

Student-centred active learning with total physical involvement to enhance language acquisition

Reference: GPPG13-002

Author

Anne Chen, Waitakere Adult Literacy Incorporated

The Māori whakataukī (proverb):

Ehara tāku toa i te toa takitahi. Engari, he toa takitini

A warrior never stands alone, but stands with many

I would like to share the effectiveness of my teaching practice with other tertiary educators in the community. I hope that in doing so I inspire them to use humanistic and communicative practices to empower their learners.

About this paper

This paper aims to promote good practice that engages and motivates adult Pasifika learners. The majority of research on Pasifika learners has focused on students 25 years and under. This study focuses on Pasifika learners who are predominantly aged between 25 and 50 years. The learners are from low income families, born overseas and English is their second language; they are typically mapped at steps 1 to 3 in the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) learning progressions.

The TEC progressions provide a framework to show what adult learners know and can do at successive points as they develop in their literacy learning (TEC, *Learning Progression for Adult Literacy*, 2008). The subjects of this study are eager to pursue tertiary education and/or enter the workforce; however; they lack the required language skills at steps 3-6 of the progressions (depending on the job requirements).

My teaching practice is based on the humanistic and communicative approach to teaching and learning (HCATL) (Celce-Murcia, 1991), which promotes active, student-centred learning (Bonwell and Eison, 1991; Gagnon and Collay, 2006). The content of a lesson is taught and learned from the point of view of the learner. The management of the group involves regularly shifting the modes of interaction: asking learners to work individually, in pairs and in groups. The HCATL approach focuses on learning rather than teaching; it focuses on what learners will do rather than what the teachers will do. The teacher's role is to develop an environment for learners to take part in active learning. The approach engages learners in authentic communication through the use of social interaction activities such as role plays, interviews, information gap exercises, surveys and games. Learning topics are chosen so learners can draw their knowledge from past experiences, and apply what they learn to their daily lives.



Supported through the Organisational Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2012. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-Book: www.akoatearoa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



The positive effects of active learning

Active learning enables students to become less anxious and less conscious of the learning process, consequently making the learning seem effortless (Young, 1991). All students, regardless of learning type, benefit from lessons that engage them. The HCATL approach to learning is non-threatening and it not only engages students' interest, but also keeps them involved. Additionally, in providing an environment of increased learner contribution, learners are empowered to develop to their highest potential.

Incorporating movement into learning

Movement can be in the form of physical activity like role playing, playing toss and catch while reviewing material, miming or learners getting out of their seats after sitting down for a long period of time.

Dr James Asher, the originator of the Total Physical Response (TPR) approach (Asher, 1979) to learning language, describes how he discovered the power of learning languages through physical movement, and the lengths to which he went to prove the technique through scientific experimentation involving the differences between the right and left brain. This paper promotes learning by students carrying out a physical activity: learning by doing, rather than just listening to the teacher or watching a demonstration – this type of learning is known as kinaesthetic learning (Fleming and Mills, 1992).

How movement aids learning

Research by neurokinaesiologist Jean Blaydes Madigan (2010) found that movement prepares the brain for optimal learning. Movement with intention (when movement is linked to a learning process: for example, learners carry out instructions by physically performing the activity's instructions such as "Walk to the door", "Open the door", "Sit down" and "Give me your pen") prepares the brain and enhances and anchors learning (Blaydes, 2010). When more modalities (any of the five senses) are used in learning a concept, the information is stored in several areas of the brain so the brain has more memory pathways for retrieving the information (Blaydes, 2010).

In her book, "Smart Moves: Why Learning Is Not All In Your Head", Hannaford (1995, p. 96) explains that "movement, from earliest infancy and throughout our lives, plays an important role in the creation of nerve cell networks which are actually the essence of learning".



Supported through the Organisational Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2012. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-Book: www.akoatearoa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



Literature review

A kinaesthetic learning (Fleming & Mills, 1992) environment using game-like activities is of crucial importance to keep students interested and to create a relaxed atmosphere. Franciosi (2010) argues for the need to make learning more “game-like” in order to make learning interesting and hence produce successful learning (Urr, 1998). Game-like activities are designed to combine learning with interest and enjoyment. They help learners to practise particular aspects of the language they are learning and use some features of games such as competition, role play and time limits to increase interest. Hadfield (1992) states that “affective activities aim to create a positive and supportive group atmosphere in a non-explicit way”. This can be achieved when learners work in pairs or groups, during which they support each other rather than having to bear the whole weight of learning themselves. This creates a positive affective environment, which is conducive to learning (Harmer, 2001).

