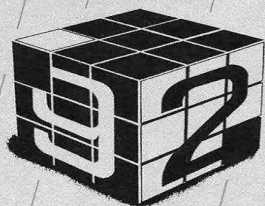


3rd
National
BRAZ-TESOL
Conference



Meeting the Challenge!

July 20-23, 1992
São Paulo - Brazil

Proceedings

A Touch of Vivaldi in EFL

Silvia Maria Guerra Anastacio
and Maria Fernando Calou da Cruz

Contemporary pedagogy has given emphasis to the importance of capitalizing on a variety of cultural information in EFL classes. Taking this into consideration it might be relevant to make the best of the multi-channelled human mind by devising learning activities related to art since art itself invites people to touch, hear, see and feel the world more deeply. So why not use a bunch of multiple sensorial stimuli through art, when it is well known that learning supported by emotions is long retained?

In search of new alternatives to develop language awareness in EFL students, the present work suggests a combination of poetry, video and a piece of classical music. This material has been applied to small groups of advanced students both from the UPPE and Cultura Inglesa, and it is part of a wider project which aims at analyzing different textual functions.

By being exposed to different sources of models on description, students become sensitized to it and feel better equipped to produce their own descriptive piece of writing.

Vivaldi's musical portrait of The Four Seasons shown on video and accompanied by descriptive poems, is analysed by EFL students in an attempt to focus on the target language in a new light. Since The Four Seasons is not a short piece of music, this work only concentrates on the first part of Vivaldi's composition, SPRING.

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN TWO HEMISPHERES

During the recent decades neurologists have been interested in studying the correlation between the principles of the brain function and language acquisition. Psychological research suggests that both brain hemispheres differ in the way they process the received stimuli; the right hemisphere treats them holistically (as wholes) and the left one processes them analytically (by parts). Furthermore, musical and visual/spatial skills, as well as non-verbal communication are right hemisphere dependent while the left hemisphere seems to include special language capacities.

According to Harnish (1984:507) the brain hemispheres can be represented in this way:

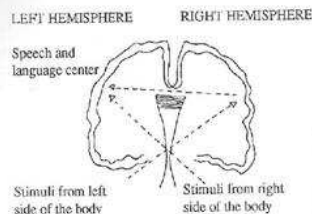
LEFT HEMISPHERE	RIGHT HEMISPHERE
Speech	Holistic processing
Writing	Stereognosis
Temporal-order judgements	Nonverbal environmental sounds
Language	Visuospatial skills
Reading	Nonverbal ideation
Associative thought	Recognition and memory of melodies
Calculation	Left visual field
Analytic processing	
Right visual field	

It is important to stress that it is inappropriate to label the language-dominant left hemisphere as the main one; they are rather complementary halves, each lacking special talents that the other has.

Apart from that, sensations from the right and left halves of the body go straight to the opposite hemisphere. In this way, when one holds an object, although the right hemisphere recognizes it, the speech centre in the left hemisphere is requested to verbalize its name.

The model (on the next page) can represent the transmission of signals in the human body mechanism.

It happens that conventional education used to emphasize the left hemisphere capacities while current education has tried to combine the stimulation of both brain hemisphere talents.



(Harnish 1984:507)

The proposal of this project is to stimulate both hemispheres in all possible ways in order to facilitate language acquisition and make the learner have a dynamic participation in the process through a correlated multimedia network.

RHYTHM - A SPRINGBOARD FOR IMAGES

The starting point of this work is to set up a certain situation in class to make students react to rhythm in order to let their spontaneous experience flow naturally. The aim is to eliminate repression and foster a liberation of the senses in order to encourage students to contemplate their inner life and listen to their own vibrations.

Suggestopedic techniques (Malama 1987:82) introduced by Lozanov 1978 were already in tune with the idea of integrating music into the classroom environment in an attempt to make the language acquisition process more effective. According to Lozanov, when the learner feels relaxed with the help of classical music played in class, he naturally becomes more receptive to input.

There is no doubt that music can easily work as a catalyst to set off multiple trains of thought and endless chains of images. In class it can be put to use to make the learner generate a wide variety of images and thus a bunch of classroom activities can be derived from such a stimulus.

In the present work Vivaldi's The Four Seasons is used as a catalytic element in class and when each learner listens to that piece of music, he processes it in such an individual way that matches his own experiences and fantasies. That is why in any classroom situation the data collected vary a lot and so they can generate rich debates.

