

## Plenary I

### Teaching across the Senses

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#### ABSTRACT

The five senses, visual, auditory, haptic (touch/feel//tactile/kinaesthetic), olfactory (smell) and gustatory (tastes) are the means by which we take in input. They are keys to learning and, as teachers, tools for effective teaching. The first three are the most practical for use in the English classroom. Each learner has a “preferred sensory modality” or learning channel. This paper and related plenary workshop will show ways the three main senses can be used in the classroom. The chart in figure one of this article suggests ways that textbook and classroom activities can be modified to include sensory input that is otherwise missing.

**Keywords:** sensory input, modalities, learning styles

Baring a disability, we all have the five senses: Sight. Hearing. Touch. Smell. Taste. And every bit of information we take in, we do so through those senses. The senses are how the brain gets input (de Jong, 2009). And from this input, the brain creates meaning. As teachers, the senses can offer tools to help our learners.

#### Senses

Of the five senses, sight (*Visual*), hearing (*Auditory*), feeling (often called *Haptic* = touch/movement/ emotion or *Kinesthetic* = movement and *Tactile* = touch) are the most useful in the classroom. Of course, our sense of smell (*Olfactory*) is very powerful. If I ask you to remember the smell of fresh baked bread, you may well start to salivate since the memory of the smell is so strong. And taste (*Gustatory*) is a powerful sense, too. Try bringing chocolate chip cookies to class and check what the students remember. But V–A–H are the senses most often and

most easily used in learning languages and other skills at school. Note that the term *haptic* is most often used in American English while *kinaesthetic* (sic) is used in British English to include the same range of input that *haptic* represents in American English.)

### **Modalities**

We have and use all our senses. But we also have one that we use more than the others. It is called the *preferred modality* (Bolstad and Hamblett, 1998). The modalities are sometimes called *learning styles* or *processing channels*. These are just different ways of talking about the senses.

Your *preferred modality*, by the way, doesn't mean the one you like the most – just because you like music doesn't mean you are an auditory person. (It most likely means you are human – who doesn't like music?). Rather, your preferred modality is the one which, when there is nothing going on to force a change, you use as a starting point. You can often tell your preferred modality by noticing your own behaviour. For example, imagine you are going to a lecture. Which of these do you usually do?

1. Take a lot of notes (which are probably fairly neat).
2. Make a recording instead of taking notes.
3. Take a lot of notes, then never look at your notebook again (it may be better that way – the notes are a mess).
4. Watch the speaker closely as you listen.
5. Close your eyes so you can concentrate on what you are hearing – you are tuning in. You might mentally repeat key phrases or points.
6. Move around in your seat –adjust your position, move your arms, tap your fingers, fidget – as you listen, even though you *are* paying attention.

This is just a quick introduction and isn't meant to be a full sensory preference evaluation (more on that in the note at the end of this article), but you probably found yourself relating to a few of the ideas and not relating at all to the others. Ideas 1 and 4 are typical of visual learners, 2 and 5 are things auditory learners do, 3 and 6 are

typical haptic learner behavior.

Of course, it is useful to be aware of your own style for several reasons. It is the way you usually process information so it is often the way you learn best. And, since that is the way you take in information, it may well be the way you teach. It is no surprise that many of us give out information in the same way we process it. After all, it makes sense (to us) that way.

### **Charting the differences**

But what about learners who process things differently? What about learners whose learning style/preferred modality is different from the way you teach?

What follows is an attempt to deal with that. I originally made the Figure 1 chart for myself (adapted from Helgesen 2008) . I know I am a haptic learner who also rates quite high on the visual scale, but whose score on the auditory scale is quite low (this is a typical pattern: high on one, fairly high on another, quite low on the third). I was worried about my auditory learners – what was I doing to make sure the class made sense (so to speak) for them? I identified the main types of activities we do in class. Then I looked at the three main sensory areas. I tried to identify things I can do as a teacher to make sure I have the main senses covered. I also noted things they can do as learners.

I try to make sure that my teaching covers the range of senses – it is useful for students to get practice with all the senses. I usually introduce a few options and find that students naturally gravitate towards the activities that fit with their learning styles.

To use the chart, either take a learning inventory (see the note at end) or just look over the chart and see which things you already do. This may indicate your learning/teaching style. Then make a point of trying some of the other items, especially those that are not necessarily part of your regular pattern.

A word of caution, multi-sensory learning has come under criticism (Willingham, 2010). Like any aspect of

multiple intelligences theory, it is sometimes misinterpreted to mean that we should identify each student's learning style and teach to that: Give visual learners something to look at. Auditory learners get a CD or something else to listen to. Have haptic learners manipulate objects, etc. That's neither possible – different information may require different input – nor necessary. The key isn't to assume everyone will process everything with the same sense, it is to make sure learners get input in all the senses. Teaching across the senses can be very powerful. Medina (2008) cites research suggesting that learners who receive multi-sensory input have greater recall and are can create 50% more creative solutions to problem solving tasks. So the key as teachers is to teach using all the senses.

Work with it. Play with it. I think your students will see the light, or it will ring some bells for them. Or maybe it will just feel right. Whatever happens, they'll be learning.