In their *Affective Filter Hypothesis* (Krashen & Terrell, 1983), the affective filter is an imaginary wall that is placed between a learner and language learning. Krashen argues that a positive attitude will lower the filter, while a negative attitude will increase it. Negative feelings such as lack of motivation, lack of self-confidence and learning anxiety act as filters that hinder and obstruct language learning. A need to function in the language while participating in a purposeful game-like activity will generally lower the filter (Richard-Amato, 1988), but anxiety can raise the filter. The filter is down when the learner is not anxious and is part of a team (working in a pair or group) (Harmer, 2001; Young, 1991). This is also reflected in Rinvolucri’s *More Grammar Games* (1995) and Ur’s *Grammar Practice Activities* (1998), which promote game-like activities in teaching. Learning is enhanced by both getting the learners moving and by using game-like activities to provide the learners with opportunities to practise what they have learned, without losing the pedagogical value of more traditional language teaching methods/practices, where the focus is on grammar.

Applying the HCATL approach to engage the target group in academic literacy will not only enhance their own learning, but will also enable them to become more active participants in their children's education (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006). As was demonstrated in the *Literature Review on the Effective Engagement of Pasifika Parents & Communities in Education* (PISCPL) (Ministry of Education, 2006), participants who were beneficiaries of the HCATL approach were subsequently able to transfer the skills they had learned to their school-aged children (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006). Thus, the benefit of motivating the target group is two-fold; participants can enhance their own language skills (essential for entering tertiary study or the workforce), and they can also enhance their children’s ability to achieve educational outcomes (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006).

This paper reports on a study of Pasifika learners taught at Waitakere Adult Literacy Incorporated since 2009 and investigates the effectiveness of student-centred active learning with total physical involvement. This means that movement is integrated into the content of the lesson, rather than as a tangent or parallel activity. The academic objective is at the heart of the movement experience (Blaydes, 2010).



Supported through the Organisational Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2012. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-Book: www.akoatearoa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



The study used a questionnaire to gather quantitative data along with interviews and observations to add a qualitative dimension. Subsequent findings highlight the importance of student-centred active learning with total physical involvement for the enhancement of learning.

Participants

The study was undertaken at Waitakere Adult Literacy Inc., a member provider of Literacy Aotearoa, based in New Lynn, Auckland, New Zealand. The participating students have enrolled at Waitakere Adult Literacy Inc. to improve their English skills. Of the 43 students included in this study, 13 were working full-time, eight had part-time work and the rest were unemployed or stay-at-home mothers.

The demographic distribution of the study's participants was as follows:

- 67.5% Samoan, 17.5% Tongan, 5% Fijian, 2.5% Tuvaluan, 5% Kiribatian, and 2.5% Cook Islander
- 13 of the participants were working full-time
- two participants were first-year degree students
- two were overseas-trained nurses seeking the Academic International English Language Testing System (IELTS) "band 7" (good user) score. Nurses with an overseas qualification (except Australia) are required to pass the IELTS band 7 before submitting an application to the New Zealand Nursing Council for registration in New Zealand
- one was a final-year degree student
- 25 were enrolled to improve their general language skills.

Instruments

This study used three different instruments to gather data:

1. Questionnaires: The questionnaires developed for this study contained 10 statements (see [Appendix A](#): Workplace Final Evaluation Survey for offsite workplace learners at their workplace, and [Appendix B](#): Evaluation Questionnaire for learners who attended on site at Waitakere Adult Literacy Incorporation and Leataata Tupulonga Le Pasifika).
2. Observation Guide: This was in the form of session records written by a support tutor during the learning/tutoring sessions. Details of the learners' performance during the session were observed and recorded throughout the programme (see [Appendix C](#))
3. Interview: The interviews involved asking the students to give brief feedback at the end of each session, as well as an informal one-to-one conference on their progress and their feelings about their learning at the end of each session during the programme.

Completion of evaluation tools

- 13 learners completed the survey for workplace learners
- 12 learners completed the questionnaire for learners not in the workplace
- 33 learners were observed (a support tutor observed the learners and made notes on their learning progress)



Supported through the Organisational Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2012. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-Book: www.akoatearoa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



- All 43 learners were interviewed using Talanoa Pasifika Research Methodology (Valioleti, 2006).

