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Getting Started

The longest journey begins with the first step.
—Chinese proverb

You don't have to be an expert to make a good beginning. Here are a few suggestions to help you start.

Be Aware of Your Preferred Modes of Learning and Teaching

Do you prefer to learn by seeing, hearing, or doing? Do you like to analyse or to think in metaphors? Do you learn best in a group or alone? Which intelligences do you favour? Are your lesson plans linear and closely organised or spiral and flexible? Keep in mind that there are many different valid modes of teaching. How does your teaching style harmonise with the learning styles of your students?

In schools of education, many of us were taught to stand at the front of the room and expect all students to pay conscientious attention to our words. The teacher and the textbook were considered the prime sources of information. Recent research indicates that sometimes it's more effective for teachers to have students work cooperatively in small groups, processing information from a number of sources. For a time the teacher becomes the 'Guide on the Side' rather than the 'Sage on the Stage'. Several of the activities in this book enable you to assume the guide role while maintaining effective but flexible structure.

Start with Familiar, Easy Activities

Engaging the bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence is much easier than it may seem at first. You may have been using some bodily-kinaesthetic activities for years, such as field trips, hands-on projects, skits, and creative book reports. In this book are some of your old standbys, but there is also a wealth of new ideas you can introduce easily into the classroom. Although you may think that using these activities will complicate your job, they will actually facilitate it.

Many teachers quail at the idea of using physical activities in an academic classroom. They may imagine a classroom in pandemonium, with thirty or more adolescents stumbling over desks or slamming into walls. Nothing could be further from the truth! For students not accustomed to using movement for learning, you can start small, with hands-on activities or with movement limited to a small area. There's even a form of 'muscular imagination' students can use that requires little or no physical movement.

Kinaesthetic techniques vary widely. This book describes techniques that use the whole body, as well as activities that feature the large muscles, hands-on involvement, kinaesthetic imagination, and perception enhancement. The following section gives examples of the various types of activities. In later chapters are detailed descriptions of these and many other activities, categorised by subject.

Types of Activities in This Book Whole-Body

If you're willing to use whole-body activities, there are several that work well in academic classes. A prime example is total physical response (TPR) described in chapter 2. This well-structured, highly effective approach is often used for teaching languages and ESL. Berty Segal and James J. Asher have produced splendid books of lesson plans for using TPR (see the 'English and Other Languages' section of the bibliography). Other whole-body techniques include skits and charades.

Large Muscle

A friend of mine teaches Urdu (the national language of Pakistan, which is written in Arabic script) at a university. She has enabled her students to overcome their difficulties in mastering the Arabic alphabet by having them write the letters and words on the chalkboard with the whole arm rather than

just the hand. In his *Brain Gym* materials, Paul Dennison teaches adults and children to do lazy eights to improve hand-eye coordination, promote efficient reading, and prevent eyestrain at the computer. A description of the lazy eights method appears in chapter 5.

Hands-on

These activities require that students use their hands to solve a problem or create a product that expresses what they have learned. A good example for high school algebra students is a game called ‘Wodjah and Company’, described in Tim Erickson’s *Get It Together*. Students work in groups using manipulatives to solve whimsical but challenging questions.

Kinaesthetic Imagination

Yes, the muscles really can ‘imagine’. Professional athletes have long been taught to enhance their practice by ‘seeing’ themselves making a perfect pass or a three-point basket. More recently, they’ve been learning to ‘feel’ themselves doing it while visualising. There are more details later in this chapter. It’s a natural for the classroom.

Perception Enhancement

We have more than five senses! When you’re feeling tired, hungry, calm, stressed or euphoric, you’re experiencing several of the proprioceptive senses, the ones that perceive internally. *Experiencing these senses is a key to self-regulating behavior* and an important element in conflict resolution. Internal sensing and self-calming techniques are described later in this chapter.

A related enhancement activity is cross-sensing, or *synesthesia*. A great composer may ‘hear’ a sunset and put it into music. Einstein ‘felt’ insights about abstract concepts *in his muscles*. A cross-sensing technique is described in chapter 5.

Choose the Best Approach for Your Students

Should you be funny or straightforward? Should you use the kinaesthetic activity as an introduction, as the core of a lesson, or as a follow-up? What kind of debriefing will you use? After a physical activity, it’s wise to use a different modality to connect the activity with the more abstract aspects of the content. This connecting activity can consist of a written description

of the learning, a diagram, a formula, a discussion, a picture, or even a song or a poem.

Can you give permission for students to participate in degrees, or do your students need more complete structure? I prefer to allow students to participate to the extent they feel comfortable, but I don't allow 'wet blankets' or class clowns to disrupt the experience for others. Also, let students know that the ground rules for this kind of activity may differ from those for standard activities but that there are still rules. Following are some suggestions:

no put-downs

only positive feedback

no disruptive, destructive, or dangerous behavior

Sometimes it helps to use a consistent signal for this different learning modality: lowered lights or a particular kind of background music, for instance. Then when the lights are back to normal or the music is off, students understand that the regular ground rules are in operation again.

Explain Your Inclusion of Kinaesthetic Activities (metacognitive learning)

If your students don't already know, tell them about their various intelligences, adapting the information from the introduction or using material specifically written for young people, such as *Seven Ways of Learning* by David Lazear. Discussing the intelligences is a good way to help students become aware of their own learning processes. Moreover, it encourages them to sense themselves as partners in their own education, rather than as passive consumers—or worse, as victims. Essentially, it gives them an owner's manual for their own brains.

Once they know why they're using this approach to learning, students can begin to evaluate how well it serves them. This awareness helps them learn how to learn, an essential twenty-first century survival skill, since they're likely to need to change careers several times in their lifetimes. Someday we hope to develop cross-intelligent learners—those who can reconceptualise new information taught in other modalities into their own favoured blend of intelligences. Metacognitive learning is a step in that direction.