

## **Chapter Three**

### **Kinesthesia and Teaching Vocabulary to Children (Hyper-active Creatures)**

#### **Introduction**

Human race has always been interested in rising up children soundly since, as Scovel, (1998, p. 7) says, they deserve to be in the focus of attention and affection of all societies. In the field of foreign language education, today's teaching approaches have been reported to be child-oriented because they, mostly, address children learning a foreign language in school (Kubanek-German, 1998, p. 196).

Marinova-Todd, Marshall, and Snow (2000) explain that a major difference between teaching a foreign language to children and to adults lies on the learning activities and situations adapted by the teacher. Children rely more on their teachers as they react to their actions (Dahl & Freppon, 1998, p. 271). Brown, (1994, p. 90) affirms this idea saying that it is a teacher's responsibility to select and direct the task that can lead a child to learn a foreign language effectively.

In the field of teaching English as a foreign language, Rixon (1992) illustrates that there has been a notable shift from structural teaching approaches to communicative, humanistic, and learner-centered ones where the affective domain is reasonably considered. Thus, Brophy (1996) believes that teachers' roles are not only to instruct and control the classroom, but also to: (a) please children and help them be socialized in school; (b) develop their attitude toward learning; and (c) lead them to feel secure in the classroom in order to participate in classroom activities.

Educators give the activities that require some kind of movement from the learner several names such as: stir activities, games, Total Physical Response, and so on. Recently, this type of activities has been called kinesthetic activities. Kinesthesia in its simplest definition means learning by moving where the teacher makes use of children's natural capacity to move as a tool for teaching the syllabus (Griss, 1998; Trencher, 1991).

In the present chapter, the author means by the term *Kinesthesia* assigning activities which require from the target children to move body parts, jump, and run, while learning.

### ***A Rationale for the Selecting Such a Trend***

1. TESOL Research Agenda (2000) emphasizes that foreign language (FL) course designers need to select and make use of learning activities, tasks and resources that are related to the biological age of FL learners.
2. Several recent studies stress the importance of utilizing children's energy and natural tendency to play, when teaching them an FL (e.g. Asher, Kusudo, & De La Torre, 1993; Glisan, 1993; Kalivoda, Morain, & Elkins, 1993).
3. The universal Declaration of Human Rights (1990) urges educators to put into their consideration children's best interests in all activities related to them; and, consequently, to respect and respond to their right to play.
4. Several studies recommend researchers in the field of FL education to conduct researches related to vocabulary building because of its importance in FL instruction (e.g.

Laufer, 2001; Morin & Goebel, 2001; Ten-Hacken, 2001; Wesche & Paribakht, 1999; Wood, 2001).

### **Definition of Kinesthesia**

Kinesthesia is commonly defined as the sense that provides a human being with conscious awareness of body movement, body position in relation to one's environment, and body balance (Glossary of Interaction Terms, 2004; Milestones Children's Therapy, 2004; The American Heritage Dictionary, 2000; University of New Mexico, 2004).

The Kinesthetic Approach is a training approach which uses sensation derived from muscles or motor movement for the sake of learning (The Nalanda Institute, 2002). This approach utilizes muscles, tendons, and joints, stimulated by bodily movement, to foster and improve learning outcomes (Merriam-Webster Medical Dictionary, 2002).

### **Kinesthesia and Learning**

Recently, the field of foreign language learning has witnessed an increased interest directed toward kinesthesia.

This term has been, mainly, discussed in the light of two major contexts: multiple intelligences and learning styles. In his *Multiple Intelligence Theory*, Howard Gardner (1985, 1993, 1999) identifies several intelligences that energize a human being to learn, behave, and interact. One of these intelligences is the bodily kinesthetic. This intelligence is related to the ability to use physical movement to express ideas and feelings, and solve problems (Gardner, 1985). According to Lazear (1991) the bodily kinesthetic intelligence is awakened through physical movement (such as sports, dance, and physical exercises) as well as the expression of oneself through the body.

Gardner (1999) recommends teachers to take some action to develop the bodily kinesthetic intelligence through movement. This movement helps the pupils process information by interacting with the virtual physical space around them. Thus, FL teachers are required, by several educators (e.g. Armstrong, 1994; Brauldi, 1996; Dallmann-Jones, 1994), to make use of activities that manipulate this virtual space in order to develop their pupils' learning of an FI

The other context that has focused on the concept *kinesthesia* within the field of FL pedagogy is learning styles. Learning styles refer to pupils' general preference to receive, process, retain, and produce new information and skills (Ehrman, 1996; Oxford, 1992; Reid, 1995). A kinesthetic learning style refers to the learner's general preference to learn through concrete body experience (Reid, 1995, p. X). In addition, Oxford (1992, p. 61) mentions that a kinesthetic language learner likes to move frequently in the classroom and dislikes to sit at a desk for a long time.

