

FOUR WAYS ENGAGED LEARNING

CREATES MORE MEANING
WITH CHILDREN!

By Steven Ellair



Have you ever been teaching, and you look out to see a room full of children just staring back at you with glazed eyes? Maybe you've experienced sessions where children start twitching, get easily distracted, or maybe even become disruptive as you desperately try to cover the content and keep their attention.

In these situations, it's easy to come away wondering, what, if anything, the children took away from the lesson.

Is there a better way? Yes! It's called engaged learning, and it can completely change the experience of teacher and children alike!

Engaged learning occurs when children are encouraged to actively participate in the process of learning. In engaged learning, children interact creatively with the lesson goals, collaborate with each other, and demonstrate understanding through activities, discussions, and by applying learning to everyday life.

Let's dive in to discover four aspects of engaged learning and explore some tips for implementing this approach in our learning environments!



1. ENGAGED LEARNING ADDRESSES MULTIPLE LEARNING STYLES

It is said that people remember 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, and 90% of what they do. While these exact numbers may be disputed, they developed out of an interpretation of Dale's Cone of Experience (Edgar Dale, 1969).

"When multiple learning styles are employed, more individuals will walk away with increased learning."

Dale showed that the more our five senses are involved in learning, the stronger the learning will be. A large body of research on the learning styles of individual learners indicates that when multiple learning styles are employed, more individuals walk away with increased learning.

Think of this in practical terms. If the children you teach include visual (learn best by seeing), auditory (learn best by hearing), and tactile-kinesthetic (learn best by moving/doing) learners and you only utilize the skill of reading in your sessions, you are only addressing visual and some auditory learners.

However, if you create a meaningful activity that gets children out of their seats and moving, you have suddenly created a learning experience that fully addresses all three learning styles.



2. ENGAGED LEARNING CREATES TRUST AND SECURITY

Psychologists have long noted the link between feeling encouraged, supported, and safe and effective learning.

When everyone in a learning environment is engaged, feeling a part of the group, and enjoying themselves, learning can take place in deeper ways.

Engaged learning addresses this important facet of psychology by creating active opportunities for children to collaborate, support each other, and work toward a common goal.

Through creative activities and group learning, children build trust with the teacher and each other and see the environment as safe and enjoyable. **Children can then begin to discover the joy of learning and recognize their own gifts and abilities to explore and discover the topics at hand.**

3. ENGAGED LEARNING INCREASES INVESTMENT, MOTIVATION, AND PERFORMANCE

When children are engaged, they invest more energy in their learning. Engaging activities increase dopamine and endorphin release and boost oxygen levels, all of which contributes to support learning.

"An engaged teacher creates the environment for an engaged learner!"

In learning spaces that introduce and reinforce lesson goals through active and enjoyable means, children's motivation and performance soar.

With engaged learning, children stay interested and motivated and will look forward to subsequent lessons and experiences.

Teachers report that when they create learning environments that use engaging activities and a variety of learning methods, the experience is more exciting, interesting, and enjoyable for them as well. An engaged teacher creates the environment for an engaged learner!

4. ENGAGED LEARNING ADDRESSES MODERN ATTENTION SPANS

Concerned about the influence of today's technology, sociologists and educational specialists are researching its effects on children's attention spans. They have discovered that the ability of a child to sit in a desk and stay focused on a single task or endure a lengthy "lecture-style" approach to teaching appears to be decreasing.

Therefore, lessons need to be paced appropriately and incorporate a range of learning experiences.

Engaged learning to the rescue!

Through use of meaningful, creative activities and multi-focused approaches to learning, we respect attention spans and learning doesn't stall.



TRY OUT ACTIVE LEARNING WITH A FREE ACTIVITY:

Gratitude Relay

After reading a short Scripture passage together, engage your children in a relay where your kids shout something they're grateful for. With your guidance, they'll see how gratitude is an active part of living one's faith!

Download the instructions:
smp.org/parish2020

SO, WHAT CAN YOU DO TO IMPLEMENT THE PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGED LEARNING?

Assess your learning environment.

The first step is to complete an honest assessment of your current **learning environment**. Is it engaging? Do you and the children look forward to each lesson? Start by looking at your lessons and seeing where you could build opportunities to better engage the children.

Reinforce core concepts with out-of-the-seat activities.

Break up in-seat reading with practical, out-of-the-seat activities that can strengthen or support the main teaching concepts. For example, have a relay race to emphasize teamwork (Church), create a role-play that shows an abstract concept in action (forgiveness, kindness, etc.), or use games, puzzles, and worksheets to create group activities that relate to the lesson.

Incorporate engaging discussions or introductory activities.

Don't jump into new content before tapping into the children's prior knowledge on the topic. For example, instead of immediately reading about the Sacrament of Reconciliation, have the children come to the board to write the first word they think of when they hear the word *forgiveness*, or invite them to share about times they have experienced forgiveness with others. Once they are invested through having a life connection with the topic at hand, they will be ready to engage the topic further.

