

How to provide more auditory stimuli to my students (A preliminary classroom–research report)

Liliana Russo Rastelli
ELT Trainer

1. Introduction. Identifying the problem

As teachers we should be aware that we have to assess our practices to see if we are really catering for our student's needs. This has to be done in order to change or improve any given situation which is not balanced for the children. I can say that it is important for teachers to know their students learning styles in order to help them in the acquisition of the language. It is also important to teach students to recognize their learning styles to improve and maximise their learning.

The first thing we should do is to recognize our learning style and that of our students. Learning styles are simply different approaches or ways of learning. There are different learning styles and these can condition the way we learn and see the world, so as teachers we should be aware of them in order to reach the greater number of students. I am going to examine the different learning styles so as to see how I can recognise them and improve my communication and teaching through them.

2. Learning styles

Taking into account that visual learners learn by watching and noticing, they like to see things written down, read books, look at pictures and diagrams, we should incorporate visual stimuli when using textbooks. They like to see what they read and to see what we are teaching; they need physical representation of things. This style is the one most currently catered for because all the textbooks have pictures and posters and they are full of visual aids.

There are some tips in order to discover these learners so I asked some of my older students, if they identified themselves with any of the following: (in the case of very young learners I based myself on observation).

2.1 Visual learners

Visual learners tend to do some or many of these things:

- Sit up straight
- Follow the teacher with the eyes.
- Speak quickly.
- Be careful in choosing clothes and combination of clothes.
- Be good spellers, they see the words in their minds.
- Memorise by visual association.

- Are not usually distracted by noise.
- Demonstrate rather than speak,
- Like visual arts more than music.
- Know what to say but can't find the right words.
- Have trouble remembering verbal instructions unless they are written down.
- Be fast readers.

2.2 Auditory learners

As far as auditory learners are concerned, these are some of the characteristics we can base ourselves in order to recognise them:

They tend to:

- Learn by listening and discussing.
- Get information through their ears.
- Like to hear things being said or listen to cassettes.
- Appear not to be listening and gazing out of the window, but they usually follow your movements by turning their dominant ear towards you.-
- Find it distracting to look at the same time they are listening.

These students normally:

- Speak rhythmically
- Follow the speaker with the ears.
- Can repeat back and mimic the tone
- Are good at imitating voices.
- Talk to themselves while working.
- Are easily distracted by noise.
- Subvocalise: move their lips and pronounce words as they read.
- Enjoy reading aloud and listening to stories.
- Find writing difficult and are better at telling.
- Tend to like music more than visual arts.
- Learn by listening and remembering
- Are talkative.
- Spell better out loud than in written form.

2.3 Kinaesthetic learners

Kinaesthetic learners like to get information through their hands or bodies or emotions. They like to touch things, move their hands and feet walk around the room, take notes (because the movement of their hands help them absorb the information.)

There are two types of kinaesthetic learners:

- The tactile/movement oriented ones (who have a great need to touch anything and everything, they get out of their seats, drum on their desks, rock on their chairs)
- The feeling/oriented ones who want to be comfortable feel loved and safe.

3. Case study

I realised I'm a visual-kinaesthetic learner and I don't pay so much attention to the auditory side so I noticed that auditory learners may have it more difficult to learn with me as their teacher. So my objective this term is to try and provide more auditory stimuli to my students.

So having examined the problem, I decided I had to prepare things very carefully and detect who the more energetic are and which type of learners they are.

4. Study group

I worked with a group of 6 children between the ages of 3 and 8. As my group was heterogeneous I had to provide activities for all of them and –as they were young– I had to be careful because they could get bored and they were not patient while you tried to work with their companions.

Maria, 3 years old, is very sweet and likes all the activities I tell her to do. She's no problem because we play a lot and she loves painting and doing creative work with paper, etc. She may well be a visual learner. She observes everything and likes a cuddle or two.

Laura, 5 year old, is another sweet girl and works very well too. They both like songs and they pronounce very well and they like sharing activities. Here we have another visual learner.

Sofía, 6 year old, is very restless and is absolutely auditory, so much so, that after working with me for some time she still can't write numbers orthographically, she does it phonetically. She has very nice pronunciation and she loves all types of activities but she tries to catch my attention and she wants to be the star.... She's always humming and talking to herself.

