

COURSE # 2

ACTIVE LEARNING (Lecture Notes)

Active Learning

What is Active Learning? Why do children need it? Is it really that important for religious education and Sabbath School teachers? *I've heard it's terribly noisy*, you may be thinking. *Is that reverent for church?* If I am teaching the same way I did back in the 60's, so why are my children not interested to learn?

We need to realize that we are dealing in a very different time, but we are not doing anything different. So we need to teach differently. How different? What are we supposed to do? Before answering that question, we must look closely at how children learn.

WHY ACTIVE LEARNING?

Children Remember Best What They Do.

The Sunoco Company sponsored research to study how people learn. They first instructed a group of adults by using a tape recording. Three hours later, the adults could remember 70 percent of what they had heard. But three days later, they could recall only 10 percent.

The next learning session involved visual learning only when they watch a video. Three hours later the adults remembered 72 percent of the materials; three days later 20 percent. In the third test both hearing and seeing were involved. Three hours later recall was up to 85 percent; three days later, 65 percent. The fourth test involved learning by doing and experiencing real life activities. Immediate recall was 95 percent; after three days, 90 percent.

The study clearly shows that people learn best by doing and experiencing and least well by listening to a lecture. However, visual aids can dramatically increase the learning value of a lecture.

The implications for Children's Ministries are:

- 1) There must be less teacher talk and more student participation in learning
- 2) Teachers should be like coaches than lecturers
- 3) The task of the teach is not to deliver knowledge but to create learning situations for the students

What is Active Learning?

- Active Learning requires the child's active participation; the concepts are self constructed as the child takes part. Discovery learning eg objects that float or standing a Bible on paper.
- Active Learning experiences use activities and materials that are concrete, real and relevant to the lives of the children eg. Aboriginal children- Peter's vision on acceptance of all people.
- Active Learning is multi-sensory; therefore it impacts on the child's memory in many ways. Eg Popcorn in church.

- Active Learning includes dramatization of stories, skits, object lessons, experiments, games, exploring real objects and creative activities.
- Active Learning is characterized by movement, participation, exploration, hands-on involvement, talking and discussion, individual and small group work.
- Active Learning aims to link spiritual concepts to concrete activities that are relevant to the children eg. Bucket of water – trust

Active Learning Is An Adventure

It's an adventure because the activities are new and different. The outcomes are not predictable either. Try this:

It's a clique

Children get into groups of 7 (*or whatever fits your situation*). 6 children form a tight circle and the 7th tries to get into the middle of the circle, while the others try to keep him out.

Ask the 7th: How did it feel to be left out? etc

Ask the others: What were your feelings about the 7th? What were your feelings about what you were doing? Etc

Active Learning Is Fun And Captivating

It can include hikes, art, crafts, small-group discussions, model building, music, and skits. Children love to be active. Active learning in Sabbath School will sound different. The children will not be absolutely silent, except for short times when they're intensely focused on what the teacher is doing. But the active sound isn't disrespectful, irreverent, uncontrolled noise of kids playing and scrapping. It's the controlled background sound of learning activity. It's a different way of being reverent.

Active Learning Involves Everyone

Every child gets to be involved in the learning activity. It is not only the sociable and bold learners who will dominate the talking and question and answer period, but even the shy and timid child can participate in active learning activities. Try this activity:

1. The Power of Words

Materials:

Paper cutouts in the shape of a person (20cm high) One for each group of 8 - 10 people.

Roll of sticky tape for each group.

Say : "Say something unkind to the paper person while tearing off a part of its body. Pass to the next person in the group who will do the same. Keep the part you tore off." Give each person a 4cm piece of sticky tape.

Say: "Starting with the last person in the group, use the sticky tape to put the part you tore off the person back on as carefully as possible. As you do it say something kind to the paper person."

When this is completed ask the first person in the group to hold up the paper person so everyone can see.

Ask: "Does the person look as good as it did before you tore the pieces off?"

Say: “This is what happens when we say unkind things. We can never make things as good as they were before.”

Active Learning Is Student-Based

Learning is not teacher-based but rather student-based. Teacher-based learning involves the teacher teaching, explaining, and passing on knowledge and information to the student to learn. Active learning involves students learning and discovering for themselves. Hence, children participate in many learning activities whereby they are experiencing learning themselves

Active Learning Is Process-Oriented

The children learn from doing. Try this:

Can I help you?

Materials: nil

Say: “Sit on the floor back-to-back with your partner. Join arms. Stand up.”

Wait ‘til everyone is up.

Ask the first pair: “How did you manage to stand up so quickly?”

Ask the slowest: “How did you manage to stand up?”

