Enjoyable Classes, Retentive Memories: Using Foldables in English Language Teaching[1]

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Abstract

Being the most outstanding organ of the human body, the brain consists of different parts with different functions. In educational settings, this means that if we want our students to learn effectively, we should help them make the most of their minds by offering various activities in our classrooms since brain gets more activated when it is exposed to different stimuli such as words, colors, images or movements. Foldables, which are three-dimensional and often colorful graphic organizers, provide students not only with verbal and visual information but also with kinesthetic activities, thus addressing to a variety of learning modalities. Consistent with Ausubel's theory of subsumption, Piaget's notions of accomodation and assimilation, Vygotsky's semiotic mediators and Gardner's multiple intelligences, foldables help learners organize information, see relationships, make new connections, improve retention and they promote active learning. Although foldables can be effective learning and teaching tools, we can not find many experimental studies related to their use in the field of language teaching. Therefore, the aim of this study is to introduce foldables to increase awareness about them among language teachers as well as giving practical ideas to teachers on the use of these tools while teaching English.

1. Introduction

As teachers, we want our students to learn effectively. One way of achieving this is to know how brain works since what will be learnt, how and how fast is determined by it [1]. To clarify, brain is composed of 100 billion cells called neurons. Learning takes place when these neurons interact with each other [1-2-3]. Willis [4] indicates that " when more connections form between neurons, there is greater potential for further learning" (p.13). She further maintains that each individual has different experiences which lead to different dendrite connections. This means that students in a classroom have different tendencies and different way of learning. Garnett [5] points out that adopting a "one size fits all" approach and ignoring learner differences cause the brain to literally shrink since a low sensory environment doesn't have a stimulating force to create connections among neurons. He suggests that teachers should have a rich repertoire of activities to involve more sense in learning process to enable neurons to connect to other neurons. Through these connections, the human brain grows in knowledge and learning takes place. Therefore, teachers should be aware of the diversity in their classrooms, make use of a variety of activities and provide multisensory experiences so that they can address to different learning styles and intelligences.

Both of the theories of multiple intelligences and learning styles draw attention to learner differences. They imply that although individuals have different dominant learning preferences (i.e. visual, auditory, kinesthetic-tactile) and intelligences (i.e. verbal-linguistic, visual-spatial, body-kinesthetic, interpersonal etc.), neither the perceptual styles nor intelligences operate distinctly. The more diverse the stimuli are, the more senses and intelligences are involved in learning paving the way to the deeper understanding of the subject matter. Hence, teachers should enrich their classes by presenting a variety of materials that will engage most or all of learning modalities. Being one of the learning tools, foldables can work for these aims as they enable teachers to address to different learning modalities.

2. Foldables

Foldables are three-dimensional, often colorful graphic organizers that help students with different learning styles and abilities organize, review and remember many kinds of information [6-7]. Vygotsky (1962) states that knowledge is internalized through mental tools which he calls semiotic mediators [8]. Foldables serve as these mental tools as they aid learners understand better and retain the information easily. Conforming with Piaget's theory of assimilation and accomodation, they enable

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learners to see the connections and contradictions between concepts and to restructure their existing schemas [9-10-11]. In addition, foldables allow learners to relate new knowledge to existing cognitive structures which is consistent with Ausubel's theory of subsumption [9]. Brown [12] points out that it is this relatability that provides the subject matter to be subsumed under a more inclusive conceptual system and when the material is subsumable, the learning is more meaningful. With his theory of multiple intelligences, Gardner [13] contends that learning is enhanced if different learning modalities are incorporated into classes. Since foldables can address to several intelligences simultaneously, they help learners get a better understanding of what is taught [11].

As well as these benefits, foldables have the following advantages when used appropriately [6-9-10-14]:

- They help learners convey their ideas and understanding
- They help learners review previously learned vocabulary, concepts, generalizations, ideas, theories and provide them with a strong foundation upon which they can build with newly learned knowledge.
- They help learners improve such skills as comparing and contrasting, cause and effect, and similarities and differences
- They help learners focus on key concepts as they enable learners to omit extraneous information
- They help teachers assess comprehension as they allow teachers to see gaps in their students' learning
- They give students a sense of accomplishment when they successfully construct something, and these positive feelings enhance learning.
- They address to more than one learning modality.

Foldables provide learners not only with verbal and visual information but also with kinesthetic experiences. Research has shown that memory is enhanced if verbal information is presented with visuals [15]. As stated by Medina [16] "…the more visual the input becomes, the more likely it is to be recognized—and recalled" (p.233). Foldables allow learners to incorporate written information and images and make abstract knowledge more concrete. As they help learners see the relationships and connections between concepts, it enhances retention. Wolfe [17] points out, **"**The brain does not naturally outline; it organizes information in networks or maps… This may be why visually mapping information has proved productive for enhancing students' storage and retention of information: It mirrors the structure used by the brain" (p.190). In addition, foldables allow learners to concentrate on the subject matter and improve their attention span by giving hands-on experiences.

Foldables can be used in various content areas such as language, maths, science and social studies [6]. They can be benefited from at all grades [10]. They can also be used at any time during instruction either at the start of the lesson when their attention and engagement are at their highest in order to make them learn something straightaway or during the middle of the class when the brain's natural cycle of attention drops in order to intervene to bring the level up or at the end of the class when their attention rises in order to review what has been learnt [17].

Finally, foldables are user-friendly, interactive graphic organizers. They can be easily made by your students. As a teacher, all you have to do is photocopying and handing out the template. The rest falls to your students. In accordance with their objectives, they cut, fold and glue [6].

Below are some of the foldables that can be used in language teaching for various purposes suggested by Zike [18-19] and Barnekow [6].

Two-Tab Foldable: This foldable can be used for comparing and contrasting, determining cause and effect, finding similarities and differences and so on.

Layered-Look Book: This foldable can be used for generating and asking questions about a text/article/story etc.

Envelope Fold: This can be used for organizing information on four things.

Secret door foldable: This foldable can be used for summarizing a story, highlighting key words etc.

Three-Tab Foldable: This foldable can be used for showing word parts and syllabication

Accordion Book: This foldable can be used for sequencing information.

Flip-flap Table: This foldable can be used for learning vocabulary.

Idea Box: This foldable can be used compiling the main ideas of a book, collecting key facts or brainstorming writing ideas.

Object/Person Pop-up: This foldable can be used for presenting important information about a concept/person etc.

Double Twist Tube: This foldable can be used for teaching antonyms and synonyms

3. Conclusion

Cognitive connections and associations are important for enhanced learning. Sitting passively in a classroom and listening to the teacher will not necessarily result in learning. Therefore, teachers should differentiate their instruction to include all their learners in the learning process. One way of achieving this is to engage more than one sense while teaching because every student in a classroom has different learning preferences.They have weaknesses and strengths in different intelligence domains. For this reason, they should be exposed to a variety of activities and have the opportunity to be active in their learning in order to get a better understanding of the subject matter. By integrating different learning styles, foldables can work well with many students because they enable learners to organize, review and reinforce what they learn. Hence, teachers should make foldables a part of their instructional plans and help their learners become effective users of them.

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