CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS FOR TEYL

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ABSTRACT

Young learners have their own set of characteristics and needs which is distinct from teaching adults and advanced learners. In the field of teaching English to young learners (TEYL), teachers have to consider these factors in curriculum design, lesson planning, activity design, and materials selection. This paper describes three conceptual frameworks that can be referenced and applied in the context of TEYL. The frameworks are Bloom's Taxonomy, Multiple Intelligences, and Gradual Release of Responsibility. These frameworks have been chosen for their practicality in providing guidance to TEYL teachers, based on my experiences as a teacher and teacher trainer. Each framework is summarized with key points and an explanation is given in terms of the TEYL context with examples.

KEYWORDS: young learners, TEYL, kindergarten, elementary, educational framework, lesson planning

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English to young learners, generally kindergarten to elementary school age students, presents its own set of challenges and requires a particular range of techniques and approaches that are different from teaching other age groups. Considerations need to be made for the linguistic and cognitive abilities of young learners, as well as their specific characteristics such as boundless energy, enthusiasm, and short attention spans (Shin & Crandall, 2014). What works for adults and advanced learners may not be suitable for young learners, and vice versa. Therefore, there are certain concepts that are especially relevant for the field of teaching English to young learners (TEYL). This paper suggests three key conceptual frameworks for the context of TEYL.

2. FRAMEWORKS FOR TEYL

Rather than presenting abstract ideas, the frameworks described here provide a clear structure or set of linked concepts that can be applied or referenced in the process of curriculum design, les-son planning, activity design, and materials selection for teaching English to young learners. The-se frameworks have been chosen based on my experiences as a teacher of young learners, and as a teacher trainer helping new and in-service teachers to understand the unique challenges and solutions needed for this context. They are not unique to young learners, but I believe that these concepts in particular form a practical and solid basis for teachers to approach the planning of education for young learners. Each can be considered individually during the planning stages, or they can be combined to give multi-faceted systematic guidance for teachers.

The three frameworks that will be described are:

- Bloom's Taxonomy
- Multiple Intelligences
- Gradual Release of Responsibility

2.1 Bloom's Taxonomy

Bloom's Taxonomy was developed by an education committee headed by Benjamin Bloom in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It is a taxonomy, or classification, of levels of cognitive complexity and mental processing. The classification is presented as a hierarchy from lower-order thinking to higher-order thinking. This provides teachers with a framework that can be applied in the sequencing of activities and questions. When applied, the framework can lead students from lower-order thinking towards higher-level critical thinking.

Bloom's Taxonomy has remained relevant over the years with an update suggested by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001). The updated taxonomy exchanged the top two higher-order thinking levels of the taxonomy and changed the level titles from nouns to verbs in order to highlight the active nature of thinking. The updated taxonomy is summarized below starting with lower-order thinking (note: the taxonomy is often presented with lower-order thinking at the bottom, and the levels moving upwards).

1. Remember: Learners are able to retrieve information.
2. Understand: Learners are able to construct meaning from information.
3. Apply: Learners are able to follow a procedure.
4. Analyze: Learners are able to select relevant information and/or deconstruct it.
5. Evaluate: Learners are able to make judgements based on criteria and standards.
6. Create: Learners are able to develop new patterns of information.

Although it was not developed for language education, the taxonomy is a useful reference for language teachers. It can be used as a guide in language skills, for example with language input and receptive skills (listening and reading) practice at levels 1-2, processing the content at levels 3-4, and a language output task (speaking or writing) at the highest levels 5-6. The taxonomy can also be used in scaffolding of vocabulary and grammar from lower-order exercises like memory games to higher-order tasks such as error correction and form-focused activities like classification. For young learners, the taxonomy and related questions for each level (there are many example questions to be found online) are especially useful in planning storytelling lessons and story-related activities such as book reports and role-plays that lead students from language input to language output.

There are, however, critiques of Bloom's Taxonomy. Lee, Kim, Jin, Yoon, and Matsubara (2017) acknowledge that thinking and learning processes are complex and nonlinear, rather than unidirectional. Holliday and Cain (2012) point out the lack of supporting evidence for the structure and effectiveness of the taxonomy. However, all these authors concede the usefulness of the

taxonomy if used in a flexible and non-restrictive way. Indeed, Bloom (1994) himself states that the taxonomy is a guide for teachers to ultimately choose their own instructional approaches.

Overall, Bloom's Taxonomy and the updated taxonomy is a useful reference for teachers to plan opportunities to operate at different cognitive levels from simple to complex thinking. Questions and activities can be planned that advance learners towards the high-order thinking skills to en-sure critical thinking skills are encouraged and not overlooked. Having this clearly and explicitly laid out in a framework is very helpful to understand the levels of thinking and to plan accordingly.

2.3. Multiple Intelligences

Born out of psychology and a desire to describe the different strengths and weaknesses of individuals, the theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) was quickly taken up by educators who appreciated its description of learner perspectives and recognized its overlap with the learner-centered approaches of that time (Baum, Viens & Slatin, 2005). Multiple Intelligences (MI) recognizes the differences that all of us have in terms of beliefs about learning, favored strategies, and preferences for classroom activities and teaching methods. Gardner (1993) challenged the traditional focus on assessment of logic and knowledge, believing there were other dimensions to human intelligence that were being neglected and underdeveloped in traditional education. Oftentimes, MI theory is placed alongside other concepts related to learning styles, such as VAKT (Visual, Audio, Kinesthetic, Tactile). However, MI differs in that Gardner believed all people have a range of intelligences with a unique combination of strengths that can be developed and honed through practice.

