



Why Gizmos Work

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More than Gizmos and Gadgets

At first glance, Group's Hands-On Bible Curriculum can appear to be a collection of gizmos and gadgets that encourage children to play their way through Sunday school without ever getting down to some serious learning. Truth is, they are playing...but they're learning through active involvement, the natural way.

THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

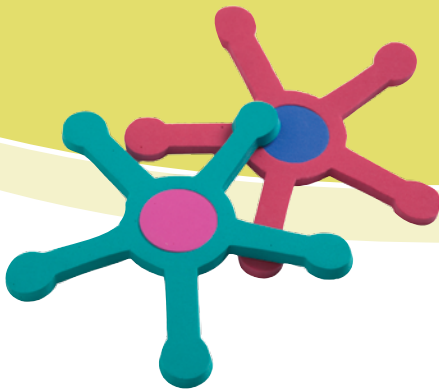
....Active Learning Was God's Idea

This is the way God designed children to learn. In Deuteronomy, Moses records God's instructions for teaching His commandments to children: "Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deut. 6:7). God urges us to teach His Word by integrating it with the activities of everyday life. Not surprisingly, this is how Jesus taught. Fishing, playing taxes, planting seeds...they were all part of Jesus' classroom.

Research shows we retain only a small percentage of what we hear or read. Whenever another of our physical senses is added to the learning process, the percentage of retention increases. When learners are actively involved in the learning process, they retain a maximum amount of what has been taught.

Because reaching only the cognitive level of a learner is not enough, curriculum must push beyond it into the area of affective and behavioral learning. It isn't enough just to know God's commands. Children must want to obey them and understand how to apply that obedience in their daily life. Part of





the Great Commission was the imperative to “teach them to obey everything.” The active learning approach that is at the core of Group’s curriculum has been proven to have an impact on behavior. *Young Children Magazine* (v. 49, n. 1, p. 54-58, Nov. 1993) reported on the High/Scope Perry Preschool Study that tracked children from active learning schools. Over a period of 27 years, records showed that these students completed more schooling, committed fewer crimes, had higher rates of employment and earned higher income. It’s easy to see that these findings indicate that active learning enables students to apply what they learn.

How does play come into the picture? God wants children to play. The prophet Zechariah recorded that God planned the rebuilt Jerusalem to be “full of boys and girls playing in the streets” (Zech. 8:5). Through play, children enjoy learning the skills they need to grow in mind and body, and to develop emotionally and socially. What looks like play is actually work.

Play is the work of childhood...why not enjoy it? In biblical times, newborn babies had honey rubbed on their palates to stimulate them to nurse at their mother’s breasts. To encourage students to learn the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, teachers coated letter shapes with honey to be licked when the letter had been learned. Nobody ever said learning had to be unpleasant.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

...Recognizing God’s Design

The key to making lessons appealing and effective is making them appropriate to the interests and abilities of the learners. Group’s Hands-On Bible Curriculum considers the child. Even though the curriculum is user-friendly when it considers the teacher, the main consideration is the learner. What appeals to a five-year-old is very different from what interests an adolescent. A skill that comes easily to a 5th grader can be impossible for a 2nd grader.

Although all ages learn best through active learning, each must be approached on its own special level of abilities and characteristics. Children are not just scaled-down adults. This kind of teaching is called developmentally appropriate practice. It’s not a new idea. Paul told the church at Corinth, “I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it” (1 Cor: 3:2).

Group’s Hands-On Bible Curriculum presents concepts when and how a child can best understand and apply them. By introducing a concept at a time when the child can best comprehend its meaning, the curriculum ensures cognitive learning. By applying a Bible concept to an experience that is real to learners, the curriculum enables learners to apply the lesson to their own lives. Educator Lois LeBar said in *Education That is Christian* (Old Tappan, NJ, revised 1963) that, “A pupil’s growth is determined not by



what he hears, but by what he does about what he hears” (p. 143).

Active learning addresses the needs of a wide variety of learning styles. While all learners will benefit from active involvement, it’s a real breakthrough for those who learn best through kinesthetic, tactile and visual methods. The more we learn about the learning disabilities that prevent children from processing what they hear or read, the more we understand the importance of hands-on learning.

Active learning does not replace learning on an intellectual level...it stimulates it. Consider Jesus’ technique of initiating lessons with questions. His method was to challenge His listeners to discover truth. By encouraging children to dig into Scripture for answers to their questions, Group curriculum hopes to instill discernment and to establish life-long Bible study habits.

THE HISTORIAL PERSPECTIVE

...Affirming God’s Directives

Throughout the centuries, educators have tried to make learning more accessible by meeting the needs of learners. Men like Aelfric and Thomas Aquinas taught in popular languages instead of antiquated ones. Hus and Tyndale went to the stake to provide God’s people with God’s Word in a form they could understand. Comenius introduced the idea of the illustrated textbook. From Montessori we

learned that children are natural learners and the role of the teacher should be mostly that of facilitator. Gesell and others in the child development movement emphasized the importance of play and of understanding the characteristics of each stage of growth. Piaget and his colleagues emphasized the importance of applying learning to life experiences. Maslow and Erikson pointed out the type and sequence of the needs of the child. Kohlberg pointed out that learners will grow in moral development if the teaching approach is novel, challenging and life-related.

Students of the Bible will recognize that the findings of researchers simply bear out what was written long ago. We also respect God’s design for the learner and cooperate with that plan. God has created children with an amazing capability to learn. We can access those channels that process information and turn it into life-changing behavior if we teach the way God intended children to learn. Group’s mission is to encourage Christian growth. Both God’s Word and contemporary research agree that the best way to teach for life-changing results is through “hands-on” active learning.

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