

Teaching with the communication style in mind

By Ronit Baras

Understanding how students learn best has always been a challenge. Psychologist Howard Gardner was the first to present the theory of multiple intelligences and acknowledge that kids use different ways to communicate. Although it is easier to teach all kids in the same way, considering students' unique styles of learning has a huge impact on their success at school.

The communication style theory recognises four main processing 'machines', and while every child uses all four, it is believed that each child has a particular strong (preferred) channel of communication. In the past, there was an awareness of three main styles: visual, kinaesthetic and auditory, but recently a fourth style has emerged—the digital style.

With education, communication styles are important diagnostic and instruction tools. Identifying the correct communication style allows the teacher to introduce new information in the most efficient way to each student. It is as simple as that! Auditory kids learn best when introduced to new information by using their auditory channel ... and so on. Surprisingly, this also explains a child's greatest challenges; for example, while visual kids can learn by using graphs and pictures, they are overwhelmed by worksheets with most of its text in small print.

Kinaesthetic communication

Simply put, kinaesthetic children (40% of kids) need to move in order to think. They are also very sensitive to others and motivated by 'gut' feelings. Kinaesthetic children learn by 'doing'.

The challenge for kinaesthetic children is to sit still. But by forcing them to sit still, we effectively shut down the brain and 'turn off' how information is received. Kinaesthetic children move a lot, seem fidgety and, after a while, become troublemakers. Sometimes kinaesthetic kids are mistakenly diagnosed as having ADHD. They are preoccupied with their physical existence and when physically uncomfortable (e.g. hungry or tired), their ability to learn slows down. Another challenge for kinaesthetic kids is having unexplained intuition and being highly influenced by others' feelings.

Here are some ideas to help kinaesthetic children understand better, be happier and love learning.

- **Dancing:** Anything with a beat will do. Encourage expression of feelings through dance and weave learning into the moves.

- **Singing:** Add a rhythm and some emotion to the message and see them beam.
- **Cooking:** Let them be messy and taste their creations to teach reading, measuring, colours, textures and more.
- **Sport activities:** You can teach anything through movement—counting, weights, reading ('run to the sign and tell me what it says') and certainly about 'me and my body'. Kinaesthetic students always prefer to be outside and active.

Arts and crafts:

- *Cutting and pasting:* Ask them to create the things they need to learn by using paper, glue and scissors and the learning will happen by itself.
- *Finger painting, drawing and scribbling:* No matter what the subject is, let the children paint, draw and scribble.
- *Playing with cream or sculpting:* Teaches while using different textures, densities, tastes and smells.

● **Playground:** An excellent place to learn about quantities, counting, time and to experience gravity and more.

● **Dress-ups and role-playing:** Many topics can be woven into students playing roles, such as acting out new topics, or performing information using a song with movements.

Visual communication

Visual children (40%) have a combined video recorder and still camera in their heads. They like to see things. Pictures, colours and visual representations of things are their main information carriers. These students learn best and express themselves best when using pictures, graphs and colours. To them, one picture really is worth a thousand words.

A visual child's challenge is to avoid being visually overwhelmed by written text, like a too-full page with too many activities and no white space, too many words in small print and books without photos or pictures.

Here are some ideas to help visual children learn better.

● **Looking at colourful pictures and books:** Choose books with lots of colourful pictures—however, beware of comic books because they create visual overload. Books with separated text and pictures are better.

● **Cutting pictures from a magazine:** Some kids like to keep their favourite clippings, sometimes in a special notebook or picture diary, show them off and look at them again from time to time.

● **Watching videos:** Visual students enjoy movies and videos with lots of colour and movement.

● **Colouring:** Nothing makes a visual child happier than adding colour to black and white lines.



- **Painting, drawing and making collages:** Self-explanatory, right?
- **Decorating:** Have your visual child help choose decorations and then decorate the classroom or anything else.
- **Matching games:** Stimulate your child's visual ability by using colour matching, shape matching, pattern matching and, eventually, letter and word matching.
- **Taking pictures:** With the advent of the digital camera, visual students can run around and take as many pictures as they like. They can even see them enlarged on a computer, show them off and share them easily with friends.

