Do you often get restless when you are seated for a length of time? Do you require short, frequent breaks? Do you prefer to participate in demonstrations and hands-on activities? Do you enjoy drama, sports, or crafts? Do you incorporate movement into your own teaching and learning? If you answered affirmatively to most of these questions, bodily-kinesthetic teaching and learning strategies most likely fall within your comfort zone. Even if you are not comfortable with kinesthetic activities, you most likely have students with these characteristics, and you look for ways to integrate action into the learning process.

A Body of Knowledge

I began using movement activities and games when teaching geography skills. As a first year teacher, I realized quickly that the methods by which I had learned social studies (reading, writing, and a heavy use of worksheets) were not working well with my own students. In addition, as the teacher, I was as bored and frustrated as they were. My students were always energetic, and I recognized the need to channel that energy in a constructive manner in order to grab their attention and keep them engaged in the lesson. I also noticed there were important terms my students had difficulty remembering. Constant classroom review and drill seemed to be required. Or was there another way?

My initial attempts in using movement simply involved the students rotating, revolving, and using their arms to remember the difference between horizontal and vertical. I knew this approach was effective when I observed students simulating these movements in their desks when responding to test questions.

As I continued through graduate school, I learned more about different learning-style classifications, and I experimented with different teaching strategies in my elementary classes. I found that body movement proved to be the most effective. These strategies appeared to be helping all of my students (not just bodily-kinesthetic learners)1 understand core social studies (and science) concepts.

I could not fully articulate reasons for the success of these non-traditional vocabulary activities until I was introduced to the concept of TPR or Total Physical Response used in many foreign language and ESL classes. Total Physical Response (TPR), developed by James Asher, is defined as a teaching technique whereby a learner responds to language input with body motions.2 Performing a chant or the game “Robot” is an example of a TPR activity, where the teacher commands her robots to do some task in the classroom. Acting out stories and giving imperative commands (box on page 14) are common TPR activities.3 Subsequent reading and discussion with other teachers provided a rationale for the success of body movement in reinforcing vocabulary with all types of learners.

I modified and developed various motion activities and incorporated them into my social studies and science classes and later modeled them in my education methods classes for future teachers and as part of in-service presentations and conference sessions.4 A collection of these activities along with writing extensions are presented on page 15 for use in the elementary classroom. These activities can be adapted for all grade and ability levels and can be used for a variety of standards-based topics in social living and civics, U.S. and world history, and physical and cultural geography.

From Concept to Movement

TPR and other kinesthetic approaches to learning can be used with a whole class (where each individual performs the command), in groups, or in pairs. Learning occurs when students can respond to the commands quickly, can identify appropriate responses in other students, and can explain how and why a particular movement represents a concept. Oral and/or written questions provided by the teacher that probe for understanding can address higher order thinking skills and enhance meaningful learning.

Questions can be along the lines of:

▶ What clues helped you identify the concept?
▶ How are these clues related to the concept/definition?
▶ Why did you (or your group) choose that particular movement to represent that concept?
▶ How does the movement show the significance of that event?
▶ How does the movement help you identify/remember the concept?
▶ What other movements could you have performed to show the concept/term/historical figure/event?
▶ What is similar between the movement and the concept/definition?
▶ What is different between the movement and the concept/definition?
▶ After viewing another group’s movement, how would you have chosen to represent the concept if it was assigned to you?
▶ What movement presented today makes the most sense to you? Why?
▶ Describe how the movement will help you remember the concept.
An Individual TPR Activity
The teacher calls on five students to come up in front of the class. She tells them she is going to call out commands for them to follow and they must move appropriately according to those commands. She calls out “rotate.” Two students spin in place in a circle while the other three walk around a tile on the floor in a circle. The first two students are correctly demonstrating the concept of rotation, while the third student’s movement could be described as “orbiting” the floor tile, which is not the correct response.

The teacher directs the class to observe the first two and to “give a thumbs-up” or “thumbs down,” depending on whether the movement correctly illustrates the concept “rotate.” A majority of the class gives a thumbs-up.

The teacher then calls out the command again and all five spin in a circle in place. She calls out more commands, such as “revolve,” “point north,” “point south,” “point east,” “point west,” “show me vertical,” “show me horizontal,” “show me latitude with your right arm,” “show me longitude with your left arm.”

