Learning activities for transversal skills development

The SPIRIT "learning activity" approach (as the project partners interpret it) is an interactive, purposeful, curriculum-implementable short activity – meaning it can be used in any lesson – that involves student activities in individual, pair, small groups, or the entire class, which teaches through experience-based activities and joint discovery rather than passive knowledge transfer, thereby developing students' skills. For the 6–10 age group students, this method is highly recommended and extremely effective because active participation builds a bridge between concrete experience and the understanding of concepts that are still abstract to them, while successfully focusing their easily distracted attention on the given lesson topic.

Beyond subject-specific connections, this method also fundamentally develops transversal skills: during group activities, students unconsciously practice paying attention to one another, emotional communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving. They can develop their creativity and flexibility while becoming more open and tolerant of others' thoughts and values. As a result, children not only understand academic material more easily, but their empathy and sense of belonging to the community also strengthen, shaping them into confident, open, cooperative, and mentally and emotionally healthier, happy people in the long run. In addition, well-designed activities provide an immediate sense of success, which in the long run motivates primary school children and makes them confident and open to further learning.

What Are Learning activities?

A lesson consists of different components, and one of these is a learning activity. A learning activity is a methodology – a general teaching strategy, method, or specific instructional approach – that actively involves students in the learning process. Instead of passively listening, students take an active role in their own learning. They are generally more motivated and engaged when they participate actively.

In educational literature, several terms are used to describe learning activities, including learning techniques, didactic methods, teaching methods, work forms, pedagogical approaches, etc. These terms may have subtle differences, but in this project, we have chosen to use the term "learning activity."

A learning activity can be:

- a specific teaching method that has been deliberately developed (for example emotional mirror).
- or a certain 'method' or 'work form' that can be applied to different learning contents while teaching subjects such as math, science, or history. For instance, anticipatory reading can be used in history, literature, etch.

These activities can include interactive group activities, role plays, individual assignments, paired tasks, quizzes, creative projects or even game-based activities that integrate learning content.

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Games as a learning activity?

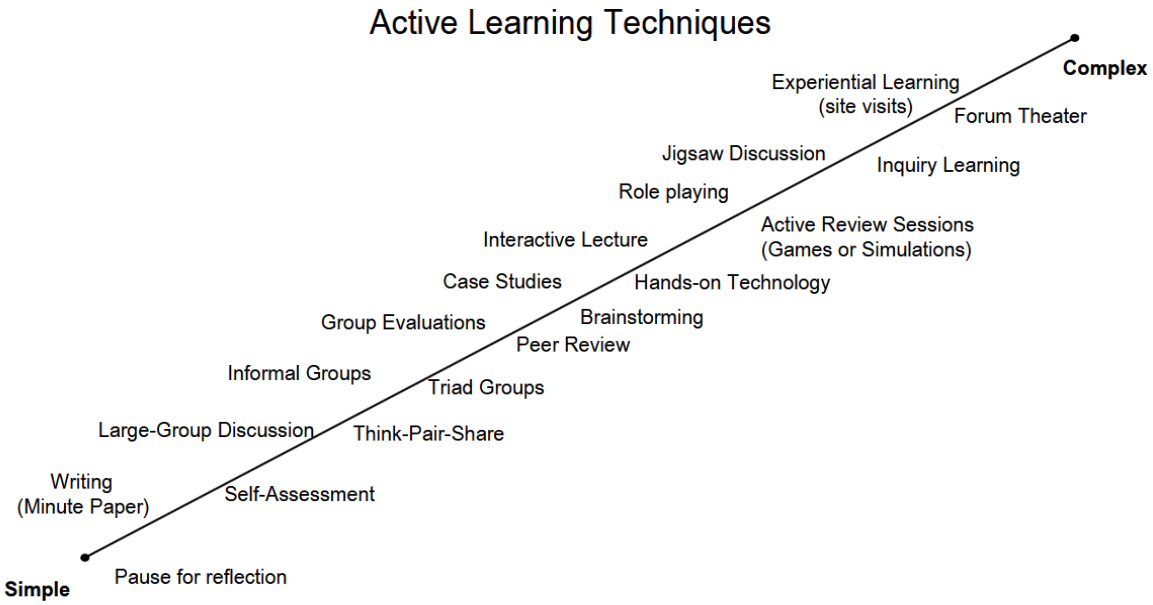
In the interpretation of the project's partners and experts, if an existing game is adapted to include learning/actual lesson content, it becomes a learning activity, as it is then used to teach specific subject matter. For example, if you replace all the faces in Guess Who? with animals that students have learned about in class, the game is no longer just for entertainment but actively supports learning.

