

Series: Powerful Best Reading Practices for Struggling Readers

Part 6: Provide Opportunities for Active Learning

by Marie Carbo, EdD

We pass by a classroom and there's lots of movement and activity. But are the students learning? While there's no doubt that active learning is important for many of our students, activity in itself may not help students to learn. It's important to understand when and what kind of active learning should be used to help students advance in reading.

Brain research tells us that active learning enables students to process what they've learned on deeper, more lasting levels (Caine, Caine, McClintic, & Klimel, 2005; Carbo, 2013; Sprenger, 1999, 2003). Remember, too, that many young children and struggling readers are global, tactile, and kinesthetic learners who also tend to have high mobility needs.

Boys, in particular, are increasingly at risk in today's classrooms, where students are often expected to sit still and listen. Boys enter school less verbal and auditory and more tactile and kinesthetic than girls, and remain so throughout the grades (Thies, 1999-2000). Boys also consistently outnumber girls in remedial reading classes, are twice as likely to be identified as learning-disabled and placed in special education classes, and by eighth grade are 1½ years behind girls in reading. To teach reading skills well and to increase student motivation, it's important to accommodate the reading styles of students—especially boys—by cutting back on the use of worksheets and teacher lecture, and increasing the use of active learning (Carbo, 2009; Dunn, Griggs, Gorman, & Beasley, 1995).

Three Levels of Active Learning

Let's look at simple ways to include *effective* active learning in the classroom. We'll move from the easiest to the more difficult methods for implementing active learning.

Level 1. Activity Separate from Learning

This lowest level provides some activity but is not necessarily related to the learning at hand. It helps to relieve the tedium that can be caused by sitting at a desk for most of the day. Movement serves to refresh youngsters physically and enables them to concentrate better on listening and on paper-and-pencil tasks. Children with high mobility needs feel great discomfort when they must sit for prolonged periods; that discomfort makes learning and concentrating difficult.

Figure 1 shows a standing workstation that allows students to stand and move as they work. Standing work stations can be used for a wide variety of purposes, such as listening centers and game areas. Here are eight successful techniques that teachers have used to give students a break from long periods of sitting. You can allow students to:

- Clean out their desks or parts of the classroom.
- Have jobs that allow mobility (open/close windows, distribute/collect papers).
- Sharpen their pencils, get a drink of water, or sign out to go to the bathroom.
- Stand at their desks while working, at least for some parts of the day.
- Move to centers to get needed materials.

- Go to the class library for a book.
- Sit in carpeted or pillowed areas to do their work.
- Stand in the back of the room to take notes (provide clipboards as needed).

Level 2. Simulated Learning

A simulated learning experience often involves the students kinesthetically (whole-body movement) and usually requires small amounts of materials and preparation. These activities can be done with an entire class, but are more often appropriate for small groups. Most important, they enable the kinesthetic learner to learn and to express himself or herself through whole-body

Figure 1: Because many students sit for a good part of the day, standing work stations provide a chance for them to stretch their legs.



Source: Photo courtesy of Featherstone Elementary School, Woodbridge, VA

movement. Some examples of this kind of experience include:

- Students pantomime parts of a story or an answer to a question and then describe their answer orally or in writing.
- On every bounce of a ball, a student spells the next letter of a word, or calls out a word and its meaning, or recites word opposites. This activity can be done individually, or students can take turns within a group.
- Each student is given a “yes” card and a “no” card. Cards are held up to answer questions posed by the teacher or by another youngster. (This technique becomes self-checking when the students look at one another’s answers.)
- A word is shown to a student, who pantomimes the word for another student or group to guess, or a word is stated and the entire class pantomimes the word.
- Place a plain shower curtain on the floor; draw on it a computer keyboard with large keys. Pairs of students take turns spelling out a word by hopping onto the correct keys in the correct order.
- Reading Jeopardy. Answers to reading questions are placed on cards. Two lines of students are formed, much like a spelling bee. Members of each team compete for points to provide the correct question for each answer.
- Students role-play characters and events from a story, or they role-play an answer to a question.
- As a word is said, students clap once for each syllable. Variations: snap fingers, stamp feet, take steps.

Level 3. Games

For tactile youngsters, learning that involves their hands helps them to learn reading skills faster. Here’s why: When tactile students are touching game pieces, that tactile involvement creates a strong pathway through which learning can occur and be remembered.

Some examples of games include: *Small Hands-on Games*. Hands-on games can be used to teach specific reading skills. When starting, it’s advisable to use a few standard formats and to cut and paste ideas from workbooks and other commercial sources.