Note: The evaluation for learners with a low level of English was completed in one of the following ways: the evaluation was read out and explained in simple English for learners with low decoding skills but good oral skills; support from other learners with better language proficiency or support from Pasifika staff at Waitakere Adult Literacy Inc. (depending on the availability of either learners with language skills or staff).

Results

- 80 *per cent* of the participants had over 80-100 *per cent* attendance
- 100 *per cent* of the participants responded positively to the practice
- 80 *per cent* of the participants completed the programme they enrolled in
- Participants who were timid, nervous and softly spoken became confident and less anxious. This was observed by the students themselves, by their peers, and the tutors
- Two out of twelve workplace learners (machine operators)
 - completed PaMPITO (Plastics and Materials Processing Industry Training Organisation) unit standards required for work
 - and completed the company Health & Safety unit standards
- Three out of twelve workplace learners (machine operators and packer)
 - completed CompeteNZ (the New Zealand Engineering Food and Manufacturing Industry Training Organisation) unit standard
 - completed Environmental Management training
- Two out of twelve workplace learners (labourers) were at starting points at a level below the steps described in the TEC learning progressions, and struggled to read and write basic words. By the end of the programme they were starting to recognise words like 'danger' and 'hazard' on workplace signage. They gained simple spelling strategies by using onset and rime
- Six out of twelve workplace learners (machine operators and packers) were able to fill out a Hazard Identification Form confidently and correctly after attending the programme
- Two first-year degree programme learners have gained the skills necessary to write academic essays. Additionally, one learner, who had struggled to understand assignment questions and constantly had to resubmit her assignments prior to receiving learning support at Waitakere Adult Literacy Inc., gained a B for one assignment
- The final-year degree student has since passed all her final exams in Early Childhood Education
- Two overseas qualified nurses, who had their initial IELTS score at 4.5 and 5.0, have improved their scores to 5.0 and 6.0 respectively

All learners have made improvements in confidence, spelling, writing and communication skills. This was measured by comparing the Student observation records at the start and end of the programme and student self-assessment at the end of the programme



Supported through the Organisational Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2012. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-Book: www.akoatearoa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



Student observations done after each session, as well as peer and learner self-evaluations showed that all the learners have improved and enjoyed their learning experience. This observation was supported by learners commenting to the tutor that the active learning approach was a fun and effective way to engage and enhance their learning.

Conclusion

Although conducted on a very small scale, this study has produced positive findings; 80% of learners showed significant progress in their studies, the completion rate at 80% was high and absences at 20% were low. The advantage of student-centred active learning with total physical involvement over the traditional passive learning approach (Celce-Murcia, 1991) is that students are actively involved in their own learning; they learn by doing and this type of learning is lively, stimulating and fun. Opportunities for working collaboratively were promoted via group work with the resultant collective knowledge and ideas enhancing the learning experience of all concerned.

For the purpose of this study, the positive outcomes of the practice were judged in terms of attendance, motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and learners' self-assessment of progress (as per feedback in oral interviews). The most significant outcomes exhibited by the learners in this study were attendance and motivation. Whilst attendance is a vital component in student achievement, it is not a guarantee that positive academic outcomes will be achieved. However, attendance (Hughes, 2009) and motivation (Ellis, 1994; Dornyei, 2001; Ushida, 2008) are considered key ingredients for academic success.

The students in this study made a positive connection with their learning, as demonstrated by their attendance records. Additionally, as a result of their high attendance and motivation, they achieved positive educational outcomes. These gains are clearly demonstrated by the workplace learners who had struggled for years to complete their workplace unit standards and who have now managed to complete three to five unit standards during the year in which they were also completing the course provided by Waitakere Adult Literacy Inc.

Learners who had been working at the factory or construction site for years and who had struggled with form filling have now gained the ability to understand and complete the organisational Hazard Identification form, and are able to decode important signage like 'danger' and 'hazard'.

The five learners with the highest language proficiency in this study gained the literacy skills necessary to write academic essays; this was demonstrated by their ability to construct complex sentences with better syntax and incorporation of academic vocabulary, which they were unable to do before joining the programme. These educational gains were reflected by improved IELTS examination scores and assignment grades and the decrease in resubmission of assignments.

All the other learners who had low language proficiency and lacked confidence became more active in their learning, knowing that they were supported by their more able peers (this practice was encouraged by the tutor). By taking a more active role in their learning, these learners became more



Supported through the Organisational Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2012. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-Book: www.akoatearoa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



confident with participating in conversations, in addition to acquiring a wider vocabulary and a more effective spelling strategy.

