Active Students + Active Learning = Active Faith

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In Sunday school we want to teach God's Word in such a way that God's Spirit can activate faith in the lives of students. We don't want young children to be Sunday Christians who know how to look and act in a church building. We want them to become 7-day-a-week disciples. When Bible lessons include active learning methods that match everyday activities, children find it easier to apply God's ideas to everyday events.

Using Active Learning

When I first began teaching, I used the "sit-still-and-listen" teaching plan. Today I use active learning in every Bible lesson. How can a teacher move from one teaching style to another? An acronym of the word *active* can become the memory device for moving toward an active learning style in Sunday School.

A*ccept*
C*reate*
T*alk*
I*nvest*
V*ary*
E*valuate*

Accept that young children will remember more and will more easily transfer Bible ideas into everyday living if they are actively involved in Bible learning. When children only *hear* a Bible idea, they will remember only 10 percent. When they *hear* and *see* a Bible idea, they remember 50 percent. When they *hear*, *see*, and *do*, they can remember 90 percent.

Create an active learning strategy that fits your children, your classroom, and your resources. There are many ways to adapt active learning for any setting. Here are three possibilities.

In a small room with a few students, tailor active learning to use at a table.

With a larger group in a larger room, use furnishings and equipment to divide the room into learning centers. If possible, assign a team teacher to participate in each center to guide the children's learning.

If there are not enough teachers, use one center at a time, moving from center to center with all children together. If two teachers are teaching, one can begin in the next center with some children while the other remains in the current center to finish.

Talk about each activity so children connect what they are doing with an idea about God. Talk is essential. Jesus used talk to connect everyday activities like planting seeds and looking for lost money with faith ideas. Talk during active learning serves the same purpose. Suppose that while children shape play dough food, you talk with them about how God created food to grow in different ways. The next time children use play dough to shape pretend food at home, the activity will trigger a memory about God's creation of food.

Invest time and resources. Teaching is a high calling. Jesus is a teacher (Acts 1:1). God the Father is a teacher (Psalm 86:11). The Holy Spirit is a teacher (John 14:26). Teaching merits an investment of our time, energy, resources, and money. While God does not expect us to give more than we have, He does want us to offer what we have for His purposes.

Most churches provide some resources for teaching God's Word. In addition, teachers can enrich active learning with their own resources. For some teachers, this may mean investing time to create homemade blocks, play dough, or snacks. For others it may mean buying a set of Duplos or toy animals to support active learning. Some teachers may creatively use household linens to act out Bible stories in class. Others may donate a portable CD player to support active worship times. Each of us can prayerfully ask how we can invest in the spiritual nurture of our students.

Vary active learning methods each week. Different children learn in different ways. Auditory learners need to hear and say Bible ideas in order to remember them. Singing action Bible choruses may help them internalize a Bible verse more quickly than

simply hearing a teacher repeat the verse. During the same lesson, visual learners may remember more from the picture they painted or the Bible skit they saw. Children with physical intelligence may need to march and climb as they act out ideas in a Bible lesson. Each kind of active learning repeats the basic Bible idea in a way that reinforces Bible learning for different children.

Also vary the length of time spent on activities. Children may lose interest in an activity and move on to another.

Sometimes vary the order of learning activities. If children arrive hungry, for example, you may want to move the snack to the beginning of the lesson rather than wait until after the story.

Evaluate how your students respond to active learning. Evaluating helps you consistently improve children's participation. Were they over-stimulated? Consider alternating quiet and active methods. Were they messy? Give clear instructions, one step at a time, saving any messy element for the last. During a painting activity, for example, pass out the paint last, and limit the amount to a quarter-sized dollop at a time on a paper plate. Did the children fail to follow directions? Next time have them practice following instructions.

Active learning is the key to active faith for active children. Ask your teaching partner, the Holy Spirit, to guide your lesson planning.

Questions For Further Study—

1. Using the concepts from the anagram *ACTIVE*, list ways to utilize them in your own classroom.

   Accept

   Create

   Talk

   Invest

   Vary

   Evaluate

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