The teacher sends the volunteers back to their desks and instructs the entire class to stand up. She calls out the same commands quickly, but periodically asks a student to explain why he or she is moving in that particular way. “Why are you pointing in that direction for North,” she asks. The student replies, “Because Lake Ponchartrain is that way, and I remember it is north of us.” She then instructs them to close their eyes and perform the commands. She stops when the class is performing them consistently and quickly with valid reasons to support their movement.

TPR Commands
Example of concepts and terms that can be called out, and to which individual students can invent movements. Those marked with an asterisk can also be done with partners or groups.

- Map skills: Point north; Point south; Point east; Point west; Place right arm in vertical position; Place left arm in horizontal position; Latitude-Longitude.
- “Show-me” Characteristics: Cultural characteristics of different countries; Animals in particular regions, Characteristics of continents; Economic terms, Climate types, etc.*
- “Show-me” Concepts-Specific Landforms: anticline, syncline, mountain, valley; Animals in various climates: (desert; tundra, rainforest); Specific processes: folding faulting, precipitation, condensations, convection, rotation, revolution, erosion (wind, water, glacier, gravity); Economic processes: supply, demand, producer, consumer, barter, etc.*
- Citizenship: voting, picketing, peaceful protest.*
- Significant figures in history: Martin Luther King, Jr., Mozart, Marie Curie, Abraham Lincoln, etc. Students’ choice of movement must demonstrate the person’s impact on society.
- Historical events: Boston Tea Party, Civil Rights Movement, Gettysburg Address, etc.*
- Magnetism: Magnetic attraction-Magnetic repulsion-North side of a magnetic needle points toward the North Pole.
- Community/Neighborhood: Members of a community, jobs.*
- Specific vocabulary for any unit of study, such as assembly line, boycott, alliance, protest, immigration, producer, consumer, supply, demand, etc.
- Writing Activity: Students divide their notebooks into two columns labeled “Motion” and “Reason.” In the first column students describe or draw the motion and in the second column they provide justification for the motions they chose or observed.

A Pair TPR Strategy
The children in Social Living have been studying different jobs in the community. The teacher places each student in pairs as number 1 or number 2 and reviews the rules of behavior. She tells them that she will call out a job, and then “Partner 1” must use a movement to show what a particular person in our community must do as part of his or her job. When she calls out “Partner 2,” the partner must perform a movement showing another task that particular person must do as part of the job.

The teacher calls out, as the first case, “Partner 1: the job is that of a ‘judge.’” She scans the class at the various movements; students are doing. Once all have acted through an appropriate movement, she calls out “Partner 2” and observes what each student does. Once they are all finished, she calls on certain pairs to demonstrate their movements. She asks, “Why did you move your fist up and down to represent the judge?” She continues the procedure by calling out other jobs such as banker, firefighter, mayor, and asking questions throughout the activity such as “There are many other roles of a police officer. What else could someone have done to show this profession besides using handcuffs?”

The teacher then selects individual students to call out other jobs in the community for the class to act out. One student calls...
**Social Studies Total Physical Response Activities**

**Simulation:** One group can model the movement in front of the class while others assess with thumbs up or thumbs down, or each group simulates a concept, while the other class members attempt to guess the concept being represented.

**Roles of a productive citizen:** Students can construct their own list of the important roles of a good citizen then act them out (individually, in pairs, or as a group) while the rest of the class guesses their actions. This allows students as a class to construct a list based on perceived importance.

**Geography challenge:** Students are assigned a particular geographical area (state, country, hemisphere, etc.) Students must pretend they are tourists exploring that area, and demonstrate through movement what their experience would be like based on the location (weather, temperature, what landforms they might see, cultural factors, etc.)

**Writing Extension:** Students divide their notebooks into two columns:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What?</th>
<th>Yes/No-Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

In the first column students describe or draw the motion and in the second column they assess each other’s simulation as appropriate or not and give reasons for their assessment while identifying similarities and differences.

**Motion Response:** Selected students act out an answer to a question posed by the teacher in front of class and then explain why they chose that movement. The rest of the class gives a thumbs up or thumbs down depending on the response. Sample questions include:

- Why does the Earth have seasons?
- Why is it daytime in some areas of Earth but nighttime in others?
- What type of animal is found in Antarctica?
- What does it mean to barter?
- What is the role of the President of the United States?
- How can a citizen respond legally if a policy is considered unfair?

**Writing Extension:** Students document each motion and provide explanations for their own and each other’s motions during or after the questioning by dividing their notebooks into two columns:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motion</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Charades:**

- **Conceptual Charades:** Each group receives a card with a different term on it and must devise a movement that represents the concept. The rest of the class has to guess the term. Students must identify the similarities/differences between the movement analogy and the concept.

