

## **METHODS OF TEACHING ENGLISH TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION LEARNING STYLES**

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Learning styles have been studied for decades and there are several models that have been proposed by various researchers. While the finer distinctions are still debated, most authorities in the field generally agree upon four basic learning styles: auditory learners, visual learners, kinesthetic learners, and tactile learners. There is a great deal of overlap between the kinesthetic and tactile learning styles, and they will be treated together here.

As a teacher, what do learning styles mean for you? First of all, you need to find your main teaching style. Whether you lecture or do role-plays or worksheets, you need to figure out your own style so that you can supplement it to fit your students' learning styles. Of course, in order to supplement you need materials and activities. You need flexibility and ideally you want to add some fun. That is where English games come in. The variety of games, as well as their integration of different ways of learning makes them the perfect supplements for you your usual teaching style.

Students who get a lot out of lectures, verbal explanations, tapes and oral instruction are generally classed as auditory learners<sup>1</sup>. Language

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<sup>1</sup> Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy. New York: Longman. Brown, H. D. (2001). P.29.

games for this type of learner are mainly listening based. They include games that involve repetition, dictation, and listening for clues.

Recitation games – These games are any games that involve students repeating language they have had demonstrated or written down for them. Chinese Whispers, Jazz Chants, and Karaoke Night are good examples of these kinds of games. Karaoke Night is an especially good game in Japan, where most students will be used to the idea of singing for workmates. It's not unusual to have a student ask you for help with preparing a song in English for a business party.

If you are you teach adults who are more conservative, use a variation of Jazz Chants with a short rhythmic dialog and a metronome, or hand clapping, and emphasize the fluency practice. You might also teach a lesson on the history of jazz in the United States. That kind of lesson works very well in classes where students are studying English as a hobby, or for travel.

Listening games – EFL Students studying English in their own country often express concern that they can understand their teacher but not other native speakers. In the language classroom you can practice listening by using tapes or videos with short dialogs for listening games like Vocabulary Scavenger Hunt, which involves trying to locate the necessary vocabulary words on multiple tapes at different listening stations.

There are also Cloze Passages where the students listen to a prepared tape while reading a transcription and filling in any blanks with words they have just heard, and Jigsaw Listening. Jigsaw listening is also an excellent team building game, as the teams send representatives to different listening stations, and then try to reconstruct the story when all the listeners have returned to the team. These kinds of games also help students

learn how to make use of TV and radio broadcasts in English to practice on their own.

Quiz and story building games – Quiz games like Jeopardy, grammar knockout type games and listening memory games are great for auditory learners of any level, since you can go from basic questions like spelling and definitions, to more challenging ones like asking for a word to be used in a sentence, explanation of grammar rules, or cultural trivia.

Another set of games to teach auditory learners are story and sentence building games like Midribs, either the store bought variety, or homemade, where the students fill in words to make funny and nonsensical stories. These types of games require excellent listening skills as the student keeps track of what will be required in the next turn, plus they usually end with a verbal recap of the finished story or sentence allowing students to check their understanding.

Visual learners prefer to read silently and make good use of any illustrations that go with the text. They will generally prefer you to teach with written instructions and will benefit from you acting out situations, watching a demonstration or presenting scenarios in videos. If you have a student who seems to retain what they read better than what they hear then that student is a perfect example of someone who prefers visual learning. There are many readily available language games that work with this kind of student, as well as helping non-visual learners make the most of visual cues that can help them with learning and using English<sup>2</sup>.

Board games – There are plenty of commercial board games that can be used in the classroom, but you can also make your own. "Folder

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<sup>2</sup> Teaching English to children. New York: Longman. Scott, W. A., & Ytreberg, L. H. (2000). P. 36

games" involve making a game board, often based on commercial boards, and using them to practice grammar, vocabulary, phonics, and spelling. The boards can be laminated onto a manila folder and then the pieces and cards needed for the game stuck in a baggie stapled to the inside. Grammatical Chutes and Ladders, Parts of Speech Path Finding (based on the Candy Land Board), and A Day in the Life (based on the game Life) where students participate in mini-role-plays generated by the roll of the die and scenario cards are all fun to play. The boards should not be decorated in a childish way, since that will turn off your adult students, but they can still be colorful. *Picture games* – These games include anything played with pictures as their main starting point. Playing games with picture flashcards, or adapting Jeopardy to use picture prompts is one example. Another one that is a lot of fun with advanced students is picture captioning or comic strip re-writes. If you use comics from different countries, you can get into some very sophisticated discussions about what constitutes humor in different countries. Many students get to a certain level of advanced English, and then plateau. One reason for this is that they have a difficult time taking their English outside of academic or basic survival situations. Studying humor through these visual games can help to bridge that gap.

*Reading games* – Reading is an essential skill for all students and will work especially well with visual learners. Language games like Reading Treasure Hunts with color-coded pencils, where the students look for particular parts of speech or vocabulary, teaches skimming as well as reviewing grammar and/or vocabulary. Ten Important Sentences with Watermelon, where teams send a representative to put sentences in order,

helps with summarizing, working under pressure, and team building. This game has the added bonus of fitting tactile learners as well.

Tactile and Kinesthetic learners are often the students who just don't get what you're trying to teach in a traditional lecture or worksheet based lesson. Kinesthetic learners take in information best when they use their whole bodies to complete practice exercises. Tactile learners are also physical learners, but they are more likely to learn things from model building and hands on instruction<sup>3</sup>.

Interestingly, there was a study done in the late 1980s (Reid, 1987) that found the self-reported preference among English Language Learners for language lessons was Tactile/Kinesthetic by a wide margin. This just goes to show how important it is to try and integrate more physical and experiential elements into our English lessons.

What makes a game kinesthetic or tactile? Look for games that involve whole body responses, or have the students touching and moving things around as part of the game activity. Games with these elements are associating physical activity and touch with specific meanings. They can be divided into three broad groups: Touch Games, Spatial Games, and Craft Games.

*Touch Games* – The most common games involving touch are those based around having real items inside a bag, so that students have to touch the items and then perform certain tasks. These tasks are what differentiate the level of difficulty. The easiest version simply has students identify the objects that they touch in the bag. This is often a vocabulary game. To make it more difficult, the students have to describe what they are feeling, while the rest of the class tries to guess what it is.

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<sup>3</sup> Authoring with Video. The Reading Teacher, 61 (4), 330-333. Strassman, B. K., & O'Connell, T. (2007). P. 84.

*Spatial Games* – These games involve rearranging items or people and can be both kinesthetic and tactile. They include traditional games like charades and less traditional games, like Population Punctuation, where all but one person in class has a card with words or punctuation on it and the one person who is 'it' tries to arrange the people at the front of the class so that the cards make a correctly punctuated sentence using as many people as possible.

Variety Brings Success Language games are the single easiest way to address different learning styles in the classroom. By putting students at ease, and stimulating their senses, you create a wealth of learning opportunities. These opportunities aren't just for learning language, but also for broadening the students' learning styles to include those that aren't the first choice.

Will paying attention to learning styles solve all your classroom problems? No, of course not. But using games to diversify your teaching style will allow you to reach more of your students more effectively than ever before. It will cut down on boredom as it increases student interest, and it will give students essential practice in integrating different learning styles into their own style. Students will be doing more than just expanding their English when they play games. They will be expanding their minds.