijan. Class consists of approximately ten students with differing language proficiencies. Some students attend their classes judiciously while others attend only some of the classes. The focus, in this study, is not on attendance. The students range from zero beginners to low elementary, elementary and higher elementary language levels. The curriculum coordinator designs our curriculum with the language school director and language teachers' input. One of the strongest aspects of the School of Foreign

Languages (SFL) is our use of Smart Board Interactive Whiteboard in our language classes. This enables various interactive applications such as pointing, clicking, and writing on the board during teaching. This takes a traditional language teaching to a new level and teaching becomes more collaborative with the input of learners.

In addition to dialogues with language learners, I also studied our textbooks in content and form. My aim was to discover specific intelligences utilized in the classroom. Content and form analysis of two random units in the course book revealed that 1) Verbal / Linguistic Intelligence 2) Logical/Mathematical Intelligence 3) Interpersonal Intelligence 4) Intrapersonal Intelligence 5) Visual/Spatial Intelligences were used extensively. Only a small percentage of 6) Natural and 7) Existential Intelligences were present in the book; 8) Musical and 9) Kinesthetic Intelligences were missing in these two units. Considering that most language teaching contexts are dominated by linguistic and mathematical reasoning (Acosto, 2004-2005), this teaching context with several intelligences represented a good mixture of intelligences. However, there is always room for improvement and more effective teaching practices should be the goal. More effective language textbooks are prepared in content and form; yet no one book is perfect for language teaching. There is an implication that the language teacher will make up for the textbook deficit by supplementing the course book with additional materials or complementing the curricula with additional intelligences (Hammond, 2008). Adding more of the intelligences into my teaching practice has been a goal for me. Following is a report including the steps of this experimentation as I incorporated activities that aimed bringing new intelligences to my teaching praxis.

An Example of Elementary Language Classroom in the SFL at the UMK

I aimed to add at least two intelligences –kinesthetic, musical- to the teaching contexts, which were mostly missing in the course book. The activities I prepared integrated also linguistic and interpersonal intelligence into the teaching context as the activities came alive in the language classroom. I decided to negotiate student preferences and learning styles before I added these in order to see if student preferences correspond to the missing intelligences in the course book. Also, this would allow for double checking student preferences with the student responses when MIT introduced in the classroom. It is always a good idea to check student preferences, because this allows comparing student preferences with actual student response/performance in the classroom.

Method of Data Collection

I met with students during the afternoon hours and discussed with them informally about their ideal learning environment and activities they prefer to see in the teaching context. The following questions are given to students. They read the questions first, and then asked if they need any clarification before responding.

Dialogue Questions are as follows:

- I) *Imagine the best learning scenario for you and describe it.*
- II) *Which learning method(s) or materials attract you the most? Please read the following options to make the best choices for you as a language learner:*
 - *Linguistic Activities*

- *Logical/ Mathematical Activities*
- *Bodily-kinesthetic Activities*
- *Musical Activities*
- *Interpersonal Activities*
- *Intrapersonal Intelligence*
- *Naturalist Intelligence*

III) *Do you like writing/reading poetry or songs?*

IV) *Do you prefer some physical movement to be part of the teaching?*

The questions were too general for some students, so I narrowed it down by giving them some situations which highlighted certain intelligences and asked them to choose the best option. 80% of the students explained that any visual or audio component made the material more attractive than usual. 10% of the students expressed that they had no preference and could learn in any context or situation. 30 % of the students explained that they were bored with sitting still in chairs for long periods of time and preferred some active learning where they can move in the classroom. 80 % of the students shared that they preferred working in groups interacting with others whereas 20% of them shared that they preferred working individually. When I asked if they liked poetry and songs, almost everyone said they liked songs and only two students said they preferred poetry over songs. They did not show any care or preference about existential philosophy in the language classroom or discussions about the meaning of life. 10 % of the students said they enjoyed to talk about religion and spirituality. 50 % mentioned that they liked to read, write and talk about animal and plant life. Realizing that students had different preferences and learning styles, I aimed to introduce activities that targeted a variety of these intelligences. I especially wanted to include kinesthetic and musical intelligences in the MIT activities, because these were the ones missing in the book. Yet, I also aimed to engage interpersonal and visual & audio aspects through these activities, because students expressed interest in these.

In the following section, I introduced two examples from the activities for the classroom and explained the outcome of these activities for the language classroom.

