

There's More Than One Way to Learn

Nurturing Your Child's Style

By Paul W. Schenk, Psy.D.

My son knows how to beat every level in Pokémon, so why can't he learn his multiplication tables? Sound familiar? For the majority of children, learning comes easily enough. But for some students school is a challenge. Your child may be a bright, quick learner at home, but for

some reason has trouble in class. Just as puzzling is the child who struggles for the first few grades, then suddenly blossoms in the third or fourth. Or the youngster who excels in the early grades, then starts to fall behind.

Making sense of it all begins by understanding the different ways of learning. As you go through the day, you store information using your five

senses: sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. Everyone has a preferred way of learning something, which influences how she remembers it later. Think about how you remember a phone number. Do you say it aloud? Perhaps your mind's eye "sees" it written in an address book. Or do you have to move your finger over an imaginary phone pad to jog your memory?

Children are no different. They learn and recall information using similar stylistic tricks that have a big impact on how well they do in school. But if you and your child don't speak the same "language," it may be tougher for you to help him succeed academically. Consider this scenario of a mom helping her son learn new spelling words:

Son: These words *sound* all wrong!

Mom: Let's *look* at the words together and I'll *show* you how to learn them.

Son: When I *say* them the way they're spelled, they don't *sound* right.

Mom: Pay *attention* to what I'm trying to *show* you here. Just *focus* on this and it will get *clearer*.

Son: But I *AM* *listening*!

Mom is visually oriented, using words like *look* and *show* to get her point across. Her son, however, is an auditory learner, relying on such words as *sound* and *listen* to express himself. Clearly, they are not on the same wavelength, and the frustration they both feel is likely to get played out regularly without either understanding why. To figure out your child's learning style, take the quiz at left, then read on to find ▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶

Paul W. Schenk, Psy.D., is a clinical psychologist in Atlanta, Georgia.

Find Your Child's Personal Style

For each question, circle all the answers that you apply to your child.

When my child has leisure time, he prefers to...

- A. watch TV, a video, or go to the movies.
- B. listen to CD's, the radio, or read books.
- C. do something athletic, physical, or use his or her hands.

What my child notices most about people is...

- A. how they look or dress.
- B. how they sound when they talk.
- C. how they move.

My child learns most easily when she...

- A. sees someone demonstrate what to do.
- B. gets verbal instructions.
- C. gets "hands-on" experience.

When my child is finding his way around a new school, he tends to...

- A. use a map he's drawn.
- B. ask for directions.
- C. trust his feelings about which way to go.

My child enjoys books or magazines that...

- A. have a lot of pictures.
- B. discuss interesting topics.
- C. cover sports, activities or crafts.

When my child has many things to do, she...

- A. makes lists or imagines doing them.
- B. keeps reminding/telling herself there are things to do.
- C. feels anxious until all or most of the things are done.

When my child is talking to someone, he...

- A. looks at the person intently to see what she is saying.
- B. listens closely so that he can hear what she is saying.
- C. physically leans in so he can try to get in touch with what she is saying.

When my child solves problems, she...

- A. keeps looking at alternatives until the pieces come together.
- B. talks about new approaches until something clicks.
- C. fits possibilities together until she gets a feeling of balance.

My child likes any place where...

- A. there are things to see and people to watch.
- B. there is music, conversation or quiet.
- C. there is room to move.

Add up all the a's, b's and c's. The highest number reflects your child's style.
a. _____ (Visual) b. _____ (Auditory) c. _____ (Kinesthetic)

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SIGHT AND SOUND
A visually oriented child often likes listening to music while studying.

▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶ From page 87 out how to make it work for, not against, her.

As children progress in school, the way they are taught goes through some important changes. While much teaching in the early grades is multisensory, it is skewed toward a kinesthetic, or hands-on, approach. Children at this age learn by touching, manipulating, and taking apart their world. Between third and fourth grade, teaching shifts to an auditory approach. There are fewer hands-on projects and more oral presentations. Then sometime before high school there is another shift, this time to a visual mode in which concepts are more abstract, symbolic and graphic. While most of us can learn fine in any of these three modes, some children seem to learn easily in only one. That's why kinesthetic learners may fall behind as teaching methods become more auditory, and auditory learners suddenly come into their own.