Marcos, 6 year old, he only wants to do written work. He's very impatient and doesn't like participating in activities with the rest of the children, he's restless too and a bit stubborn. He's kinaesthetic.

Victor is 8 and he can be patient and helpful, so he is good to work with because he likes asking things and collaborates. He's a visual learner.

Javier, 7 year old, is very, very restless and he's always up to something so it is very difficult to work with him. It is necessary to keep him busy all the time because he doesn't respect the time for his companions and he doesn't like to share activities. Apart from this he is a compulsive taboo word user so he uses one of those words in practically every sentence he utters and the others try to copy and laugh at his antics. He's kinaesthetic and visual.

All in all it was a very nice group to work with because they were fast learners so the first thing I had to do was to make them spend a little bit of energy in order to keep them quiet during the class. This could be done by singing a song and doing some TPR activities.

5. Activities

As far as oral activities are concerned, I decided to introduce more listenings from their CDs and to play their own songs while we work. Then we were ready for action. The beginning of the class consisted of a routine: they hanged their coats in the racks, they got into the classroom, took their books, and sat down.

I decided to give it a try with a version of the "Three Little Pigs" which in this case is "Three Little Friends" and told them the story. I used visual and auditory stimuli because, apart from telling the story, I was using big pictures to show the actions and some kinaesthetic activity as well because the children have

to blow (they have to imitate the wolf). Revision with flashcards and a competition: I gave a number of flashcards to the students and they had to tell me the name of the object.

Work with numbers; different activities to be done with numbers according to their ages. Saying numbers aloud, counting with different objects etc. and as far as counting is concerned, using nursery rhymes to teach and consolidate numbers. In our story we had numbers one, two and three and with the different nursery rhymes, I wanted to teach up to ten to the youngest girls, to teach them how to write the numbers to the others.

The nursery rhymes were: “Baa, Baa, Black Sheep”, “One, Two, Three, Four, Five” and “Ten Little Elephants” so we would go gradually up the numbers.

Some nursery rhymes can be used as well because they can help a lot with the auditory style and they can also be performed which is another positive aspect in this age group.

Then I would introduce the making of a house out of chopsticks and decorate it as well and talk about the wolf who wanted to pull down the houses (while they build the houses they listen to the story or sing a song about the wolf). So here we have a kinaesthetic activity at the same time as an auditory one.

6. Conclusion

So as a conclusion I can say that, having realised that my learning style is primarily visual, I need more auditory activities for some of my students because I was not catering to their leaning needs. I decided to pay more attention to that area and, at the same time, to use a lot of kinaesthetic stimuli as well because very young learners need to do things and that doing is not only colouring activities.

Being more conscious that more auditory stimuli was needed, I also tried to give them more time to produce and say things in English. At this stage in their learning process they have to be exposed to a lot of oral English, so apart from talking in English all the time, I should give them opportunities to watch adapted videos and listen to different people if possible.

At this early stage in their learning lives, the auditory mode is the one most used by children, but as soon as they start school writing is introduced, thus creating a dual form of learning for the children. If a child does very well in writing, he will probably lose a bit of their auditory capacity and we can have the opposite case which is a child who cannot write because he does so in a phonic manner and this is not appropriate for school. So this child can become a “poor” learner according to the school teacher because he does not conform to the model proposed at school and on the other hand he may be learning and producing the language in an adequate way for the teacher who has the overall development in mind.

The general idea is to realize what their learning styles are, compare them with mine, and make the learning experience as positive as possible and to help them enjoy their learning of L2. Emotional ties can help a lot because students tend to lean on the teacher, and having a very affective relationship, helps to reinforce the learning process. Positive feedback can help the learning process a lot and also help students feel happy with what they are learning.

Liliana Russo Rastelli. I graduated as a Teacher of English as a Foreign Language and have been working with groups of students from different ages. I have just finished a Master in Teaching English as a Foreign Language from Alcalá University. I am currently working as a private teacher teaching all levels. I have become involved in the BritLit project from the British Council and I do Teacher training for Pearson as well. I work as a freelance trainer and consultant. lilianarusso@gmail.com.