The results of this study confirm that, with active participation, learners use the language they are learning more frequently and accurately, and they make progress in their language acquisition. The empirical evidence discussed in this study shows that a highly engaging and meaningful learning programme is critical to ensure high student attendance, and hence motivation (Vallerand & Menard, 1984). Motivation is recognised as a characteristic of successful students (Dornyei, 2001; Ushida, 2008); motivation provides the primary impetus to initiate learning the second language and later the driving force to sustain the long and tedious learning process (Dornyei, 1998). Educators should therefore endeavour to implement, cultivate and promote student motivation (Dornyei & Csizer, 1998) to enhance Pasifika learners' language learning success.

Recommendations

This study has found the HCATL approach to be a pedagogical style conducive to optimum learning for Pasifika learners and non-Pasifika learners (Johnson, 1982). It is therefore important to inspire educators at all levels (Prince, 2004) to incorporate active learning with movement into their daily teaching. It recommends that teachers integrate purposeful movement with classroom instruction, and provide activities that improve attention spans (student engagement in learning activities) and improve the academic performance of the learners (Guilloteaux & Dornyei, 2007).

This study envisages further research and investigation. It has the potential of providing a framework (from tertiary through to workplaces) for successful literacy acquisition for Pasifika learners, particularly for those within the age group of 25-50, who were born overseas and have English as a second language.



Supported through the Organisational Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2012. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-Book: www.akoatearoa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



References

- Asher, J. C. (1979). *Learning Another Language Through Actions*. San Jose, California: AccuPrint.
- Bonwell, C. C. & Eison, J. A. (1991). Active learning: Creating excitement in the classroom. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No.1 Washington, D.C.: George Washington University.
- Blaydes, J. & Mitchell, D. (2010). How Exercise Benefits the Brain: Learning Through Movement and Music. GeoMotion Group, Inc. Human Kinetics. Retrieved from <http://www.humankinetics.com/excerpts/excerpts//learn-how-exercise-benefits-the-brain>
- Dornyei, Z. (1998). Motivation in second and foreign language learning. *Language Teaching*, 31, 117–135 doi: 10.1017/s026144480001315t
- Dornyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational strategies in a language classroom*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press
- Dornyei, Z. and Csizer, K. (1998). Ten Commandments for motivating learners: Results of an empirical study. *Language Teaching Research*, 2(3), 203–229
- Franciosi, Stephan J. (2010). Making ESL/TEFL Classroom Activities More Game-Like. *The Internet TESL Journal*, XVI(2), 1–5
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Fleming, N. and Mills, C. (1992). Not Another Inventory, Rather a Catalyst for Reflection, To Improve the Academy, 11, 137
- Gagnon, Jr., G.W. and Collay, M. (2006). *Constructivist Learning Design*. Sage Publications Ltd
- Guilloteaux, M.J. and Dornyei, Z. (2007). Motivating Language Learners: A classroom-oriented investigation of teachers' motivational practices and students' motivation. *TESOL Quarterly*, 42(1), 55–77
- Gorinski, R. and Fraser, C. (2006). *Literature Review on the Effective Engagement of Pasifika Parents and Communities in Education (PISCPL)*. Wellington: Ministry of Education
- Hadfield, J. (1992). *Classroom Dynamics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Hannaford, C. (1995). *Smart Moves: Why learning is not all in your head*. Arlington, Virginia: Great Ocean Publishers
- Harmer, J. (2001). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Longman, Pearson Education Limited
- Hughes, N. (2009). Attendance as a measure of student motivation. *Learning and Teaching in Action (LTiA)*, 8(1)
- Johnson, K. (1982). *Communicative Syllabus Design and Methodology*. Oxford: Pergamon Press
- Krashen, S. & Terrell, T. (1983). *The natural approach: Language acquisition in the classroom*. Oxford [Oxfordshire]; New York: Pergamon Press; San Francisco: Alemany Press
- Prince, M. (2004). Does Active Learning Work? A Review of the Research. *Journal of Engineering Education*, 93(3), 223-231
- Richard-Amato, P. A. (1988). Making it happen: Interaction in the second language classroom: From theory to practice. New York: Longman
- Rinvoluceri, M. (1995). *Grammar games*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Ryan, R. M. And Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), 54-67