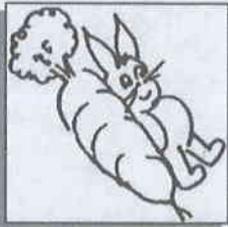
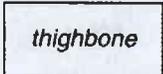
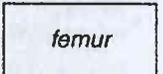
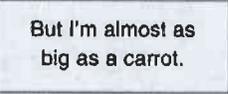
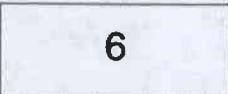
- Task cards with matching parts are one of the simplest games to make. Figure 2 shows two types of task cards. For the book *The Littlest Rabbit*, students sequence the pictures in chronological order and then match the correct sentence to each picture. The second set of

task cards, using words from the book *The Human Body*, requires students to match each word with its definition.

- The Power Reading Program has high-interest recorded short stories accompanied by reproducible games. See Figure 3 and www.nrsi.com for many sample games.

Bulletin Board and Chalkboard Games. These games, which use the larger muscle groups, are excellent for kinesthetic learners. Simply make a large game and staple it to the bulletin board, e.g., large

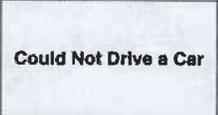
Figure 2: Task Cards

Book: <i>The Littlest Rabbit</i>		Topic: The Human Body	
Skill: Sequencing events and matching picture to sentence.		Skill: Expanding vocabulary	
			
Front			
			
Front		Back	

For the book *The Littlest Rabbit*, students sequence pictures from the book in the correct order and then match the correct sentence to its picture. The second task card set requires students to match a word with its definition.

Source: Marie Carbo © 1985.

Figure 3: Power Reading Games

Power Pak 5-A (Matching Game) <i>Story:</i> A Presidential Alligator <i>Skills:</i> Identify Character Traits, Recall Details	Power Pak 4-A (Categorizing Game) <i>Story:</i> Invite a Dinosaur to Dinner? <i>Skills:</i> Categorize Traits, Recall Details
 Dwight Eisenhower	(A) Plant Eater
	(B) Carnivore
	 Apatosaurus
	 Fern
	 Smaller Dinosaurs
	 Tyrannosaurus Rex

Source: National Reading Styles © 2000.

electro-boards, pockets with cards to sort, and so on.

- In Figure 4 a young student “reads the room” by walking around the room and reading stories placed on the chalkboard.

Floor Games. Most games that can be placed on the floor allow students to use large muscle groups. These games are excellent for kinesthetic learners. Generally, teachers use shower curtains and other large pieces of plastic to create these games.

- Figure 5 pictures two young children playing a “scoot story” game. The story has been copied on construction paper, with illustrations made by the children. Then the handwritten pages of the story are laminated together. The children take turns scooting forward and reading aloud a page of the story, continuing until each has read the entire story.
- The popular “word whacker” pictured in Figure 6 was created by drawing a keyboard on a sheet of plastic. Students “whack” letters with a fly swatter to spell out words. Remember that young children and underachievers tend to have strongly global, tactile and kinesthetic reading styles. Active learning capitalizes on those styles and helps the brain to learn more deeply because information is being processed through multiple pathways. The resulting increase in student motivation and acceleration of learning are well worth the effort involved.

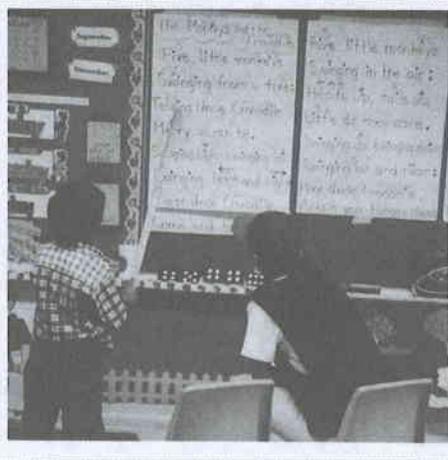
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Dr. Marie Carbo is Founder and Executive Director of the National Reading Styles Institute (NRSI). She is a nationally known award winning researcher and author. Visit www.nrsi.com to learn more.

Figure 4: While his teacher listens, a young student “reads the room” by walking around the room and reading the stories placed on the chalkboard.



Source: Photo courtesy of Wilden Elementary School, Austin, TX.

Figure 5: Two youngsters play the “scoot story” game. Each child takes a turn scooting forward one page of the story and reading the page aloud. This is an ideal activity for kinesthetic learners.



Source: Photo courtesy of Roosevelt Elementary School, Medford, OR.

Figure 6: Introducing the “word whacker.” Forest Williams uses a fly swatter to spell out a word by “whacking” each letter in the word on the plastic keyboard.



Source: Photo courtesy of West Amory Elementary School, Amory, MS.

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