



## ELEMENTARY: Promoting Multimodal Delivery

BY BETHANN HEPBURN

**E**lementary music teachers can support student learning when they present concepts with multiple learning modalities. In this brief article, I'll highlight the significance of learning modalities, offer an overview, and provide practical examples of strategies from active music learning models that support a multimodal delivery of musical concepts.

### Learning Modalities

Learning modalities delineate how individual learners process information: *visually*, *auditorily*, or *kinesthetically*. Modalities Learning Theory was developed by Barbe and Swassing in 1979. Later, they expanded their work in collaboration with Milone (Barbe, Swassing, & Milone, 1979). Their theory proposes that people process information to learn through visual, auditory, and kinesthetic/spatial modalities. The sensory processes that help promote learning are specific to the individual learner.

### Modalities Evolve

The way a child learns, whether through seeing, hearing, or movement, is not fixed. According to Milone (1981), a child's ability to learn using different methods can change with age. As children grow older, they become more integrated in their learning styles, and the use of different learning methods becomes more balanced. Younger children tend to be more auditory learners, while older children tend to rely more on visual learning or mixed methods. The sound-before-symbol method embedded in active music learning approaches aligns with this development.

Combining visual, auditory, and kinesthetic/spatial sensory inputs is common in music classes utilizing strategies from Orff Schulwerk, Kodály, Dalcroze Eurhythmics, and Gordon MLT. Let's explore a few examples and tips to consider as we plan for instruction.

### Auditory and Kinesthetic Preparation

Active music learning approaches commonly use auditory and kinesthetic preparation before the visual representation of Western notation. The first example is playing a singing game in kindergarten and bringing the game back in first grade for reading from the music staff. In kindergarten, play the Sneaky Fox singing game. In first grade bring it back when the students are reading *sol*, *mi*, and *la* on the staff. [Go to \*www.tmea.org/sneakyfox\*](http://www.tmea.org/sneakyfox) for game details and notation.

Singing games are an excellent engagement for auditory and kinesthetic preparation for students before the visual representation of notation. Another example would be the use of eurhythmics quick-reaction games. Quick-reaction exercises require students to have a musical response after an auditory cue from the teacher. These exercises can be led by the teacher on a variety of

instruments, such as a piano, hand drum, or temple blocks; they blend an auditory and kinesthetic preparation prior to visual representation of notation.

### Group Work Promotes Multimodal Learning

Many approaches utilize partners or small groups to work together during musical tasks. Whether partners are decoding a rhythm together during a Kodály lesson or working in a larger group, they use all the modalities to communicate with each other to support music learning. The Orff Schulwerk teaching process invites children to actively engage in musical experiences and performance through imitation, exploration, and creation. Pedagogical processes used in an Orff Schulwerk-inspired classroom through cooperative learning groups empower students to become their classmates' tutors or peer models. This process helps reinforce music concepts, encourages pattern play, and can aid in connecting auditory, tactile, and visual representations of musical ideas.

Orff-inspired collaboration opportunities or Kodály partner activities provide the opportunity for peers to teach each other using multiple learning modalities. Peer teachers may use one or more modalities as they model for their peers. Adding manipulatives during peer groups creates another tactile/kinesthetic opportunity. For example, during a Kodály lesson, peers may decode a rhythm together with an icon sheet using rhythm bricks during an Orff Schulwerk composition activity.

A reciprocal relationship develops between sensory input and cognitive understanding as young learners develop musical skills and knowledge. Each individual processes information differently and has their own learning preferences; however, when used in combination, the ability to understand musical concepts can be strengthened. When music educators are diligent about adding a multimodal approach to their curriculum scope and sequence, young learners will develop stronger cognitive understandings through active involvement with music.



BethAnn Hepburn is an endorsed teacher education instructor for the American Orff-Schulwerk Association and is coauthor of *Purposeful Pathways: Possibilities for the Elementary Music Classroom*, Books 1–4.

### References

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