Auditory communication

Auditory children (20% of children) give the most attention to sounds. To them, voices, tones, pitches and rhythms provide a wealth of information and carry emotions that others may simply ignore. They have superior abilities to 'record and play back' what they see and recall entire conversations.

With auditory children, the main challenge is sensitivity to tone, pitch and volume. If you shout, they will shut down. If there is too much noise, they can not think. Auditory kids are sequential thinkers and must be given the chance to focus on one thing at a time. Another challenge is that they are easily distracted by sounds and disturbed by conversations around them. Many times they are diagnosed as having attention deficit disorder, mainly because their environment is too noisy.

Here are some ideas that will help auditory students with their learning.

- **Listening to music:** Choose a suitable style of music and use it before, during (softly, in the background) or after (as a reward) learning. If the music contains words relating to the topic of learning, the topic will be learnt quicker.
- **Playing music:** Teach the students to count by playing a few piano keys and help them remember items like colours and other lists by associating them with music.
- **Rhythm activities:** Adding a beat to anything and speaking with a rhythm makes the content come to life. The children may want to tap along. Let them.
- **Keeping a calm, cheerful voice:** Auditory kids often classify their teachers by the loudness and pitch of their voices and prefer those who are soft-spoken and use varied intonation.
- **Role-playing:** Auditory students often respond to sound effects, funny voices, accents or even a lisp.
- **Storytelling:** Use stories with more dialogue than descriptions and 'act out' the different characters in the story, perhaps giving each a voice. Gradually let your child participate and read some of the characters' words.
- **Singing:** Compose any material into a song and it comes alive for auditory children. All you have to do is write it to the tune of a familiar song and they will love it.
- **Puppet show:** Similar to storytelling and role-play.
- **Verbal affirmations:** Auditory kids prefer verbal communication. To lift their spirits, say something encouraging to them every once in a while and see them smile
- **Record and listen to themselves:** Show them how to use an MP3 recorder or computer for recording and playing back their own voice. Encourage them to create short singing or voice acting projects and then proudly play them for you.

Digital communication

'Digital kids' (unknown percentage of children) need order, consistency and logic. Their greatest ability is reasoning. They are sharp-minded and need cognitive stimulation in order to learn better.

A digital child's greatest challenge is getting easily bored and a tendency for perfectionism and social isolation.

Here are some ideas that will help young digital learners assimilate knowledge better.

- **Puzzles:** Making something coherent and whole from a set of pieces is how digital kids think. Over time, puzzles develop students' abilities (frame first, side-to-side, find all the blue pieces etc.), which will serve them well for many years.
- **Patterns:** Digital children think in patterns and look for patterns in everything around them. Because of this, matching games and 'What comes next?' games will help develop this skill.
- **Language:** Language is made up of building blocks (words) and ways of putting them together (grammar rules). For a digital child, this speaks directly to his or her way of thinking.
- **Riddles:** Having to crack a code, analyse a problem or find a solution are great fun for a digital child.
- **Computer:** The computer was designed by digital-minded people to make complicated things simple, and they are simple for digital people. Set aside some computer time for your digital children.
- **Card games:** These games use rules and the person who 'uses' the rules best often wins. Choose card games that require less luck and more skill and thought.
- **Projects and challenges:** Digital students love to discover new information. They can find great ways to reorganise things (reorder books or CDs for easier retrieval etc.), and they love to research new topics and organise the material for a proud presentation. When giving a digital child a challenge, make sure it involves thinking, structuring and processing.
- **Construction games:** Using building blocks and setting a task is also a bit like three-dimensional puzzles, except that the results depend on a child's imagination. It is important to use a large set of blocks with a wide variety of shapes but with no particular designs—otherwise the child will build it once and then be bored with it.

All of this may make it seem that teachers need to have an individual program for each student in the class. However, diagnosing a communication style and introducing information through the right channel can serve more than just speeding up the learning process. The most important purpose is giving children confidence by allowing them to be themselves and providing them with success experiences.

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