Roughly one child in six is what Michael Grinder, national director of Neuro Linguistic Programming in Education, calls a "translator." Any information that enters through his sensory system has to be "translated" into his particular mode. If you have ever studied a foreign language, you know what this is like. After listening to the foreign words, you need a few seconds to translate them into your native language. So if your child is a

visual learner, she needs a few seconds to translate what she just heard into something she can store visually. In class, she may not be able to handle other incoming information while she's performing this kind of translation. And for those few seconds anything else the teacher is saying or presenting is lost. The result? Gaps in what she knows, which may become evident only at test time. The

key to helping your youngster use her style to her advantage is to understand it well yourself.

The Visual Learner

This child likes to see what he is learning and experiencing. Because what he sees takes precedence over what he hears, you may have noticed that it's next to impossible to talk to him while the TV is on. A visual learner is apt to spend less time on the telephone because she can't "see" the conversation. She wants

to look at the other person for visual (nonverbal) cues. If you are giving directions to a visual child, include visual anchors such as, "Please be sure you put both *[holding up two fingers]* your lunch box and book bag by the door *[pointing]*."

Visual learners tend to be strong, fast readers, but may not enjoy having someone read to them. They're also

likely to be excellent spellers, but may have trouble spelling words they have never seen. They may like to have music playing while studying; it breaks the silence without being visually distracting. When talking they tend to speak faster than other types of learners. But their gaze will glaze over or they'll look away if you begin to monopolize the conversation.

In class, strong visual learners may intermittently tune out when the teacher is

Words to Listen for

An auditory child has a natural tendency to speak in language that reflects her internal way of perceiving things—through sound. Keep an ear out when you talk to her and you'll likely hear many of the following words: *hear, loud, soft, whisper, shout, scream, talk, sound, hum, sing, rings a bell, listen, said, noisy, quote, saying, tone.*



speaking for two reasons. They have to pause to translate what they just heard. Plus, for these children, a "talking head" isn't as visually stimulating as watching what other kids are doing.

The Auditory Learner

If your child doodles in class, she may just be bored, but she may also be an auditory learner. Doing something that occupies the hands and eyes, but doesn't require thinking, leaves her ears free to really listen to the teacher.

An auditory learner is the most talkative of the three styles. You'll hear a more rhythmic pattern when this child speaks. She loves using the phone and having discussions, though she may tend to monopolize the conversation. Auditory learners enjoy being read to, but may be slower at reading than visual learners because they may softly read aloud to themselves—though it's barely audible to others. (Some even move their lips.) They are usually good phonetic spellers, but tend to talk better than they write.

In school, auditory kids find it easy to listen to the teacher give a lesson orally, but may get lost when they have to follow visual directions. They need to take time out to translate new information into a mode they can understand.