Continue questioning to help the participants appreciate that they had to work together and help each other.

Active Learning Is Relational

Today’s children need personal involvement in learning. They’re used to the fast pace of the media. They need to engage their minds, their bodies, and their feelings in order to learn. Hence, when the teacher does all the talking and the children are supposed to do all the listening they soon “tune out”. Some people only learn by verbalising what they’re learning. Children learn best from other children.

Active Learning Is Focused Through Debriefing

This is the most important part of active learning. An activity that is not debriefed will probably not result in much learning.

It’s also the most difficult part for a leader/teacher who is new to active learning.

A leader needs to:

- Take time to reflect on the ‘message’ for that day. Think outside the box. Try to think about it from a child’s perspective.
- Ask open-ended questions ie questions which have more than one appropriate response, questions which can’t be answered by yes or no
- When asking questions, take a child’s response and build another question on that response. It’s like leading the child along a path to fuller understanding by asking questions which will move them forward step by step. It’s a skill which comes with practice and by knowing what the fuller understanding might be. Keep the options open.

- It's ok to ask, "Why do you think that?" or "What makes you say that?" or "What do the rest of you think?"
- Don't allow one child to dominate. When there is no one right answer and when the leader treats all answers with respect even shy children will respond.

Debriefing is a Three-Step Process:

Debriefing is discussion or reflection after an activity so as to help children think about the meaning of what they've been doing. Without reflection, the activity will probably have no spiritual meaning for the children and would be a waste of time in religious education. Guiding children through discussion or reflection may be a new skill for many teachers. There are 3 steps to debriefing:

- 1) Reflection – explaining how you feel after the activity? Discouraged? Alienated?
- 2) Interpretation – the learner finds meaning out of the activity?
- 3) Application – finding a spiritual connection from the activity they have just completed to their lives.

So What Do We Do?

To Do

- Consider the developmental level of the children, and choose activities that meet their developmental requirements.
- Plan and prepare ahead of time. If it's an experiment try it out before hand to ensure it works.
- Make sure that the activity is culturally relevant to your children.
- Plan the discussion or debriefing questions before hand, and write them down.
- Plan the "How, when, where and why" carefully. If you have the reasons for doing this activity clearly in mind it will be easy to explain them to others.
- Always link the relevance of the concepts being explored in the activities to the children's lives.
- With young children, make sure that activities are short and attention grabbing.
- When dramatizing a story with small children, focus on the events and the emotional and sensory impact that would have been experienced by participants.

NOT to Do

- DON'T dominate the activity; allow the children time and opportunity to learn for themselves. An idea that a child has reached for itself, is far more meaningful than an idea imposed by an adult.
- DON'T do activities for children. Actively discourage parents and "helpers" from taking over activities. If the child is not doing the activity, there is little chance that they are learning much.

How To Make Active Learning Work

1) Give clear directions.

Giving directions is an art that can be learned with practice. Clear directions use simple language, and break down the task into steps. Good directions spell out the steps in the order they will be followed. The directions can be verbal or written or both. They can be taped up where everyone can read them, or the teacher can give the steps one at a time, waiting for everyone to complete a step before telling the next one. The more mature the student, the more independently they like to work and the more important to have directions written out. If directions are given orally, the students are likely to ask for the directions be told over and over again.

2) Provide the necessary materials.

Providing materials can be greatly facilitated by keeping supplies of much-used materials on hand in the classroom. Materials most often used include: pens, pencils, crayons, markers, scissors, glue, typing paper, construction paper, newspaper, cotton balls, yarn and string. Keep baskets or boxes of supplies for each class group in an easily accessible place; students can quickly get and distribute them for you. Be sure there is enough for everyone.

3) Provide opportunity for everyone to participate in activities.

It is important that everyone is given the opportunity to do the activities. Children should be allowed to do the activity alone or with a friend. Teachers, acting as coaches, stand ready to offer suggestions when needed. Remember:

- * Don't do the activity for the kids
- * Allow children flexibility (there is more than one way to do an activity)
- * Affirm children for their creativity and the uniqueness of their finished product

4) Provide opportunity for everyone to participate in the debriefing.

Debrief the students by discussing what was learned. This is the best way to ensure that learning has taken place. Remember to allow everyone to participate, including the shy and quiet child. To debrief the students, do the following in the order given:

- * Question the students as to how they feel about the activity
- * Ask them what they learned about the Bible text or the main idea you are teaching.

Teach Children Creatively

Remember, children need to engage their minds, their bodies, and their feelings for real learning to occur. The more children are personally involved with a learning experience, the more they will remember. Personal experiences have a touch of reality—they involve the mind, the body, the emotions, and the senses.