

Practical multi-sensory ideas for the young language class

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"[The child] should be methodically exposed to stimuli that will develop his senses rationally and thus lay the foundation of his mental power"
Maria Montessori, *The Discovery of the Child*

WHY A MULTI-SENSORY APPROACH?

Teaching has been the subject of trends for years but what I am about to put to you is a 150 year-old approach to teaching. My inspiration is Maria Montessori who is little known in mainstream education, but who provided the foundation for the multi-sensory method I have developed over the last few years. Maria Montessori believed that the more the senses of the learner are involved, the better the learning. I have successfully borrowed Maria Montessori's principles and applied them to my French classes with children aged 3 to 11.

Furthermore, some interesting figures in an article published in the *Language Learning Journal* in September 1991 reveal that as learners we retain or take in:

10% of what we read
20% of what we hear
30% of what we see
but
50 % of what we see and hear
70% of what we ourselves say
90% of what we ourselves do.

It is clear from these figures that passive learning gives little result, while efficient learning increases with active learning.

Another reason for using multi-sensory teaching is the fact that children are all different. While Lucy – an auditory learner – is happy with verbal commands and listening to a tape of songs, Charlie – a physical learner – will be much happier acting in a role-play and Luke – a visual learner – prefers games involving cards and props. Lucy, Charlie and Luke's brains have a distinctive learning pattern. What they all have in common is

an active brain, operating millions of neural connections. The more stimulated the brain, the higher the number of connections. The brain is stimulated by the environment, which is perceived through the senses.

PRACTICAL MULTI-SENSORY IDEAS

Once the connection between the senses, brain development and learning is clear, creating a sensory method is easy. Involve more than one sense as much as possible in any game for maximum sensorial stimulation.

PROPS AND FLASHCARDS

Props can be used for a variety of games creating a visual impact. Looking at what you are holding at eye level is good, but hiding or placing props high on shelves provides greater stimulation. Place an apple in front of a child and say "une pomme". Place the same apple isolated on a high shelf and say the word while pointing to it. Which approach will create the most impact? The more brain activity the children produce in order to see the props, the greater the stimulation. Use this with more than one fruit. Introduce 5 of them, all resting in different places in the classroom. Call the names and point up, down, under, behind then ask the children to do the pointing for you at the same time: sight, movement and hearing will work together with the fun of getting muddled up now and again. Take away the fruits and do the same game. This time, the props have gone but they will have to visualize them and still do the pointing for physical stimulation.

Dressing up for role-plays is great fun. The child who is not the most enthusiastic speaker but does not hesitate to wear funny hats may gain a great deal of confidence. I could talk about puppets all day. All I will say about puppets here, however, is that it is easy to mix the visual element with sound, as puppets can take on a voice of their own.

"Involve more than one sense as much as possible in any game for maximum sensorial stimulation"

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Peg flashcards on a washing line. This is great fun with numbers because it is far easier to say numbers in ascending order in parrot fashion than in random order. Who can say all the numbers on a line in under 30 seconds? The pegging provides the stimulation of touch and the cards are the visual element. The fun is in the pegging and the racing.

Use movement as visual stimulation. Show cards quickly or slowly. I devised an apparatus by which you place a picture in a slot and slowly reveal it (1). The children will compete to be the first to identify the picture; once they have identified it, make them chant the word until the card is revealed.

BAGS

Bags and boxes make great visual impact. Choose bright and shiny colours. Increase the bags' visual impact by choosing various sizes. Place a bag on your desk and the children will wonder what's inside. Go around the classroom with a bag and they will follow your every move. My 'Magic Bag' (2) rarely stays still. Sometimes it roars, flies, runs all over the children's lap, hops from head to head. This brings together sight and touch and provides a lot of laughter.

Why not send the children to fetch a bag? This is a great opportunity for the physical learners. Let them open the bags and ask them to describe what is inside, "il y a un petit chat noir, il n'y a pas de poisson rouge etc." Turn the bags into 'feely bags' (3): can they tell you what's inside without looking? Pass the 'feely bag' from child to child, each adding one object and each making the list of what's inside, in the correct order. This works very well with 6 year-olds upwards.

Add movement: open a bag in front of a child quickly and close it again. Who had time to see what's inside? Can they make a sentence?

'I spy bags' (4) are wonderful for visual memory games. Place a few known objects in a bag with a clear plastic front. The more objects there are, the more they will be partially hiding each other. Pass the bag around and let the children see the contents for a few seconds. Can they remember what they saw?

SOUNDS

There is more to stimulating hearing than playing lotto games. Noise that is meaningful and purposeful as well as containing a variety of sounds is a wonderful and fun way to stimulate hearing. Play quizzes with older children. Instead of putting their hands up, let them use rattles, bells and whistles as they would a buzzer.

Sound impact could mean no sound at all and encourages the children to listen. Tell them 5 words and slip an odd word: for instance: un lapin, un chat, une maison, un elephant, un lion, un serpent. Say the list again and ask them to repeat the words

after you but to say nothing at all when they hear the odd word. This is a simple exercise in vocabulary but the element of sound or absence of it is the fun part. To stimulate sight, have the cards representing the words face down in front of you in the correct order. You can then reveal the odd word and check against the others. To add movement, the children can say the words and touch their toes at the same time.

Reading stories is a lovely way to communicate foreign languages. The intonations will communicate a lot of feelings. Invite the children to react with the characters and mime actions to add movement to the spoken words. Choose stories that have maximum potential for a bit of acting.

PERFUME BOTTLES

I use perfume bottles and spice jars to teach likes and dislikes. This is guaranteed to be lots of fun and provide you with a range of "j'aime", "je n'aime pas", "j'aime un peu", "j'aime beaucoup", and "je préfère".

Use fruit scents for shopping games: ask children to smell scent bottles as their shopping list and ask them to ask for the correct fruits: "je voudrais un citron, des fraises et des cerises"

FOOD

It may be more difficult to introduce food in your class but if you can, you could have a real French breakfast or goûter. Ideal to practise vocabulary with the eating as a bonus!

A fun game is to place 3 plates in front of the children. Blindfold a volunteer and mix the plates. The volunteer chooses a plate. Will it be "du pain avec de la confiture de fraises", "un gâteau au chocolat" or "de la moutarde"?

Multi-sensory teaching is too often associated with special educational needs alone. I feel there is a lot to learn from sensorial teaching and a lot to gain when adapting it to suit mainstream education. In my experience, children want to learn and they enjoy languages, regardless of their ability. Educating the senses is respecting the child's natural ability and assisting him in his ongoing development. These are just ideas that can be adapted to suit your classes. The important thing is the principle behind each game: make the children feel, see, hear, smell and taste to give them mystery and anticipation. In other words, create emotions.

REFERENCES

1. Pop-up frame available from Am Stram Gram. Also available Picture Puzzle tray
 2. Magic Bag available from Am Stram Gram
 3. Feely Bags available from Am Stram Gram
 4. I Spy Bags available from Am Stram Gram
- Other material available from Am Stram Gram. See www.amstramgram.co.uk