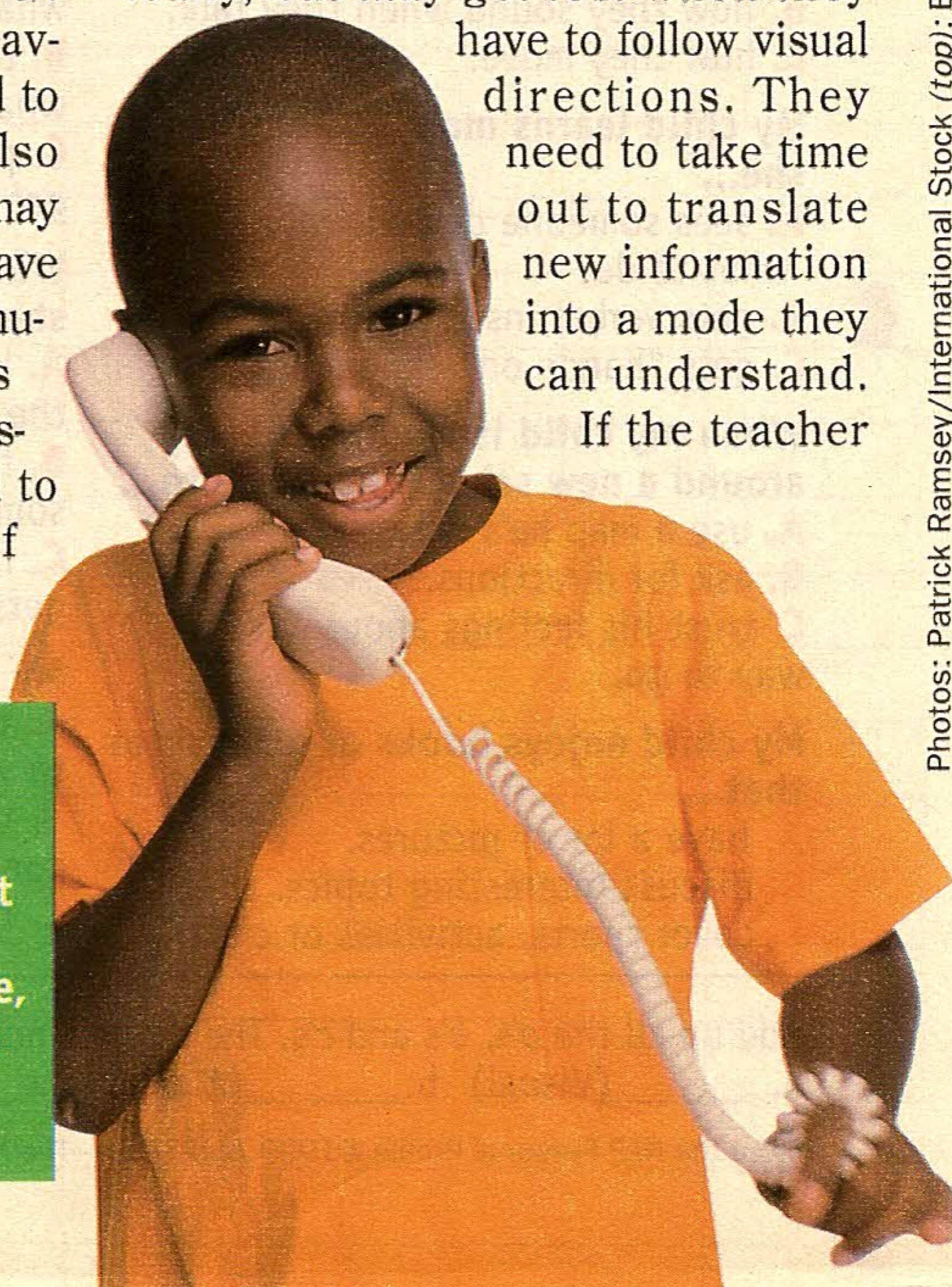
If the teacher

Words to Listen for

Listen to your child closely when he speaks and you'll pick up a variety of clues to his learning style. If your child is a visual learner, he'll automatically use words that reflect a visual perception of the world. Here are some of the words a visual learner tends to use: *see, look, picture, show, bright, large, color, shape, near, far, focus, clear, point of view, flash, shine, reflect, magnify, view, sparkle, hazy, foggy, dull, fuzzy, sharp, light, brilliant.*



ALL EARS
If your child loves to talk and just can't seem to stay off the phone, odds are he's an auditory learner.



Photos: Patrick Ramsey/International Stock (top); Bill Tucker/International Stock (bottom).

is writing a lesson on the chalkboard and a student nearby is talking to a friend, the strong auditory learner is apt to shift her attention to the conversation and away from the visual material on the board.

The Kinesthetic Learner

This child likes to move, touch, feel, and manipulate what he is learning. In conversation he uses more gestures and action words. Kids who excel at sports tend to be strong kinesthetic learners. This type of child loves to be doing things.