Ehrman (1996, p. 61) describes kinesthetic language learners as those who: (a) work better when they move; (b) hate to sit still; (c) like to move their body parts (such as fingers and feet); (d) get bored quickly by just listening and talking; (e) tend to have several breaks; and (f) may be considered as hyperactive. Moreover, Ehrman (1996) suggests that teachers should not think that a kinesthetic learner is ill-mannered or dumb. Rather, this type of learners, as she says, requires a different kind of treatment and instruction.

Shoemaker and Shoemaker (1991, p. 6) believe that language educators have a moral commitment to please all different types of language learners (including the kinesthetic). They advise educators to present the content in ways that interest the pupils' learning preferences. Furthermore, Oxford (1990) suggests that language learners have to receive strategy training on learning strategies that can make FL learning faster, easier, more effective, and more enjoyable. Some of these strategies may assist kinesthetic learners such as employing action, and practicing (Oxford, 1990).

Kinesthetic activities have been reported to affect learning physiologically and emotionally. Physiologically, Christison (2002, p. 6) explains that movement and exercises can improve brain functioning, and consequently enhance learning, because they increase oxygen flow to the brain. This increase of oxygen helps learners think better and process information more effectively. Emotionally, Hansen (1999, p. 211) believes that the human memory functions better when creating an emotional climate in language classes. According to her, this climate can be established when classroom

activities depend on movements. She symbolizes the link between movement and activation of the affective domain by the term "*e-motion*".

Dowdy (1997) says that language and movement are both sign systems. Dowdy thinks that language teaching can be more effective when the teacher makes use of performative movement of the pupils. Griss (1998) suggests that the teachers who use kinesthesia in their instruction have to: (a) offer the learners with a model; (b) guide them to do the work by themselves; (c) set up a system of freedom that guarantees security for every learner; (d) agree with the learners on the rules of the kinesthetic activity (e.g. *when I say freeze every one has to stop*); and (e) encourage learners' creativity.

Ehrman (1996) mentions that the adaptation of the Kinesthetic Approach in language classes is very difficult because of the following reasons: (a) It requires from the teacher to socialize the pupils with the kinesthetic activities; (b) Many classes are heavily crowded and these activities may not be applicable; and (c) Many kinesthetic activities depend

on non-traditional requirements which represents additional logistic difficulties. However, Ehrman (1996) declares that almost all language learners enjoy and benefit from well-done kinesthetic activities. Furthermore, she believes that the activities adapted by the Total Physical Response reflect the philosophy of the Kinesthetic Approach.

The Total Physical Response (TPR) was developed in the 1960s by James Asher (1965, 1966, 1969). Richards and Rodgers (1993) report that Asher built his method on the basis of the "*Trace Theory of Memory* (Katona, 1940) which claims that memory can be enhanced effectively by employing motor activities. Educators elaborate that the TPR, as method of teaching English as a foreign language, is characterized by the following:

- a. The learners respond physically to teacher's verbal stimulus;
- b. Learners' physical responses make learning experiences more authentic and meaningful;
- c. The repetition of the correct responses reinforces learning and gives a large number of pupils a chance to practice and

- participate in classroom activities;
- d. The TPR emphasizes the development of comprehension skills before speaking;
  - e. The TPR is based on stimulating the affective side of human relations which is largely coded in non-verbal, gestural, and para-linguistic mechanics;
  - f. Typical TPR classes include low level of anxiety where the pupils are stress-free and feel secure; and
  - g. Motor activity is a right brain function, meanwhile language processing is a left brain function. Combining both functions is supposed to lead to effective FL learning.

(Source: Asher, 1982; Asher, Kusudo, & De La Torre, 1993; Brown, 1994; Glisan, 1993; Richards & Rodgers, 1993; Seaver, 1993; Shrum & Glisan, 1994).

### **Children and the Kinesthetic Approach**

Learning a foreign language at an earlier stage may be difficult for children who are still beginners in the process of studying their own native language. Although children may learn two languages at the same time with the same proficiency level in bilingualism (bilingual settings), the results are not the

same when they acquire a native language and study a foreign one at the same time (Ellis, 1991; Mclaughlin, 1993, Scovel, 1998).

