

What Works for Older Children

Intro

Children ages 7 to 11 think differently, move differently, and act differently from children ages 6 and under. This age child is shifting into a stage that classical education names as the Logic¹ stage. Instead of accepting all facts as equally important, this age child begins to notice that some things are more important than others to know. Because of that, they begin to examine what they are taught and think it through. They will often question whether or not this is really important. At times, the 7, 8, 9, 10 or 11 year old seem to be unwilling to learn and more difficult to teach, especially when compared to a younger child. However, it is the much needed skill of hierarchy, deciding what is most important in life, that is developing, not a seeming rebellion against the teacher or what is being taught.

Children ages 7 to 11 often have basic large motor movements (walking, swaying, lifting, etc.) so well practiced that the brain now runs the movements without conscious thought. Basic movements do not challenge a child of this age, yet they still need desperately to move. Many of the self-governing skills of the brain's frontal lobe require rhythmic movement to develop². Many of the emotions now developing require the stability that patterned movement lends to the brain. The ebb and flow of the child's own energy requires both vigorous and gentle movement. An older child needs to *move* to learn, develop, and think well.

One of the biggest complaints I have heard from older children over twenty-five years of teaching is the complaint "the teacher treats me like I was a baby." Of course whatever teacher they are talking about is not using baby appropriate teaching methods, but merely interacting with the 9 or 10 year old as if he or she were a younger child. This age child wants to be treated differently than they were treated when they were younger.

So What Works?

How do we teach in an age appropriate way when children are older? How do we teach to **fully** engage the child, especially now that the child is choosing whether or not an activity might be important to them? How do we motivate the children to sing? How do we move while singing in a way that challenges these older children, and helps their brain to develop well? What happens if they choose not to participate? Let's take a look.

¹ In her book [The Well-Trained Mind](#), Susan Wise Bauer discusses The Logic Stage and how it changes the way we educate the older child.

² Dee Joy Coulter, an educational neurologist, discusses the amazing effect of movement to rhythm on the frontal lobe of the brain in her recorded talk at the xx Conference in 1998. See her website at kindlingtouch.com.

(Note: If you have questions about children younger than 7, there is also a section of this book devoted to young children from ages 1 to 3, and a section devoted to children ages 4 to 7.)

An older child learns, develops, and improves thinking skills through his or her *body*. As with a young child, successful reading abilities grow and the two sides of the brain communicate better if the child engages in different movements that cross the two midlines of the body. Movements with criss-crossing of arms, elbows to opposite knees, and legs purposely crossed are a huge help to the brain³. Challenging the brain to learn new, more complicated movement skills causes more brain cells to connect in a child's brain. Channeling the energy that comes from the hormone called "growth hormone"⁴ is often a huge challenge to those who teach this age child. Whether the child knows it or not, children want to have their energy channeled into productivity instead of flitting into nervous energy. Older children need to move to learn.

An older child learns through *logic*. About the age of 4, the ability to think in patterns and quantities begins to emerge in a child. It grows and develops all through childhood and is a strong force in an older child, especially once they pass into the Logic stage of thinking. This kind of thought doesn't necessarily use words, but grasps patterns, sequences, and numbers. This kind of thought thinks through to logical conclusions. Although every child has this ability, it is powerful and more pronounced in some individual children. They are intrigued by clues, puzzles, and trying to discover the pattern. They love to "put 2 and 2 together" to piece together the world around them. Older children learn through logic.

An older child uses *interaction with other people* to learn. As the child talks with a parent or friend, they will often figure out in their own mind more clearly what they really think about a topic. As children watch others react to different situations, they perceive what might be the way they should react to a similar situation. Most importantly to a child is the give and take of play with others to learn what life might be like in all its facets, and how to deal with it. Older children learn through interaction with others.

³ The exercises used in BrainGym, a program I highly recommend, will often cross the legs at the ankles, or move limbs across the midlines. I often sneak some BrainGym exercise movements into my music presentations, especially if one or more of the children are having a hard time focusing. The exercise "Link Up" is one of my favorites.

⁴ The study of Growth Hormone is a relatively "new" hormone being studied by endocrinology. It is the hormone that allows the human body to put on so much growth in childhood. Study has shown that it is the hormone that gives the brain an edge in learning new skills. It governs the body in the ability to use energy to grow and replenish. See ___ for more information.