Words to Listen for

If your youngster is a kinesthetic learner, he'll also have his own favorite words. This child's inherent focus on movement, feelings and intuition as a way of understanding the world around him will be expressed in words

such as: *pressure, heavy, light, soft, rough, touch, feeling, solid, move, hot, cold, smooth, handle, connect, shape, fast, slow motion.*



In class, if the teacher passes out a worksheet, a kinesthetic learner is likely to jump right in and begin doing what "feels right" without reading the directions or waiting for the teacher to finish talking. If the lesson the teacher is giving does not involve a hands-on component (sorting beads, painting a poster, etc.), this kind of student may initiate his own physical activity such as doodling or exploring the contents of his desk—and not give his full attention. As with other learners, a kinesthetic student may miss instruction while she translates what is being presented into something she can understand.

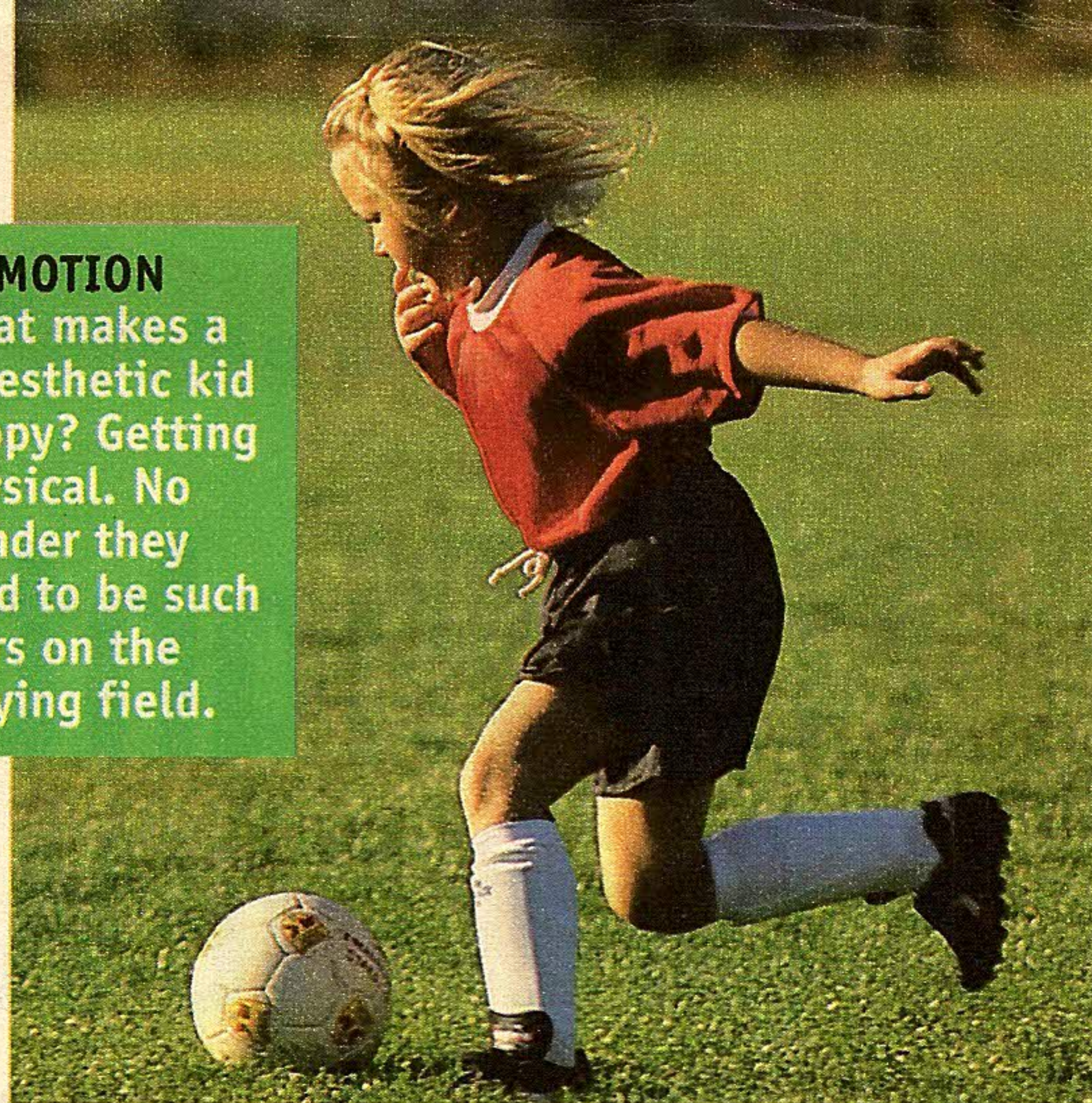
Bring Out Your Child's Best

Before jumping to any rigid conclusions about your child's learning style, talk with his teacher. If academic problems have been significant, consider setting up a thorough educational evaluation to rule out other possible culprits, such as a learning disability. If it turns out that your child simply learns more easily in a particular mode, there are several things you can do at home to help make learning more fun and successful. Just be sure to coordinate your home efforts with what the teacher is doing at school.

Start with the basics: teach new things in ways that involve several senses, not just words. Remember, kids love movement, action, and learning in a hands-on way, especially when they are in grades K-3. Take fractions. Not exactly most kids' favorite subject. My 9-year-old son has a better understanding of them ever since he began using our bread maker to sell homemade bread to the neighbors. All that measuring and pouring involves lots of physical movement. It also involves other senses: reading the recipe, measuring ingredients ($\frac{1}{2}$ tsp salt, etc.), tasting the finished product.

