

# Learning Your Learners' Style

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She comes bouncing into your classroom each morning. He can't sit still, wiggling shifting moving. Attention flits away. The kinesthetic child. Another teacher complains he doesn't listen.

It's been 99 years since Maria Montessori observed differences in ways young children interact with their worlds. Many teacher education programs spend little time exploring our sensory modalities. Yet, in our classroom learning the styles of your learners is the beginning of knowing how to differentiate for each child's success.

Auditory processors have the easiest time in lecture classes. These students rarely take notes because it interferes with their auditory memory. In college of education classes there are a predominance of auditory learners. They have been successful in the listening for learning mode.

Visual learners need to write things down. They draw pictures, doodle when bored, and take copious notes they may never look at again. The process of "getting it down" creates the memory. As a visual learner I struggled in high school. No one had explained note taking to me. Understanding modality styles was not on the scene in the 1960's despite Montessori's writing many years earlier.

I sought out learning style information when my son, now a fireman, would not sit still to listen to a book or color. I grieved, what's wrong with this wonderful little boy of my heart?? I had been teaching for years. I "knew" how to teach reading and writing! Wrong!! This child came into my life to help me learn. Through my learning, others have learned.

The tactile (touch) kinesthetic (body moving) student is often a challenge to teachers. Very often they are boys. Their effective way of learning is to do. Reading while sitting still is too boring! In the January 30<sup>th</sup> Newsweek there is a long article about how boys are significantly lagging behind girls. It documents national studies, infers that with increased standardization, girls have the advantage. "Physical education and sports programs have been cut and recess is a distant memory." It states the "boy brain" is kinetic, but doesn't elaborate to help parents and teachers.

The lead story in George Lucas' magazine, Edutopia, is "Why Johnny (Still) Can't Read." On-site coaches, reading specialists in middle and high schools, are being hired to teach teachers how to diagnosis students' needs and alter methods using less lecture and more action. Unfortunately unsuccessful students have a lot of emotional baggage from

their years of frustration. Neither article addressed the role of emotions in learning. (In a future issue we will discuss emotions and learning.)

In some schools certain activities help immensely. The Minnesota Learning Resource Center 2000-2001 summary states “Our activities integrate heightened visual, auditory, vestibular and kinesthetic inputs to the brain over the course of the school year.”(10) Teachers also can have the kinesthetic child walk in the hall while reading. Movement increases their comprehension. These kinesthetic boys and girls like taking the attendance to the office or removing the recycling. They can be helpers in the gym, or teach younger students recess games. When you teach first aid, ask them to demonstrate. When you discuss a book, they can act out a scene. They learn well with math manipulatives – stuff, not just numbers, and real life examples they can “get the feel of”. Let them use a hand squeeze ball while sitting. If there is a required sit time, try cross crawl or jumping jacks before settling down. Introduce auditory, visual and kinesthetic to your whole class by discussing famous people they know, then have your students identify their own strengths. Later have a private conversation with specific children that need movement to learn. Strengthen personal understandings and identify strategies. All students can profit by learning to be self-advocates.

The younger the child the more she needs kinesthetic experiences to learn. No kindergarten teacher would think of long sit-down experiences. A great deal of our brain is devoted to processing movement. Obviously, human movement came before reading, historically and developmentally. Movement is essential for the health of all of us, but crucial for young learners and lifetime kinesthetic learners. They won't learn sitting still. So we must plan for their success and by involving their bodies. We don't need to be perplexed by students' needs. We are smart teachers and are learning our student's styles.

**Modality questions you can ask students:**

- What are your favorite things to do at school?

Reading and writing (visual), group discussion and music (auditory), gym and recess (kinesthetic)

- What are your hobbies outside of school?

Drawing and reading (v), music and my instrument (a), sports and biking (k)

- When I'm angry I look away, glare or use the silent treatment (v), shout, and whine or turn up the volume (a), stomp around and clench my fist (k)

- When I do something well I'd like lots of smiles and stars (v), I'd want verbal praise telling me how good I did (a) I want strong hugs and pats on my back (k).