Proposed Classroom Activities are as follows:

Activity 1:

After a unit on outdoor activities and sports, I asked for a class discussion about favorite sports/activities. Everyone is asked to share their favorite activity and how often they engage in the particular sport/ activity. As a continuation of this topic, I put students in small groups where they have to teach their partner a new sports/ activity/movement. Students can teach the activity through oral depiction and written illustration, and they are expected to show their performance physically to their partner. Then as a team, both students need to come to the front of the class to demonstrate their performance.

This activity aimed to engage the kinesthetic intelligence of students. In addition to kinesthetic intelligence, verbal/linguistic and interpersonal intelligence of learners were also engaged in the activity, because students worked with a partner as they engaged in the activity, and used oral and written language as

they taught their sports theme. It was quite interesting that despite the fact that 30 % of the students previously expressed a desire to move from their chairs and be active, when they were given the opportunity they refused to participate fully in the activity. Only 10 % of the students participated fully in the activity accepting coming in front of the class to share their skills and seemed to enjoy kinesthetic learning. The rest of the class showed avoidance when asked to share their kinesthetic learning in front of the class. A lot of them asked to be excused for not coming to the front of the class. They looked less uneasy when they did physical movement in their little group. They actually laughed a lot among themselves, which proved that they enjoyed some parts of the activity. Their avoidance was most probably due to their prevalent language anxiety, because elementary level is an early stage to be performing before an audience. It would be interesting to try this activity with the same students when they are in their next language module, which is Pre-intermediate language module. Those who accepted to come to the front of the class, asked to describe the sports activity/dancing in words instead of physical demonstration. Another reason for their inhibitions of performance is maybe due to their shyness of public performance.

Activity 2:

Write/sing the words of your favorite English song/ poetry. Teach it to your partner, and then learn a song from him/her. Then come to the front of the class and sing it to the class. Try to teach it to the whole class.

All of the students enjoyed writing down their favorite song. They exchanged notebooks and shared songs. Those who did not want to share a song or did not have a favorite song were asked to share their favorite poem. Some students went online and chose a poem they liked from the internet. They chose not to come to the front of the classroom to read out their poem or sing their songs. Most of them shared their songs or poems sitting at their seat. None of the students wanted to come to the front of the class to share their poems. One student sang a song and another read a poem sitting at their seat. Writing the lyrics of a song and then uttering the song required both making use of students' musical intelligence and linguistic intelligence. It was not only a good writing activity, but also it made use of a variety of their skills, such as presentational skills as well as interactive skills along with interpersonal intelligence. Yet, performance part of the activity was not actualized, because students were shy about public performance and anxious about language production before an audience.

Method of Data Analysis

Findings

These two activities met the educational goals, because learners participated effectively in the proposed activities. Students used the language effectively and creatively in writing a song/poem, teaching a sports activity to their partner and expressing it. I do not see it as a shortcoming if students do not complete all the requested language assignments/activities, because they perform to the best of their ability depending on their readiness at the time. Students have different abilities and skills, and these can only be activated at the right time with the right kind of materials. If the class does not go as planned, or an activity backfires, it points out that the material should be presented in a new way or at a different time when students are more ready..

There is always a way to reach students, and we should focus on finding these. We should also focus on what students are able to accomplish at a certain point in their language learning as opposed to what they still need time for. The test results after MIT application was almost the same, however, this is not crucial, because my focus was on language use and language performance. Students were motivated and succeeded in class participation and used language effectively for the assigned tasks.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, Multiple Intelligences Theory has a lot to offer to language teachers and learners. We can compliment different learning styles with a variety of activities targeting different intelligences. These types of MIT activities should be tried out at different times during the semester as certain intelligences are aimed to be activated. The same activities should be tried again with the same group of students as they move up to higher modules. Also, different groups of students should be introduced to MIT activities in different language classrooms to compare and contrast level differences and learning styles. This will also provide the opportunity to compare the attitudinal differences of learners at different language proficiency levels. A planned lesson plan taking into account the unique needs and abilities of learners such as this one goes a long way in reaching the maximum potential of our learners. Integrating each intelligence so as to represent as many intelligences as possible is a democratic approach to language teaching. Not only we choose to widen our lenses for academic achievement, but also we responsibly take charge of our teaching practices. We go beyond teaching the successful few who already excel in mainstream classrooms - with verbal and mathematical intelligences- the cornerstones of traditional language teaching. Thus, we include more students in our teaching praxis and increase the chances of success for students who might not be thriving in a regular language classroom with traditional methods. This is a most compelling duty of any teacher or educator, because students who are self-directed and gifted language learners will succeed anyway. Our goal then is to strive increasing chances for all students with diverse intelligence materials and methods in the language classroom.

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