By simply working in the kitchen my son was able to start "bridging." That's what experts call it when you teach something in your child's strongest style, and then move to a second style to enhance his learning. Educators agree that a child's learning ability is strengthened when he is able to use several styles. Milton Bradley's game Simon is a good "bridging" tool. The visual child can remember the sequences by memorizing the colors. The auditory child does the same thing by memorizing the sequence of sounds. If your child is a strong kinesthetic learner, he uses location. Have him practice playing Simon by focusing on the color or sound cues

IN MOTION
What makes a kinesthetic kid happy? Getting physical. No wonder they tend to be such stars on the playing field.



instead of their location. If your child prefers computer games, Knowledge Adventure's Math Blaster and The Learning Company's Reader Rabbit are two of many that allow children to use multiple learning styles.

You can also bolster your child's learning ability by making sure you talk to him in his "native tongue." If your efforts to help with homework haven't been going well, for instance, figuring out how to translate your words into his style may produce surprising results. (See "Do You Speak the Same Language?" for the how-to's.)

Keep in mind, effective learning starts with effective strategies. Tune into your child's individual style and you'll be better able to arm him with the best strategies possible. ■

Do You Speak the Same Language?

If you and your child aren't in sync, it could be a simple communication problem. His learning style determines how he takes in information. Talk to him in another style and he won't understand. The good news is learning to speak your child's language is easier than you think. Here are some words that will work.

VISUAL	AUDITORY	KINESTHETIC
I see...	I hear...	I feel, I get...
That looks...	That sounds...	That feels...
I can't get a clear picture of what you're saying.	I'm confused by the tone of what you are saying	I can't get a grip on what you're saying.
Look at me when I talk to you.	Are you listening to what I'm saying?	Are you getting this?
I can't get that into focus.	I don't like the sound of that.	I don't get it.
That doesn't look right.	That doesn't sound right.	That doesn't feel right.
Show me what you mean.	Describe that in more detail for me.	Walk me through that one step at a time.
How do you see things?	What does all of this sound like to you?	What's your grasp of the situation?
Watch this.	Listen to this.	Do you get my drift?
Imagine how this might look over here.	Tell me whether this sounds better to you.	Do you think this would be a good fit?