In addition, Schumann (1999) explains that the best way of teaching a language is the way that brings pleasantness to the learners. This pleasantness, as Stevick (1999) says, leads to successful FL learning and improves memory functions. Oxford (1999) illustrates that the teaching environment that provides language learners with pleasantness decreases their harmful anxiety, and consequently: (a) enhances their self-esteem; (b) improves their tolerance of the ambiguity that the culture, logic, and rhetoric a new language may carry; (c) increases their risk-taking ability; and (d) develops their attitudes toward competition that classroom interactions may involve (pp. 60-63).

The history of teaching foreign languages reveals that the teaching methods that bring pleasantness to children are those that utilize children's natural tendency to move. For example, Caulk (1998) describes children as creatures with

excessive energy who prefer to learn by running, jumping, screaming and to let out energy. Caulk's (1998) study recommends that educators have to adapt a learning environment that offers children with real opportunities to move in order to satisfy their need for moving.

In addition, Andres (1999) believes that children, in language classes, require activities that "*unfold their wings*" and enhance their senses of security, identity, and affiliation. Moreover, Tannen-baum (1996) declares that children should be taught a foreign language through the use of physical performance responses because of their natural abilities and potentialities.

Brophy (1996, p. 259) mentions that children are mostly hyperactive learners who: (a) like to squirm, wiggle, and scratch; (b) are easily excitable; (c) blurt out answers and comments; (d) prefer to work out of seats ; (e) move a lot; (f) are energetic but poorly directed; and (g) excessively touch objects and people.

Among other suggestions, Scott and Ytreberg (1994, pp. 1-7) recommend instructors who teach a foreign language to children to: (a) play with the language and have them play with it; (b) help them cooperate in classroom activities; (c) make use of fun in classroom interactions; and (d) include movement and involve the senses in classroom activities.

Halliwell (1995, pp. 6-27) advises educators who work with FL learners at the primary school to: (a) make use of children's natural ability to grasp the meaning; (b) utilize their capacity for indirect learning; (c) benefit from their instinct and aptitude to interact and learn by playing; (d) employ stir activities that motivate them and wake them up; (e) use activities which keep them physically occupied; and (f) keep the lesson simple.

Brown (1994, pp. 91-94) claims that teaching English as a foreign language to school-age children requires from the teacher to: (a) concentrate on, what Piaget calls, "*concrete operations*" offering them with authentic language tasks to be accomplished; (b) set certain patterns and then have the pupils

repeat the pattern for some time; (c) use sense of humor to please the pupils and to avoid boredom that may emerge because of their short attention span; and (d) pepper lessons with physical activities.

Regan-Baker (1990) thinks that teaching a foreign language to children is not an easy mission because it requires from the teacher more energy; quick thinking; and adequate use of children's natural tendency to move, play, and have fun. However, Weikart and Carlton (2002) report that the use of movement activities in FL classes can effectively develop children's language abilities and vocabulary. In this respect, Caughman (2000) believes that movement evokes children's memory and helps them enjoy learning. Thus, Trencher (1991) notes that teachers have to leave spaces in the classroom setting for such movements.

Griss (1998) illustrates that teachers are recommended to utilize kinesthesia in constructing children's learning experiences. According to Griss, the kinesthetic physical movement: (a) makes learning tangible, accessible, and

memorable; (b) cultivates critical thinking; (c) involves both individual decision-making and group interaction; (d) encourages children to make use of their own experiences and observations as a foundation for knowledge; (e) stimulates creative and dynamic energy in the classroom; (f) increases comprehension; and (g) improves social and personal skills.

Cross (1992) stresses that language teachers are required to make use of kinesthetic language games because they have linguistic and affective effects on language learning. Linguistically, they give the learners an opportunity to practice vocabulary and grammar in non-bookish situations. Affectively, they enhance the pupils' motivation to learn through playing and competition.

### **Studies Related to Learning by Moving**

Several studies were conducted in order to investigate the effectiveness of movement in education. For example, Dienstbier's (1989) research showed that movement exercises could improve thinking and learning. The study explained that physical exercises had a clear impact on adrenaline response.

Adrenaline arousal was reported to increase blood flow, and consequently oxygen flow, improving mental functioning.

The aim of Linda's study (1994) was to find out how far hands-on activities could affect language learning. The study depended on training the subjects on moving their hand and fingers as a means for communicating with others. The study proved that hands-on activities improved children's attention; self-esteem; motivation; sensitivity to others; and behavior management. In addition, it was found out that these activities developed children's vocabulary; retention; and reading.

