

# How do kids learn? Improve your teaching with basic learning philosophies and techniques.

How did you learn to play a sport, drive a car, use a computer, cook a meal? By reading a textbook and listening to a lecture? Of course not - you learned by *doing* those things.

This is the secret for learning:

You have to *do* something, that *you* want to do,  
with the help of someone who knows how.

Here are four crucial concepts to guide your teaching:

## We learn by doing things

- People don't learn by sitting and listening to someone talk.
- We learn when we're *actively* engaged in *meaningful* activities.
- Children are naturally curious creatures and want to try things.
- Give them opportunities to talk, write, express themselves, collaborate, build, investigate.
- Bring in adults from the congregation to show them interesting things.
- These are the experiences they will remember forever, and if the activity is authentic and meaningful, they've learned something useful. Imagine that!

## We learn when it's relevant to us

- Learning requires doing something meaningful *for the learner*.
- No matter how important you think your topic is, if they don't connect personally, they won't remember anything.
- You can't force this. Lollipops won't make it work either (they actually make it worse).
- How do you tap their interest? Try to connect things to *their* life. Make it real, make it personal.
- You learned to play ball or cook because *you* wanted to figure it out - not because it was in the lesson plan that day.

## The Velcro Principle

- Basic learning is getting something new to stick to something relevant you already know.
- This is crucial when working with kids - you must connect what you're interested in teaching to where they are. But, you don't know until you ask. Don't assume.
- Remember that you (hopefully) know a whole lot more than they do. Obvious? Yes, but we tend to forget this when explaining things in class and often go over their heads.

## God made us different

- God made everyone different...but then apparently forgot to let teachers know.
- Everywhere in life we have choices - foods, clothing styles, books to read, even churches to attend.
- So why do we sit a bunch of kids (and adults!) in neat rows and expect them to learn the same thing in the same way? This doesn't work.
- Everyone processes information and connects in different ways. Each kid leaves your class with a different understanding due to individual experiences, beliefs, abilities, and so on.
- Use a variety of activities and experiences in your classes.
- Use this to help them begin to discover the particular gifts God gave each of them.

## **Age-specific issues**

### **Elementary**

- Kids at this age are fascinated by the world around them. They want to touch things, figure things out, build and create stuff.
- They have a very objective, concrete view of life. Sense of fairness and justice. "It's not fair!"
- Early elementary ages can't handle abstract concepts - much of our Biblical conversation has abstract, almost fantasy-like descriptions and meanings.
- Hands-on activities is the key. Not crafts - help them build a manger or model of the temple, produce a video, interview adults involved in church ministries. Lots of exciting options.

### **Middle School**

- Social and personal issues are a major factor - but this opens opportunities to connect Biblical concepts to their lives.
- Don't do school-like activities - they get far too much of that in school.
- Remember their behavioral changes are from biological development - not because they just want to be difficult.
- They need lots of personal interaction and guidance from solid adult role models.
- Give them more responsibility, ownership, and active participation in class and church.

### **High School**

- High-stakes school pressure rules the day for these kids.
- They need opportunities to talk things through, figure out what life is about.
- Life skills are not taught in school - find ways to prepare them for Christian-based relationships, finances, career choices, and so on.
- Connect them with experts in the church to try different skills, careers, ministries.
- Get them involved in the church - missions, music, outreach, etc.
- 90% of all kids leave the church and never return. This may be your last opportunity.

### **Who's your ultimate role model for teaching? Jesus, of course.**

- No quizzes, worksheets, asking people to raise their hands to answer questions.
- He didn't teach using fancy words and long lectures.
- He used real-life imagery and analogies to connect his points with everyday life.
- He asked probing questions that gave people something to think about. You learn when you have to think it through yourself.
- His lessons featured a variety of activities: stories, questions, debates, quiet reflection...mix it up!

Fascinated? Want more? The complete presentation, which includes more examples and ideas for these concepts, is here: <http://brhill.wordpress.com/christian-education>.

Let me know what you think - I'll be happy to discuss this with you. Happy teaching!

Barry R. Hill  
[hill@lvc.edu](mailto:hill@lvc.edu)