

PROMOTING SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH PHYSICAL EDUCATION: A NEW PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

In India, despite the learning of English since childhood, many students complete their higher education with poor English language proficiency. Integrating physical education for the instruction of English language will be of immensely successful among the learners. Physical education provides opportunities for pupils to develop the key skills of communication, through promoting verbal and non-verbal communication skills when explaining what they intend to do, giving feedback to others, planning and organising group or team work, giving instructions and signals in a game. The theory of brain-based learning is suitable to explain the effects of integration of physical education and English language learning. The theory states that moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) effectively stimulates the brain. The special nature of the PE environment and curriculum, means that movement and developmentally appropriate physical tasks assist language development in several key ways.

Introduction

Physical education would be an easy class for the students to learn a language because of its emphasis on movement rather than reading and writing. However, success in PE class depends on a student's ability to listen to and understand instructions. In India, despite the learning of English since childhood, many students complete their higher education with poor English language proficiency. Integrating physical education for the instruction of English language will be of immensely successful among the learners. Physical education provides opportunities for pupils to develop the key skills of communication, through promoting verbal and non-verbal communication skills when explaining what they intend to do, giving feedback to others, planning and organising group or team work, giving instructions and signals in a game.

Related Studies

Despite the lack of sustained, comprehensive research into the relationship of language and Physical Education in both the secondary and primary school curricula, previous studies have successfully established that language and motor activity are closely linked (Bearne, 1998.) It is noted that the language acquisition patterns of infants have certain parallels with the acquisition of motor skills (Yule, 1994). This point is repeated by Maude (1998) in an analysis of the links between language and physical education in the primary sector. Infants develop language skills through motor exploration and, as a consequence, motor skills are also enhanced. Maude (1998) clearly highlights this significant, entwined relationship between movement, language and physical education. As children experience physical activity, they also acquire a vocabulary, syntax and structure.

Brain Lateralization

The theory of brain-based learning is suitable to explain the effects of integration of physical education and English language learning. The theory states that moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) effectively stimulates the brain. In short-term, physical activity leads to immediate biochemical changes in cerebral regions thereby increasing attention and enhancing cognitive performance. In long-term, regular MVPA fosters angiogenesis, neurogenesis, and synaptogenesis in brain areas that are important for the process of learning and memory. Additionally, researchers verified both positive short and long-term changes in physical activity intervention programs for children. These findings suggest that regular or additional physical education lessons might stimulate children's cognitive capacities (e.g. L2 learning of young learners).

Physical Activity and Language Instruction

The special nature of the PE environment and curriculum, means that movement and developmentally appropriate physical tasks assist language development in several key ways:

Physical activity is a natural environment for language instruction... physical activity may facilitate improved generalization of knowledge of vocabulary labels. For example, children may have learned to identify the colour red in books and among building blocks in the classroom. In physical education activities they can learn to generalize the colour red to pieces of physical education equipment such as balls, shapes, spots, tapes and paddles.

Connor-Kuntz and Dummer, 1996, p303)

Physical education classes rarely take place in silent, static environments. Pupils who benefit from a good physical education programme are encouraged to plan their performances, discuss content and listen to the reflections of others. This is done using a variety of techniques and is commonly enhanced by the use of visual aids, with an increasing emphasis on Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Well-planned programmes encourage many language types and communication activities, that are in nature both restricted (low word count, often with short simple commands) and elaborated (long sentences with complex syntax.)

Guildenhuys and Orsmond (1996) also suggest that good PE lessons provide real, vital and visual experiences rather than being of an abstract, inert or purely verbal nature. The concrete experiences of, say, discussing a route in orienteering or of watching and commenting on a performance in gymnastics, are tangible, common occurrences through which oracy skills can be developed. Guildenhuys and Orsmond (1996) add that language is not an abstract set of concepts just as the relationship between motor activity and physical education is neither vague nor unrelated. They maintain that language can be placed in context naturally and meaningfully during physical activity. The process of acquiring language is achieved, in part, through the use of social, interactive routines. For instance, the routine of planning, performing and evaluating may be used by the teacher to encourage language skills to develop alongside physical abilities.

Use of Non-Verbal Communication

The use of non-verbal communication can help convey information to students who may otherwise have trouble understanding verbal input.

Some examples of how to apply the strategy of non-verbal communication include:

- Pointing to objects as you say them, such as 'basketball' or 'racquet'
- Physically demonstrating something, such as dribbling a basketball
- Developing non-verbal cues, such as holding up a hand to say 'stop'
- Using a whistle to indicate start and stop times or errors
- Referring to a picture or diagram when introducing a new activity

Use of Total Physical Response

Total Physical Response (TPR) is a strategy to help the beginners develop vocabulary. The basic premise of this strategy is that students acquire a new language through the structured integration of words and movement.

While introducing the vocabulary associated with basketball, as an example, the following activities can be followed. To implement TPR, the teacher could provide students with a ball and ask them to repeat his or her actions. The teacher could say, 'dribble the ball,' while demonstrating this action. Students would then repeat the action.

Here are some more examples of how to use the TPR strategy in PE class:

- 'Shoot the ball in the hoop'
- 'Bounce the ball three times'
- 'Pass the ball to your partner'
- 'Make a slam dunk'
- 'Run or walk around the track'
- 'Run to first base'
- 'Hit the ball with the racquet'
- 'Hit the ball over the net'

These are all activities that could be demonstrated by the teacher and then repeated by the students.

Increased Motivation

"It is a student's desire to understand and use the content that motivates him or her to learn the language" (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010:11). In the field of PE, there is ample evidence that links the self-determined motivation with factors such as the enjoyment of the exercises, the cooperative learning and positive motivational consequences: interest, satisfaction and high participation, the importance of PE and the intention to partake in leisure-time physical activity. As for the learning of a second or foreign language, Intrinsic Motivation has been positively linked to self-confidence (Pae, 2008), the performance in the

second or foreign language course (Morales-Rodríguez, 2011), the intention to continue with the second or foreign language studies, or, conversely, with the reduction of anxiety levels.

Conclusion

Sport and physical education, although a unique and important subject on its own, can also be used as a vehicle to be able to teach other core subjects. For teaching English, this can be in the form of speaking, listening, reading or writing as part of PE lessons and extracurricular activities. Sport is one of the few very subjects where discussion and team work are used in the majority of, if not all, lessons. Students in PE lessons should be encouraged to coach each other and offer constructive criticism when they make a mistake as this will improve their confidence in public speaking and develop the way they construct sentences both verbally and in their written English.

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