<b>Skill</b>	<b>Visual</b>	<b>Auditory</b>	<b>Haptic</b> (tactile/kinaesthetic)
<b>Listening</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Before reading) Give learners time to read though and do the warm-up task.</li> <li>• If their textbook comes with a CD, learners can review the listening as they look at the book. Or they close the book (and, perhaps, their eyes). They listen and imagine the scene, people, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening is auditory.</li> <li>• Let learners discuss how they understood. What information gave them the answers?</li> <li>• If their textbook comes with a CD, learners use it to review. They close the book. They repeat (mentally or aloud) the key words and information. (This is a type of ‘shadowing’.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure tasks include a physical response. If they don’t, add one, eg add ‘Touch the part of the picture they are talking about.’</li> <li>• If their book comes with a CD, have learners review the listening as they do something else. For example, they take a walk as they listen. Or they notice how they think the people feel.</li> </ul>

<p>Speaking 1:</p> <p><b>Dialogue practice</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Textbook dialogues with recorded written texts are both visual and auditory. Just working with them is visual input.</li> <li>• Invite the learners to close their eyes and imagine the conversation, the scene, the speakers, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Textbook dialogues with recorded written texts are both auditory and visual. Just working with them is auditory input.</li> <li>• Invite the learners to close their eyes and focus on the conversation they hear.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try Silent listen and repeat: Learners move their mouths and say the words with no sound (subvocalise). They notice mouth, tongue, teeth, etc.</li> <li>• Have learners stand and gesture as they practise.</li> </ul>
<p>Speaking 2:</p> <p><b>Working with the language map</b> (key/example sentences) for pair- or groupwork or other speaking activities. These technique are mainly pronunciation tasks that focus the learner on key grammar/ functional language.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write the language map on the board or call attention to the forms in the book.</li> <li>• Imagine the words. Note or change color/ printed versus handwritten, etc.</li> <li>• ‘Mentally underline’ key words/grammar.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen and don’t repeat. Instead, learners imagine hearing their voices saying the sentences.</li> <li>• Mentally imagine the words with a strong L1 accent. Then imagine own voice with a native-like accent.</li> <li>• Say the sentences in nonsense syllables</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Silent listen and repeat (see box above).</li> <li>• Tap the rhythm of the target sentences.</li> <li>• Get extra large rubber bands – ones with a width of at least a centimetre are ideal. Learners stretch the bands on the stressed syllables as they practise.</li> <li>• As they hear the sentences, they ‘write’ them with their fingers on their hands.</li> </ul>

		<p>(DA da da), matching the rhythm. Then say the actual words, matching the stress.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get a metronome to help students keep the rhythm.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• March/dance around the room to the rhythm of the sentences.</li> <li>• Play “patty-cake”. In pairs, they mark the rhythm by clapping their own and their partners’ hands in rhythm.</li> </ul>
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<p>Speaking 3: <b>Pair- or groupwork</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give learners time to look over the page/task/questions before they begin the task.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners look over the questions in pairs. They clarify instructions. Talk about which look interesting to talk about (see haptic task).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give learners time to read the items before they begin. They might rate each item for interest. (☺ ☹ ☹) They begin with the most interesting ones.</li> <li>• Encourage learners to change partners between tasks.</li> <li>• Play instrumental background music.</li> </ul>
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<p>Speaking 4: <b>Open-ended fluency work</b> (Task planning/mental rehearsal)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before a speaking task, learners look over the page/task and think about what they want to say.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners think about what they want to say, then imagine the situation and listen mentally to the description.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They think about what they will say. They can try subvocalising (saying it silently) or mumbling.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Reading</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading is visual.</li> <li>• Invite the learners to imagine the pictures (watch the movie in their minds) as they read.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They read silently but as they do, they imagine the sounds of the words.</li> <li>• They read the text aloud to a partner (or even to themselves). Some may want to read silently for meaning first, then read it aloud.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get pastel vinyl folders. Learners put whatever they are reading inside and read through the folder. (This is similar to using the Irlen screens that many dyslexic readers find helpful. For more on this, see Irlen. 2005)</li> <li>• Get large pieces of paper (B4 or A3) in a wide variety of colours. Learners choose one they really like. They place it behind the book they are reading. It serves as a frame. (This is called ‘colour grounding’.)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Writing</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage learners to ‘imagine the movie in their minds’ of what they will write.</li> <li>• They proofread backwards (right to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners talk (to themselves or a friend) about what they are going to write.</li> <li>• They proofread by reading aloud.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When thinking about what they will write, they can make notes/ideas on slips of paper or post-its. This makes it easier to rearrange the order.</li> </ul>

	left) to slow down, notice spelling, etc.		
<b>Independent practice</b> (homework)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners can look around and think about how to describe what they see in English.</li> <li>• If their book comes with a student CD, they should listen as they follow along with the book.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners can talk to themselves (silently or aloud) in English.</li> <li>• They can listen to music and really think about the meaning.</li> <li>• If their book comes with a student CD, they close the book and then listen and imagine the scenes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage learners to learn how to do something in English, eg take some kind of lessons. Instructions on video may be useful. Or even getting an English cookbook and talking themselves through a new recipe as they make it.</li> <li>• They can just take a walk and talk to themselves in English.</li> </ul>

Figure 1: Adapting Classroom activities across the senses.

**Notes and Resources:**

To find your own preferred sensory modality, take a learning style assessment like the one at [www.berghuis.co.nz/abiator/lsi/lsiframe.html](http://www.berghuis.co.nz/abiator/lsi/lsiframe.html). I find ‘Learning styles test 2’ to be the most useful with my students.

To find it more easily, google: Abiator LSI test

If you want to have your classes take the inventory and doing so on the internet isn’t practical, there are photocopiable tests in *Knowing Me, Knowing You* by Jim Wingate (Delta Publishing) and *In your Hands* by Jane Revell and Susan Norman (Saffire Press). One very good test, which has been validated for reliability, is the *Learning Channel Preference Checklist* by Lynn O’Brien. It is available for US\$2.25 from [www.way2go.com](http://www.way2go.com).

This article is adapted from Helgesen (2008). See below.

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### BIODATA

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