According to the music-therapist Alfred Tomatis Schmid (1992:17) the human ear, controlled by the brain, has not only got a physical but also a psychic structure. So the human being hears only what he wants to hear and each person processes the same stimulus in different ways.

VIDEO SESSION

The video on Vivaldi's The Four Seasons shows an orchestra playing the concert, accompanied by beautiful pictures, which translate into images the impressions suggested by the piece of music. The spring scenes are in Paris, the summer in New York, the autumn in Venice and the winter in Moscow.

Classroom Management - A Sample of Activities Focusing on Descriptive Materials

1ST MOVEMENT OF SPRING IN VIVALDI'S CONCERT

1. Warming-up

(Video is shown without image). (Before the lesson starts a sweet fragrance of plants is released in class and arouses the learners' olfactory sense, as a preparation the kind of mental associations the piece of music is expected to evoke from the audience).

Class organization: pairwork

Directions:

- Close your eyes, listen to this piece of music and see if you can perceive any particular fragrance in class. What kind of impressions do these stimuli evoke in you? Try to associate them with any special scenery.
- Talk to your partner about your first impressions and find out if you have any ideas in common.

2. Checking questions

(Same video section again, this time with sound and image)

Class organization: class divided into two different groups/whole group

Directions:

- Group A:
- Check if your first impressions match up with the pictures on screen and see if you can recognize the scenery on screen.

- List some of the places you are able to identify.
- Arc de Triomphe Notre Dame Isle St. Louis Seine Tuileries Eiffel Tower Montmartre.
- Report your answers to the big group and justify yourself by freezing some video images to support your ideas.
- Group B:
- Check if your first impressions match up with the pictures on screen.
- Some motives associated with the first movement of SPRING are listed below. (motive- a melodic phrase or short passage that recurs and is expressive of certain idea, person or situation).

Try to identify the motives when you hear them. Be prepared to talk about them to the big group and support your answers by referring to expressive moments in the musical portrait of THE FOUR SEASONS that you have watched on video.

1. SPRING COMES
2. BIRDS
3. STORM

Class organization: pairwork/whole group

Directions:

- The following comments match the motives above. Which comments go with the motives? Talk to your partner and then report your answer back to the big group, using the video to illustrate your answers:
- (3) sound of violin
- (1) allegro (fast music)
- (2) minor motive
- (3) another minor motive
- (2) twittering sound
- (1) major motive, recurring again and again
- (3) lightning and thunder sound
- (1) country tune.

2ND MOVEMENT OF SPRING

1. Pinpointing motives

Class organization: pairwork/whole group

Directions:

- There are a few motives which occur in the second movement of SPRING. Try to identify the dominant one. You are going to find it in the box of options below, together with other motives that have nothing to do with the piece of music you are going to hear. Circle the right motive.

CRY SLEEP DRUM BIRD
RAIN THUNDER WAR

- Select your choice and justify it.

Justification: - the piece of music is played slowly (it is a LARGO, the opposite of ALLEGRO).

- the camera is at a slow pace and the setting is very quiet (probably at dawn)

- deserted streets, gleaming lamps, closed windows, sleeping stamens...

- Which adjectives would you choose to express this second movement?

- calm quiet serene slow sleepy

- Can you identify the sound of a barking dog, a minor motive in this movement?

Identification: - a repeated note which is a dissonant sound always present at the back of this music arrangement.

- Discuss your answers with your partners and then with the big group.

Refer back to the video and freeze some takes to illustrate your answers.

3RD MOVEMENT OF SPRING

1. Concentration on motives and instruments

Class organization: individual work/whole group

Directions:

- Suggest the major motive of the third movement. Concentrate on the piece of music and observe how it is translated into pictures. There are some visual clues to help you.

- major motive: a country dance (lively dance).

- Which musical instrument(s) have(have) most attracted your attention?

- instrument: pipes

- Watch the 3rd movement again and observe the images which express the dominant motive. Discuss with your colleagues in a big group debate and be prepared to defend your point of view.

- The dancing motive is expressed through: dancing water/ fountains; movement of people going to and fro/working; movement of a dancing robot; a Folies Bergeres picture showing a dancing woman.

POETRY SESSION

In order to ensure that his creation would remain as near to his ideal as

possible in its reproduction, Vivaldi used to write minute notes in the margin of his manuscripts for the musicians. He was very keen on conveying his subjective impressions to the world in order to make sure other people would understand the sounds he wanted to translate into images, he wished to provoke mental associations in people.