An older child learns through *visual images, colors, and shapes*. Some children are extremely sensitive to color, and all the varieties of color. These children notice the details of the images around them. When a teacher is talking, these children will often focus on the shape of the teacher's mouth, or the style of his hair. They notice the color of the carpet or the texture of the paint on the walls. They can spot a "slug bug" from a mile away. These children can tell intricate details of the movies they have watched. Those visual images also affect their emotions and thoughts. They see and remember the details of shapes, visual images, and colors. Learning patterns, words, and numbers come more easily if there are **colors** or distinct **shapes** involved in the learning process⁵. Older children learn through visual images, colors, and shapes.

An older child learns especially well through *music*. Pitches, Rhythms, and the form of music are not so new to an older child. They can easily process more complex rhythms. They can easily sing a bigger range of pitches. They can sense "where" a song is going. When presented with the wonder and new challenges of patching the beat and the rhythm together, or singing a note longer than ever before, the older child is fascinated. Because they are becoming increasingly more aware of their singing voice as a personal extension of themselves, they often need additional challenges to sing freely. Their brains love to remember things through song.

An older child often thinks in *words*. Often after learning how to read, a child will picture words in their heads. They can see words in their head (which really helps with good spelling), and often bunch names of different objects by their first letter. Some children need to hear words to learn, others need to see words to learn.⁶ Very often this is the major teaching method in schools, so it is often overused. However some children learn best through this way of taking in information (while, of course, other children do not.)

An older child learns through the patterns he or she sees around them in nature. As they become familiar with the way a plant grows, the taste of a fruit, or the color of a sunset, children use those experiences and apply them to their own personal situations. The synergy of nature coexisting with itself provides huge lessons for a child. The intricacies of a tadpole becoming a frog instill a hope and wisdom in a

⁵ I use colored bells with some of my children. It always amazes me how effective it is to put a chart up with the color of the bell indicating when they should play their particular bell. Following a color pattern is easier for many people than following a pattern written in numbers, letters, or other symbols.

⁶ One of the children I have worked with is an intelligent student, but must read things in order to remember them. He has a very difficult time remembering aural instructions, but does just fine when the instruction is written down. An adult I know has the opposite problem. She must hear words, either spoken by another person or inside her own head in order to understand. (Think of, for instance, the instructions in an instruction manual.)

child that is beyond their years. Children learn through the earth, nature, and animals. Bringing those things into the learning experience strengthens the learning process.

A child is innately *spiritual*, sensing deep things about life, humans, and the relationship to a Higher Being. They willingly listen to an inner voice of the Spirit speaking truth to children. They have faith in this voice and are eager to hear it. They seek after truth about their Heavenly Father. They rely on faith and hope as a normal part of their being. They do not doubt things taught to them through the Holy Ghost. Older children are starting to move into the logic phase as I mentioned before, so they are beginning to try out their faith and make it even stronger. They start to recognize and remember experiences with the Holy Ghost and rely on those experiences to nourish their budding testimonies. They want to know their relationship with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. Children are guided by their ability to hear the Spirit.

I use these eight modes of learning as I plan my teaching: *Kinesthetic* (purposeful movement), *Logical Conclusions*, (compare and contrast, patterns, and analysis), *People Sense* (interactions with people), *Visual Intrigue* (visual images and thus, story telling, that both lead to thought), *Living Music* (playing with music in a way that makes it come alive to the child), *Words* (words written and aural), *Awareness of Nature* (using the patterns and images of the earth and animals to learn), and *Spiritual Connection* (bringing spiritual moments to the child's attention).

Each child prefers a different combination of two, three, or even four of these learning modes to take in information. As their teacher and guide, I can best serve them by teaching with as many of these learning modes as possible, preferably mixing them up to give variety.

What are hands-on ways of using these eight learning styles, so well suited for older children? Let's look at what some of the activities might look like within each of these learning modes in our next chapter.

Post note: Howard Gardner has also identified another learning mode that is strong in some children... that of the very personal intra-action. These children are deep thinkers, and learn well in self-guided activities. They write in their journals, meditate, and search out information on their own. I find that this type of child is an observer of all that goes on, then will take whatever he or she needs into their home to fully take learn what was presented.