

IS THERE A WAY TO REACH EVERY ONE OF THESE LEARNERS?

Is there a way?



Monica

likes to talk with her

friends about what's going on in her life;

Craig

wants to know the facts and details as he works



through the Bible study;



James is

most interested in how

a new idea works;

Julie wants to get out

of the classroom and

put into action

what she's just

learned.



Yes!

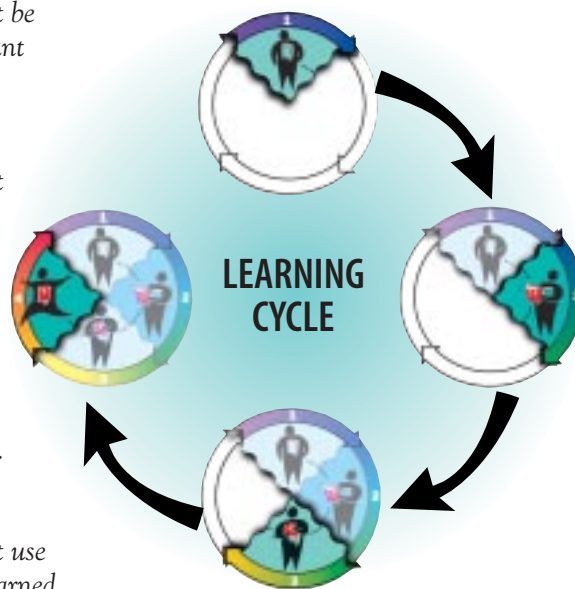
The process is called the natural learning cycle. This way of presenting God's truth is nothing new. Capable Sunday school teachers have done it instinctively for years. Research supports the idea that God designed a series of events to occur for information to go into long-term memory—that is, for learning to take place.

STEP 1
The learner must be **motivated** to want to learn.

STEP 2
The learner must be **presented** with new information.

STEP 3
The learner must **practice** the new learning.

STEP 4
The learner must use what has been learned and **apply** it to life.



For many Sunday school teachers, the natural learning cycle just seems to make sense. Experience has shown these teachers that students cannot absorb information they don't care to remember or practice a new concept they have not understood.

How does this look in a Bible lesson?

The following pages will amplify the learning cycle activities in each of these steps.

STEP ONE



All Students Need to Be Motivated

THE PURPOSE OF STEP 1

is to link your students' life experiences (home, friends, school, etc.) to the Lesson Focus and to interest them in the topic.

As the motivator, you are entrusted with the responsibility of engaging your students in such a way that they stay tuned in to find out what the lesson is about. To do this your students must have meaningful answers to questions like "Why do I need to know this?" and "What does this have to do with my life?"

To begin the lesson, you should have your students participate in an opening activity which involves the whole class in some way.

Activities could involve . . .

- a skit
- a game
- a video clip
- a teaching aids poster
- a page in the student book
- an opening story

This activity is immediately followed up with a sharing time that allows your students to talk about their own experiences and knowledge about the lesson topic. You see, students learn

How do you get them interested?

best when they see the relevance of the new information you want to present to them. When they see how their own experiences connect to the Bible content presented in Step 2, your students will be more inclined to "buy in" and become motivated to participate in the entire lesson.

The point of the initial activity and sharing time is to help your students discover the stake they have in the lesson, to understand why they should give you their time to learn something new, and to recognize that you value their participation.

Meaningful Connections

God created the human brain to make meaningful connections between new content and what it already knows. When people are asked to remember something new, it is difficult (or impossible) to remember something that is perceived as useless. The human brain can only hold five to nine pieces of insignificant information at one time. Unless your students see the relevance of what you're going to present, the lesson won't "stick" in their minds or hearts for very long.



STEP TWO



All Students Need to Learn the Facts

THE PURPOSE OF STEP 2

is to present the Bible information to your students.

In Step 2, your students will come face-to-face with information they may have never encountered before. This is the traditional step when most teachers feel they are “teaching.”

But you might ask, “Can’t I just begin here to teach the lesson?”

Unless you take the time to set up the lesson, motivate your students, and help them focus

‘Can’t I just begin here to teach the lesson?’

on how this content connects to their lives, you’ll lose their interest and they won’t grasp the Bible facts you’re presenting.

Bible content can be delivered in many different formats.

You can . . .

- lecture
- present a drama
- show a video

- read the Scriptures
- conduct an in-depth Bible study

There is no limit to the ways that Bible information can be passed on to your learners.

Check for Understanding

Simply presenting information, however, does not guarantee that learning has taken place. As you well know, just because you’re talking doesn’t mean your students are listening. That is why it is important that time be taken after new information has been presented to check for understanding.

This means that the teacher needs to take a few moments to find out if the students comprehended the information that was presented.