Caulk's (1998) case study dealt with a sample of 15 children (age= 10-11) who were very difficult to control. The study reported that these children had hyperactive behaviors such as: hitting other children; knocking chairs over the floor; and throwing books and paper balls. In addition, these subjects' voices were also out of control in terms of volume and pitch. Caulk's treatment to solve such a problem was to assign some kinesthetic exercises such as: running, jumping, and screaming to let out the energy of these children. Caulk's

observations revealed that the suggested treatment led these children to be more cooperative and concentrating.

Asher, Kusudo, and De La Torre (1993) conducted an experimental study on a sample of 27 undergraduate college students. These subjects studied a course in Spanish for 90 hours. The method used in teaching that course was the Total Physical Response (TPR). The learners were required to respond by acting, moving, and performing. Using the Pimsleur Spanish Proficiency Test, the researchers found out that the subjects' listening, reading and writing skills were significantly improved after studying the offered course.

Kalivoda, Morain, and ELkins (1993) conducted an experimental study on a sample of 180 foreign language learners. These learners were taught within 10-minute intervals an Audio-Motor Unit in which the teacher was playing a tape and the learners were supposed to respond by acting or telling someone what to act. The results of the study revealed that 90% of the subjects had positive attitudes toward the method of teaching used in the study. Moreover, there

were no significant differences between males' and females' attitudes toward the method. The subjects indicated strongest approval for three aspects: (a) They felt that it increased their language learning and improved their listening comprehension and vocabulary building; (b) They appreciated the change of classroom procedures; and (c) They found it stimulating and entertaining.

## **2.5. Vocabulary in the Foreign Language Classroom**

The present chapter focuses on developing children's learning of vocabulary because of its importance in enhancing FL learning. Taylor (1990) believes that success in learning a foreign language basically depends on the amount of words that one manages to learn.

Thus, Jones (1984, p. 138) suggests that FL teachers have to play an active role in drawing learners' attention to words; and to do much effort for building up their learners' vocabulary. In addition, Cross (1992) explains that one of the priorities that foreign language course designers need to put into their consideration is to help language learners gain a

large amount of useful words. Moreover, Cohen (1990) notes that FL vocabulary teaching at early stages needs to receive more care from educators and researchers.

Wesche and Paribakht (1999) argue that after the 1980s the field of FL education has witnessed a movement toward researching and teaching FL vocabulary away from syntax and other aspects of language because of its importance. The studies related to this movement have stressed the role of teaching vocabulary, at early stages, for developing FL learning.

For example, the results of Qian's (1999) study proved that vocabulary size and the depth of vocabulary knowledge had positive correlation with reading comprehension. Those results indicated that vocabulary was essential for developing reading skills.

Also, Nation's (1990) study showed that teaching vocabulary in isolation (out of context) was significantly effective to foreign language beginning learners. The study

revealed that those learners managed to learn over thirty words per hour with retention for several weeks.

In addition, Wesche and Paribakht (2000) conducted a study on a group of ESL learners in order to investigate the effects of five vocabulary exercises on developing reading. The study included two experimental groups. While the first group studied reading passages only, the second received five additional exercises related to word knowledge and word use besides the reading training received by the first group. The study revealed that the group that received vocabulary learning exercises was significantly better than those who did not in both reading comprehension and language production.

In his descriptive study, Zimmerman (1997) illustrates that word learning is a complex task that needs well-planned vocabulary instruction. This instruction, according to Zimmerman study, helps FL learners develop not only reading but also listening, speaking, and writing. Furthermore, Cohen (1990) explains that teachers can apply certain tasks for developing their learners' vocabulary such as: (a) repetition;

(b) using mnemonic strategies; and (c) associating some physical work to the word.

Teaching vocabulary to children needs to focus not only on word meaning but also on alphabetic knowledge, i.e., spelling of the target words (Cataldo & Ellis, 1991; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). The study of McIntyre and Freppon (1998) reveals, among other things, that: (a) children need to acquire alphabetic knowledge before they can develop other skills related to reading and writing; and (b) this alphabetic knowledge can be developed successfully through different instructional techniques.

Coxhead (2000) mentions that one of the most challenging aspects of vocabulary teaching is to decide which words should be taught in a particular program or course. As for teaching FL vocabulary to primary school pupils, Steinberg (1986) recommends course designers to focus on concrete words that these beginning FL learners can observe in the real world. In other words, Cohen (1990) and Harbig (2001) say that curriculum developers have to make use of words that the

target learners use (in reality) in their daily life actions. This is because, as Shrum and Glisan (1994, p. 58) explain, children (ages 7-10) prefer to receive concrete experiences in foreign language classes.

