Providing a Variety of Forms of Classroom Input to Ensure the Fulfilment of Learning Potential

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Extended Abstract

A common form of classroom instruction caters to the needs of auditory and visual learners, with the lecturer being the focus of attention. This takes place despite it having been found to be ineffective (Subramanian, Timberlake, Mittakanti, Lara & Brandt, 2012), with the retention rate of information disseminated being 45% 3 days after a lecture, falling to a mere 24% after 8 weeks (Menges, 1988). In a traditional linear lecture with a large amount of teacher talk, disengagement takes place which prevents some students from fulfilling their potential (Rose, 2000) as individuals have different learning strategies in various autonomous proportions. Consequently, Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer and Bjork (2008), for example, are of the opinion that for learners to be academically successful, input has to be accessible to all learner types, with their various intelligences catered for, while Harmer (2007) comments on the need to strike a balance between student and teacher talk time in order for this to be achieved.

It has also been proven that learners employing multiple learning styles experience greater success with their language learning, which can be achieved if students are exposed to the various forms of input (Lujan & DiCarlo, 2006). However, failure to match the teacher’s teaching style with the learners’ learning styles, in contrast, can lead to demotivation and frustration, and, unsurprisingly, has a negative effect on learning (Peacock, 2001). This is why the different types should be borne in mind when developing syllabi.

Consequently, research was undertaken to determine the preferred means of learning of students on an undergraduate academic writing course, which adopts a reading-into-writing approach, in order to determine whether the course input addressed the students’ stated learning preferences. This was conducted post-input, with the syllabus having been supplemented with interpersonal and kinaesthetic activities to ensure the traditionally dominant auditory and visual forms of input featured less prominently.

The findings were from a questionnaire completed by a cohort of 52 students from three classes, which asked for responses to 22 prompts on the Likert scale regarding how effective and enjoyable the course input was. There was a focus on whether the input was enjoyable, because, as Cives-Enriques (2003) states, “...if students of any discipline enjoy what they are doing, they will at least make the effort to learn” (p. 240), and, according to Tomlinson, Hill and Masuhara (2000), devote “...energy and attention to the learning process” (p. xi).

The results show that interpersonal and kinaesthetic activities were perceived to be, on the whole, more effective and enjoyable than teacher-led instruction. For example, 83% of students surveyed regarded Working with classmates to be both effective and enjoyable, while 54% believed Working alone to be effective, with a mere 43% regarding it as being enjoyable. Consequently, the students agreed with Felder (2013), who advocates an interpersonal classroom, as “…language learning does not occur as a result of the transmission of facts…but is result of opportunities for meaningful interactions…” (Cives-Enriques, 2003, p. 253), and Peacock (2001), who is of the belief that appealing to kinaesthetic intelligence can lead to enhanced comprehension, production and motivation.

Therefore, while certain features of the course did address some students’ preferred means of learning, other forms of input should feature more prominently. The results of the research conducted indicate a strong preference for an interpersonal classroom, meaning that the lecturer should limit the amount of time spent being the focus of attention, with an approach ensuring various student(s): student(s) interactive patterns whilst actively participating in cognitively and emotionally engaging tasks being implemented. This is given credence by Ellis (2003), who discovered that a focus on language results in learners becoming more aware in their communication post-input, which is essential for language acquisition, and that the most use, as well as the most complex use, of the target language occurs during information exchange activities, a fact which emphasises the need to strike a balance between theory and application. This philosophy is supported by Mazur (2009) who reported that spending time on discussions and peer interactions, as well as giving students time to think, resulted in learning gains tripling. It should be noted that this is the case not just for the language classroom, but for other disciplines, such as Medicine, and Chemical Engineering (Felder, 2011).

In conclusion, as well as kinaesthetic activities, I shall continue to present interpersonal activities, with the latter featuring more prominently due to the response to these activities being more favourable according to the categories of faculty, gender, country of secondary education, mother tongue, and highest English language qualification, as well as in general terms.
References