Teachers can check for understanding in a variety of ways. You can . . .

- ask students to paraphrase the Bible passage.
- ask students to compare the passage with others in the Bible.
- ask questions about the material like . . .

What would be a good title for this Bible passage?

How would the events in the passage have changed if . . . ?

How are characters in this passage the same? How are they different?

Step 2 of the lesson typically provides several questions to help you evaluate what your students have grasped.

It is very important to check for understanding before going on to the practice part of the lesson (Step 3). If the information has been misunderstood, the student who moves on in the lesson will either practice mistakes, or quickly get bored with the activities.

The Power of Patience

Most teachers wait only .8 or four-fifths of a second after asking a question! When teachers wait three full seconds after asking a question, an amazing number of gains are seen in the number and depth of answers given by students.



STEP THREE

All Students Need to Practice



THE PURPOSE OF STEP 3

is to provide a variety of opportunities to practice the information they've just acquired.

Step 3 is the guided practice part of the lesson. In this step the teacher functions as a coach, setting up the plays, and then standing back and letting the students do all the activities. This is the time for your students to try out the new information and see how it works.

This is a time for safe choices and exploration.

There are any number of ways to put new information to the test.

This is
a time
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Research supports the idea that the activity center works best. In this model, the teacher sets up several activity choices and allows each student to select the one which

best matches his or her interest level and learning style.

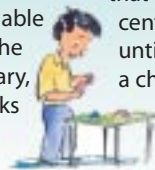
Create an environment that encourages your students to explore and be productive with their activity options. Consider how to use tables and chairs, or where to put them to open up floor space.

Arrange your room for each lesson's activities. Put out materials for each project or game. Teach all of your available activities to the whole class. Explain and demonstrate what the children will do at each center. Answer questions and review important steps. Then let them go.

Be patient as you conduct this step in your lesson. Most teachers find it takes as long as six weeks for students to learn the rules and procedures for using activity centers appropriately.

Activity Tips

- If you have a **small room** with little space to set up three different activities, you may wish to select only one activity and do it as an entire class.
- If you have a **large group** of students, the more active options may need to be adjusted to fit your space. For example, instead of running in a tag game, you could have the students take tiny steps, or sit at a table and have them "run" with their fingers.
- When trying to **carve out** enough places for activity ideas, be creative in using all available space, such as hallways or the area under tables. If necessary, you can move chairs or desks against the walls to gain additional room.



■ If there is **more than one Sunday school class of the same age level** in your church, perhaps you could team up with another teacher during Step 3. You could set up one activity while the other teacher sets up a different option. After the classes have completed one choice, trade students with the other teacher.

■ If some of your students have **trouble making choices**, you may wish to divide your class into small groups and assign each group to one of the activities. After five minutes, tell the students that it is time to rotate to the next center. Repeat this three times until all of the students have had a chance to experience each of the options.

STEP FOUR

All Students Need to Apply the Bible to Their Lives



THE PURPOSE OF STEP 4

is to encourage your students to apply what they've learned to their everyday experiences.

Step 4 is the time for the teacher to step back and assume the role of the encourager. This is the time for your students to be creative in making plans on how to take their new learning and apply it to their lives.

Step 4 has two distinct parts.

1. Your students make a plan about how they will use what they've learned.
2. Your students implement their plans after they leave the classroom.

One of the hardest parts of Step 4 is to allow your students to make their own plans. It is appealing to "tell" them how to use the information in their lives. But in order for your students to "own" what they have learned, they must choose to use it, and use it in a way that is all their own.

The second part of this step is where your students put their plans into action! The creation of the plans occurs in the classroom in Step 4, but the acting out of those plans does not happen in the classroom. The application usually does

Application Paralysis

Teachers have often spent so much time forging paths of application that students can become paralyzed during the Step 4 portion of the lesson. Students may be afraid to be "wrong" or simply have no idea about how to personally use what they have learned.

This calls for patience and understanding on the part of the teacher. It is critically important to understand that this step must "belong" to the student. If the student comes up with his or her own plan of application, then the student is far more likely to put that plan into action.



Students must use what they have learned in a way that is all their own.

not happen where you can see it. These plans are fulfilled in the student's home, school, or neighborhood. In this way your lesson gets extended into your students' everyday lives where God's Word can make a significant impact.

Digging Deeper into the Natural Learning Cycle

The natural learning cycle is a great pattern that every teacher can successfully use. Discipline problems diminish because students are involved. Students learn because they have been shown how the subject is relevant to them. Students are challenged to put what they are learning into practice. Before the lesson begins, the teacher can use the Link to Last Week to ask students to talk about how they put their Step 4 plans into action the previous week. The natural learning cycle honors everyone God brings into our classrooms.