### **A Suggested Kinesthetic Vocabulary Program**

Based on the previously mentioned review of literature, the author suggests the use of kinesthesia to help the pupils enhance their learning of the meaning and spelling of the targeted English words. The major teaching aims of the suggested program included the following:

#### **A. Cognitive-linguistic Teaching Aims:**

- To build up the subjects' vocabulary.
- To develop their learning of the meaning of the targeted words.
- To enhance their spelling skill of such words.
- To raise their attention by moving and playing while (and for) learning.

## **B. Affective Teaching Aims:**

- To encourage slow learners to participate in classroom activities.
- To create a secure learning environment.
- To use laughter for pleasing the learners.
- To utilize children's natural tendency toward learning by playing.

## **C. Social Teaching Aims:**

- To encourage children to cooperate with each other in learning actions.
- To urge good learners to take the lead and feel happy with this responsibility.
- To develop the social acceptability of the good and not-good learners in the classrooms.

The program is to be consisted of 13 lessons taught within 13 weeks. Each lesson has an objective which dealt with the desired learning outcomes of such a lesson. The content of the program deals with six topics: numbers, colors, animals, fruits, study objects, and clothes. Each topic is to be

taught in two sessions. While the first session deals with the meaning of the targeted words, the second session has to be concerned with the spelling of these words. The final session is a comprehensive review of the program.

Each session is to be completed within 45 minutes. Activities used in the program are mainly based on the Kinesthetic Approach which refers to learning by moving. Each session includes four major teaching steps:

- a. A warm-up or a revision activity to direct the pupils' attention toward the new information.
- b. A Presentation of the new material where the teacher makes use of varieties of presentation techniques such as: the blackboard drawings, flash cards, and real objects.
- c. Kinesthetic activities in which the learners are mainly required to move as a response to the assignments demanded by the teacher; like asking a pupil to spell out a word by jumping from one letter to another. These letters are supposed to be written on the flour by the teacher.
- d. A homework that requires from the pupils to apply the kinesthetic activity, practiced in the period, at home

individually or with colleagues.

The program is constructed in a way that can stimulate the pupils to participate in the kinesthetic activities. Procedures followed in these kinesthetic activities took place in four stages:

***Stage One:*** The teacher gives a model.

***Stage Two:*** Good pupils are directed to volunteer to practice any given activity since they have the linguistic talents, in addition to the kinesthetic ability, that enable them to do the task correctly. This procedure intends to decrease anxiety in the classroom since no one is obliged to do the task at that stage.

***Stage Three:*** Other pupils, known by their teacher to be good language learners, are assigned to do the task. At this stage, it is supposed that these subjects earn more experience monitoring volunteers who practice the task in stage two. Their observations are supposed to (a) decrease their level of

stress, fear, and anxiety; and (b) give them guidance to the correct responses.

**Stage Four:** Finally, some other pupils, known by their teacher to be below average, are invited to do the task since they spend a longer time monitoring several pupils practicing the activity. Their natural tendency to play and have fun is supposed to urge them to participate in the activity. Their will to play like their colleagues is posited to (a) increase their concentration; (b) refresh their memory; (c) raise their self-confidence; and consequently (d) help them develop a positive attitude toward English classes and the teacher of English.

## **Conclusion**

It has to be said that children have been created as hyper-active, moving, and full of energy creatures and educators have to find ways to utilize such characteristics in classroom actions. Planned, guided and controlled child-movement in the classroom helps him/her not only to learn better but also behave. Thus, classroom teachers are

recommended not to punish their pupils because of their natural energy at that age. Rather, they are invited to find out and make use of kinesthetic activities that can help them learn by moving. Such a procedure can assist both teachers and learners to gain academic, emotional, and social benefits.

Moreover, course designers and curriculum developers are recommended to offer classroom teachers with activities as well as ideas that can support them when applying the kinesthetic approach in their classes. Also, researchers are invited to conduct further studies related to the kinesthetic approach in order to find out the gains that they can get from children's natural habit and tendency to move. Among other things that they can study, researchers can research factors such as different age, proficiency level and/or gender and their relations with kinesthesia.

Furthermore, researchers are recommended to study not only children's natural tendency to move but also their other natural tendencies, energies, and potentialities. The keen study of such factors can lead children to learn better,

faster, and more effectively and help teachers teach better, smarter, and more effectively.

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