- Ur, P. (1998). *Grammar Practice Activities: A Practical Guide for Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Ushioda, E. (2008). Motivation and good language learners. *In Lessons from Good Language Learners*, pp-19-34. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Valioleti, T. M. (2006). Talanoa Research Methodology: A Developing Position on Pacific Research. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 12.
- Vallerand, R. J. and Menard, L. (1984). Increasing the School Attendance of Native Students: An application of Cognitive Evaluation Theory. *The Canadian Journal of Native Study*, 2, 241-255
- Young, J. D. (1991) Creating a low-anxiety classroom environment: What does language anxiety research suggest? *The Modern Language Journal*, 75

Appendix A:

Workplace Final Evaluation Survey

The following is an evaluation survey for the Literacy Programme you are completing. In order to improve the quality of the programme and provide a better learning experience for future employees, we would like to ask you complete the following survey.

1. How would you rate your language ability (reading/ writing/ speaking/ listening/ other, please specify _____) before attending this programme?

very poor 1 2 3 4 5 very good

2. How would you rate your language ability (reading/ writing/ speaking/ listening/ other, please specify _____) after attending this programme?

very poor 1 2 3 4 5 very good

3. Did the programme meet the goals that you set?

not at all 1 2 3 4 5 very much so

This programme has helped me improve my reading/ writing/speaking/ listening/ other, please specify _____ skills.

Reading

strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 strongly agree

Writing

strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 strongly agree

Speaking

strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 strongly agree

Listening

strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 strongly agree

***Other, please specify* _____**

strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 strongly agree

4. What do you think about the teaching materials your tutor used?

very poor 1 2 3 4 5 very good

5. The space provided for this programme was appropriate (e.g. room/space, site, furnishings etc).

very poor 1 2 3 4 5 very good

Please comment: _____

6. Did you enjoy the one-to-one sessions or would you prefer to be in a group?

Please comment: _____

7. If you had a concern or problem, were you happy with how it was dealt with?

Not happy 1 2 3 4 5 very happy

8. Overall, how satisfied were you with this programme?

Highly Satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Highly Dissatisfied

9. Would you recommend this programme to other people?

Not really 1 2 3 4 5 very much

10. What else could be done to improve the programme?

Please comment: _____

Other comments or suggestions:

Please comment: _____

Please make any additional comments you may have about this course in the remaining space.

Please comment: _____

Appendix B:

Evaluation Questionnaire

In order to improve the quality of the teaching and provide a better learning experience for future students, we would like to ask you to take some time to complete the following evaluation.

Tutor name: _____

Date: _____

1 – Strongly agree 2 – agree 3 – neutral 4 – disagree 5 – strongly disagree

	1	2	3	4	5
I enjoy playing games while learning English					
I like to get up and move around while I am learning					
I am actively involved in the learning process					
I get the chance to practise what I have learnt					
I get a lot of support from other members of the group					
I learn practical and useful things					
The sessions are interesting and fun					
I enjoy working in pairs and groups					
The learning atmosphere is positive and relaxed					
The tutors are friendly and supportive					

Other comments (you can write in your own language if you wish to)

Sample comments:

I learnt a lot with this course, even-though it was only for a short period of time due to my working career.

We played some games, such as finding out the names of a fruit that starts with whatever letter of the alphabetical order the other person ends his/her fruit with.

We also tried to find words starts with whatever letter of the alphabetical that you picked. It was fun but learning was embedded in it. I had a wonderful time with the tutors and other class members.

Appendix C: Observation

By Sandy Johnston (support tutor at Waitakere Adult Literacy)

Sample observation

In the 'Let's Talk' group, in which I was a support tutor, I made the following observations of a young Samoan student (M.) who had arrived in New Zealand from Samoa, three weeks prior to joining the group. In the beginning he was timid and obviously very nervous of having to converse in English, giving only 1 or 2 softly spoken words in response to questions. Over the coming weeks I noticed a rapid and marked change in the manner of his participation in the group. I saw his self-consciousness dissolve as he began to participate in games and tasks that required him to share his skills and ideas as he moved about interacting with others. A variety of activities were deftly interwoven within the course in such a way that enthusiastic and willing involvement was generated. Throughout the course, M. was drawn beyond himself, clearly enjoying the challenges presented by working cooperatively within the group dynamic to achieve learning outcomes. By the end of the year he was a confident student, speaking in clear sentences, offering comments, making jokes and able to ask direct questions.