Initially, Gardner described eight "intelligences" and later a ninth - existential intelligence - was added:
- Linguistic "Word Smart": An ability to use language in creative ways. A preference for reading, writing, stories, poems, word games, etc.
- Logical/mathematical "Number Smart": An ability for problem-solving and logical reasoning. A preference for experiments, puzzles, equations, etc.
- Visual-Spatial "Picture Smart": An ability for visual imagery and models. A preference for de-signing, drawing, building models, and using pictures.
- Musical "Music Smart": An ability related to melodies, sounds, singing and rhythm. A preference for songs, chants, and playing instruments.
- Bodily-Kinesthetic "Body Smart": An ability for athletics and using their body. A preference for active games, acting, miming, dancing, etc.
- Interpersonal "Self Smart": An ability for social interaction and communication. A preference for group work, team activities, cooperating, and sharing.
- Intrapersonal "Self Smart": An ability for self-awareness and introspection. A preference for solo activities, reflection, journal writing, and individual work.

- Naturalist "Nature Smart": An ability for recognizing patterns in nature. A preference for out-side work, field trips, natural materials, ecological projects, etc.
- Existential "Existence Smart": An ability for philosophy and "big picture" thinking. A preference for questioning views, summarizing concepts, finding patterns in life, etc.

Although MI theory attempts to describe factors related to the learner's psychology and preferences, it also provides a useful blueprint for teachers in terms of the range of modes that can be included in curriculum design, lesson planning, activities and materials selection. It is especially useful for providing presentation and practice ideas for teaching fundamental concepts and basic vocabulary to young learners.

One approach to teaching that is often discussed by TEYL teachers is having a "basket" or "grab bag" of activities. This means that the teacher prepares a range of activities related to the topic or language of the lesson and can cycle through the activities as the students get restless or become unfocused on the current task in hand. MI theory provides a convenient inventory of learning modes for teachers to use in planning and preparing a range of activities. Indeed, there are many examples online of plans where teachers have used a chart to map activities according to each multiple intelligence. These are sometimes intersected with Bloom's Taxonomy so that each intelligence has graded activities from lower to higher order thinking.

Although MI theory has been criticized for lack of empirical evidence and research, these criticism have been rebutted (for example Armstrong, 2009). Indeed, its popularity seems to have in-creased encompassing new fields such as instructional technology (Mackenzie, 2005) and management and leadership (Riggio, Murphy, & Pirozzolo, 2002).

2.3. Gradual Release of Responsibility

Born out literacy and reading comprehension teaching to young learners, the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) framework proposed by Pearson & Gallagher (1983) provides a system for scaffolding instruction from modeling by the teacher to student independence. The GRR frame-work is informed by the notion of scaffolding and Vygotsky's "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD) in which adult support and collaboration can guide a student to becoming independently capable in a new skill. The GRR framework describes in detail four stages. According to Fisher and Frey (2008) these are:

1. Focus Lessons "I do, you watch": The teacher demonstrates the target content/activity and the thinking involved in the process. This also allows the teacher to model the expected standard of the outcome.
2. Guided Instruction "I do, you help": Direct guidance from the teacher while the target content/activity is completed collaboratively. The teacher can lead with input from the students.

3. Collaborative Learning "You do, I help": Responsibility shifts to the students, who complete the target content/activity in groups with help and guidance from the teacher. It is key here that students apply and practice, rather than the teacher.
4. Independent Work "You do, I watch": The students take full individual responsibility for the target content/activity. Teachers become monitors and assessors as students solidify new skills and knowledge.

Although the GRR framework was born out of the teaching of reading comprehension and is of-ten linked with literacy teaching, such as the Balanced Literacy Approach (BLA), it has applications outside of solely literacy instruction. For example, McVee et al. (2018) applied the GRR framework in teacher education with inservice and preservice teachers. In language teaching be-yond literacy, the four stages suggest a planning sequence for teaching speaking skills with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) or Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). The GRR framework provides a route map from modeled language to independent fluency activities such as role plays. The scaffolding involved is suitable for younger, lower-level learners and would result in the weak form of CLT, which is CLT that includes language-focused activities to provide support. Equally, it can be used for planning vocabulary or grammar instruction where inductive, meaning-focused modeling can lead to meaningful student-centered mastery of new language.

To summarize, the GRR framework is a useful reference for teachers in their activity and lesson planning to ensure that classes include various levels of support leading students to independence. It is not only relevant to literacy teaching, as it was originally designed, it is also applicable in many other settings, objectives and contexts.

3. CONCLUSION

There are many factors that should be taken into consideration when planning and teaching language to young learners. This paper suggests three overarching concepts and specific frameworks that are practical and applicable to curriculum design, lesson planning, activity design, and materials selection. These frameworks take into account learner differences, learner-centered teaching, and the wide variety of objectives that may exist in different contexts. Preservice and inservice teachers of young learners should find these frameworks useful and practical in their teaching profession.

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