- **History Charades:** Each group receives a card with a different historical event on it and must devise a movement that represents the significance of that event. The rest of the class has to guess the incident. Students describe in their notebooks the motion presented and discuss why it represents the historical event.

- **Geography Charades:** The teacher assigns each group a particular country on an index card. Each group must construct an action that demonstrates what a person who lived in that area might be doing on a typical day based on location, culture, economy, etc. This can be an excellent opportunity to examine stereotypes students may have regarding culture and to discuss the similarities and differences between countries.

**Move to Prove:** Groups of students plan a role-play or pantomime to demonstrate two new ideas they learned in relation to the assigned word of the day to perform in front of the class. Each student must briefly describe their performance plan (orally, pictorially, or written) and justify why it is appropriate to represent that particular word.
out “teacher” as a command. After completing the actions, another student calls out “plumber.” Later, another student calls out “manager.”

Other Examples

After reviewing behavioral expectations during movement activities, the teacher informs the class that the body movements they perform in their group will represent the concept of “population density,” which the class has recently studied in a geography unit of study. He will call out a country or city, and the group must use group proximity to show the population density of that area. He calls out “population of China.” The students huddle close together to represent China even though it is such a large country. The spokesperson for the group states, “China has the highest population.” The teacher asks Group 1 to explain why they are standing so close together to represent China even though it is such a large country. “Many people live in cities in China.” The teacher continues this procedure along with questions, calling out various cities and countries they have talked about: “Show me the population of Greenland, India, Canada. Show me Tokyo, New Orleans, Boise.” When he calls out “Show me Fez,” the students stop and say they do not know where that is. He instructs each group to use their maps to find this city in Morocco along with several others they will be studying in the next unit. The students will record their predictions in their notebooks and will begin the unit on the continent of Africa with another TPR activity.

Another teacher is reviewing vocabulary that will be on the standardized test at the end of the year. After placing the students in groups, she informs them that she will be calling out a term they have previously studied. Each individual in the group must perform some sort of movement to demonstrate the concept. She calls out commands such as “picket line,” “tools,” “migration,” “assembly line,” “immigration,” “emigration,” “dispute,” “withdrawal,” “producer,” “consumer,” “supply,” “demand,” etc. After all of the students have tried, as individuals, to illustrate each term, the teacher asks each group to choose a card that has one of the concepts written on it. Each group is given five minutes to work out a pantomime, a short silent skit that will illustrate the concept. Then, each group performs their skit while the rest of the class tries to guess the concept. Students document a description of the motions in their notebooks along with an explanation of how the movement represented the concept.

Movement and Language Skills

Learning vocabulary in a content area is like learning a language. For ESL students it is essentially synonymous. Understanding vocabulary is crucial for students in all content areas; they must be able to “talk the talk” to move on to higher-level thinking. The thought of learning vocabulary often elicits moans and groans among students in the classroom. In addition to inducing boredom, the study of vocabulary often causes anxiety, particularly among students who have difficulty speaking English or have different learning preferences than the ones reinforced in traditional methods. Total Physical Response allows all students to process and review vocabulary in a fun and exciting way which can make them more comfortable, less tense, and get them actively involved in the construction of meaning. These conditions facilitate learning.

Classroom Management

Recognizing that classroom management issues are a major concern, I offer the following suggestions for implementing effective TPR and other kinesthetic activities in the classroom.

► Use easy, short activities with the entire class or as a demonstration at the beginning of class to assess prior knowledge, or use as an “attention grabber” for the lesson that day; or use them as a review at the end of class until you are comfortable using more difficult group activities.

► Have a specific plan for addressing potential behavioral problems. Students who repeatedly go off task can sit and observe an activity.

► Set up behavioral expectations and consequences at the beginning of the activity especially the first time you use it. Review them each time you use movement in the classroom.

► Move from simple concepts to more complex concepts.

► Preplan your activity thoroughly.

► Begin and move through the movement activity quickly.

► Make sure the entire class is engaged even if they are not actually performing the movement. Examples: students can show “thumbs-up” or “thumbs down,” answer prepared written questions, or work on individual writing assignments.

► Use movement activities as a check for understanding and a method to identify misconceptions or stereotypes.

► Give the opportunity to do movements individually and as part of a group.

► Consistent oral feedback during movement activities helps students remain engaged.

► Encourage students to construct their own methods of movement to describe a particular concept.

► Use debriefing after movement activities to make sure students made the connection to the concept/content or understood the main ideas.

Notes


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