It is even possible to read sonnets which have been composed to accompany The Four Seasons and ensure the audience a better understanding of Vivaldi's concert. Some critics have ascribed these sonnets to the Italian composer, others, however, think they have been written by a great admirer of Vivaldi's work. Anyway, they have proved useful since each concert is set to a sonnet describing one of the seasons of the year, and the passages within each movement are related to specific lines of poetry which they are intended to suggest or imitate.

Classroom Management

VIVALDI'S MUSIC TRANSLATED INTO POETRY: THE FOUR SEASONS

SPRING

- 1 Spring has arrived, and merrily the birds greet it with happy song; and the brooks at the blowing of the zephyrs, with sweet murmuring rush along.
- 5 Then, covering the air with a black cloak, come lightning and thunder chosen to herald it, then, when these are silent, the little birds return anew to their melodious enchantment.
- 10 And now in the pleasant flowery meadow, to the soft murmur of boughs and grasses sleeps the goatherd with his faithful dog at his side. To the festive sound of pastoral bagpipes Nymphs and shepherd herds dance under their beloved sky at Spring's sparkling arrival.

Activities

Class organization: pairwork/whole group

Directions:

- Complete the tasks below. Discuss your answer with your partner and report them to the big group.
- Read the poem and find words that mean the same as:
 - a) happily; b) again; c) field with grass and flowers; d) small streams; e) announce; f) gentle winds; g) magic; h) large branches of trees;

- i) a person responsible for looking after goats; j) a wide coat; k) flow quickly

- Give the meaning of the following reference words:

- it (line 2) it (line 6) these (line 7) his (line 11) their (line 13)

- Here are two columns of verbs and nouns extracted from the sonnet under consideration. Identify which nouns collocate with the given verbs.

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| (1) brooks | () sleeps |
| (2) spring | () dance |
| (3) goatherd | () rush |
| (4) black cloak | () arrives |
| (5) birds | () greet |
| (6) nymphs and shepherds | () covers |

Class organization: 3 groups/whole group

Directions:

- Split yourselves into 3 groups. Each group is going to receive an extract from the sonnet THE FOUR SEASONS. Think back on the video you have just seen and try to match your extract with one of the movements from the concert. Then report your answer back to the big group and discuss the poem organization.

- The first movement corresponds to the octave in the sonnet.

- The second movement corresponds to the first part of the sestet.

- The third movement corresponds to the second part of the sestet.

Complementary Task (Botticelli's picture SPRING is brought to class)

Class organization: whole group

Directions:

- Let's appreciate another classical representation of SPRING in Botticelli's picture. It illustrates the ancient mythological NYMPHS mentioned in the sonnet. Make comments on the figures which most attract your attention in this picture.

PRODUCTION

After students have been stimulated to working with the theme SPRING, a writing activity follows.

Class organization: individual/groupwork

Directions:

POETRY PROJECT

- Form groups of 3 or 4. Jot down on paper any lines, phrases or even individual words related to SPRING. Keep in mind verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs from all the descriptive sources you have just

worked with. Obviously, you can add any other piece of information that comes to your mind in an attempt to produce your own poem.

- Compare your own lines with those of your group participants. When you have finished, combine all the notes to build up a single poem for the group.
- Display your group poems on the walls so that the whole class can have the chance to read and compare them.

(OR)

- Instead of working with SPRING you can also come to an agreement with your group colleagues so as to choose a different season that appeals to you most. If you make that choice, start by brainstorming words related to such a season.

Class organization: group work

Directions:

DRAMA PROJECT

- A drama project could also be a good follow-up. Work in groups and devise a piece of drama to represent SPRING or THE SEASONS. You could imagine allegories to make the seasons speak or could satirize them if you choose.

CONCLUSION

The multi-media stimuli used in this project encouraged students to work more affectively and effectively in class. As far as they had their brain hemispheres set to a more intimate dialogue, learners were led to respond to the process of language acquisition in a dynamic and creative way.

With all their sensorial capacities alert, teachers and students had fun in working out problem solving situations through art, which was also used as an outlet for self-expression in class.

So the feedback of the whole work was stimulating because it sharpened the students' critical skills to criticize the target language; besides that the materials used in class warmed up the learners to design, at the final productive stage, beautiful descriptive pieces of writing of their own.

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