

## **Learning Styles**

There are learning-styles experts who classify learners as visual, auditory, or tactile/kinesthetic. Visual and (especially) auditory learners tend to do well in the classroom. Tactile/kinesthetic learners typically do not.

As prerequisites to teaching 'mental flexibility', teachers need to:

1. Nurture all learner styles and modes
2. Help students understand their own preferences and utilize learning techniques compatible with their own styles
3. Communicate to students an appreciation of learner differences

In other words, students need to have their unique styles recognized as valid and acceptable.

This may be most true of those students most likely to fail. Research increasingly suggests that the majority of students classified as "at risk" of failure fit the description of concrete/common sense learner style, and favor the tactile/kinesthetic mode. Kinesthetic activities make abstract concepts concrete. This is extremely important for students who have difficulty dealing with abstractions.

Moreover, whether the learner's preferred modality is auditory, visual, or tactile/kinesthetic, it is known that none of us always remembers what is seen or heard, and all of us remember best what we have had an opportunity to do. An old Chinese proverb expresses this: "I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I do and I understand." Tactile and kinesthetic engagement enhances anyone's learning!

Studies in neurophysiology have shown that physical experience creates especially strong neural pathways in the brain. When students participate in tactile/kinesthetic activity, the two hemispheres of the brain are simultaneously engaged. This type of learning experience helps assure that new information will be retained in long-term memory.

The tactile system is essentially touch. It is activated through receptors in the skin. Our tactile sense gives us information about size, shape, texture, and temperature. In the study of science, a well-developed tactile sense is essential. It is a sense that could be better utilized in the other disciplines as well. The kinesthetic system is activated through movement, with its receptors located in the tendons and muscles. It is the kinesthetic system that recognizes, for example, when a dance sequence you are practicing has not been properly executed.