Flexible Use Across Subjects

The learning activities in this toolbox are described in a general way. In principle, they can be applied to multiple types of learning content. For example, a "Galery walk" or Jigsaw activity could be used in any lesson. The 50 learning activities included in this toolbox have been carefully selected to ensure that, in addition to developing the specific skill, they support this Flexible Use Across Subjects. Each learning activity descriptoin includes several practical examples on how it can be used in different subjects. They are therefore applicable to the various contents of the partner countries' national curriculum.

Use and placement of learning activities in a lesson

Such a learning activity can be part of a larger lesson plan that includes other learning activities. It therefore usually forms part of a bigger whole. The duration and complexity of a learning activity can be highly variable, ranging from very simple 5- to 10-minute activities (such as the Think-Pair-Share activity, which typically takes between 5 to 10 minutes to complete) to much more complex techniques that may require significantly more time. (see below for a simple and, of course, far from complete illustration). This spectrum arranges active learning techniques by complexity and classroom time commitment.



Source: Chris O'Neal and Tershia Pinder-Grover, Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan

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When Do You Use the learning activities?

Activating techniques can be used at any stage of a lesson to make teaching and learning more interactive:

- At the beginning of the lesson: to introduce a topic and assess prior knowledge (e.g., dilemma thinking).
- During the lesson: to engage students and help them process new information (e.g., writing an encyclopedia entry).
- At the end of the lesson: to assess learning outcomes or summarize key concepts (e.g., wonderful reinventions).

How Do You Choose the Right activity?

When you wish to use learning activities in your lesson and want to select the ones that best suit the lesson's content and the age-specific characteristics of your students, consider the following:

1. Start with the Learning Objective:
   - What do you want students to learn, train, or achieve?
   - How will you test their understanding?
2. Match the activity to the Goal:
   - For example, if the goal is to improve teamwork, use collaboration forms, like group problem-solving or project-based learning.
   - If the goal is knowledge recall, consider quizzes or brainstorming.

Always let your learning objective guide your choice of technique. Begin with the outcome in mind and select methods that help students achieve that goal effectively and actively. This comprehensive toolbook offers a variety of practical learning activities to help you create engaging, interactive, and goal-oriented lessons to train transversal skills. By embracing activating learning activities, you can transform your teaching, empower your students, and prepare them for the challenges of the 21st century.

Why Flexibility Matters?

Activating learning activities can be adapted to different class sizes, subjects, and teaching moments. For example:

- In a **lecture setting**, interactive tools like quizzes or Q&A sessions can energize a large group.
- In a **smaller group**, role-plays, debates, or discussions allow for deeper interaction and personalized learning.

This approach makes teaching dynamic and ensures students are not just explicitly learning content but also the skills they need to thrive in the modern world.

Adjusting Activities to Different Levels

Each learning activity can be adapted in terms of difficulty (beginner – advanced – expert) by providing more or less support or by making specific adjustments. Let's look at an example of the

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interpretation of this, which we quote from the Object Lesson Energiser learning activity, find in fully detailed in Chapter 3.10.5 of this book:

- Beginners (6-7 years old): Use a very concrete, obvious symbol. Teacher models the connection explicitly. Students get sentence stems or fixed prompts, work in pairs or small groups with assigned roles, and do a simple, single-step action/commitment. Reflection is guided ("I notice..., I will...") with yes/no or fill-in-the-blank support.
- Advanced learners (8-9 years): Use a symbol with a bit more nuance; students help generate the analogy. Small groups discuss guided open questions, compare ideas, and choose a related action. Teacher scaffolds but let us groups revise or extend their commitments. Reflection asks "what" and "why" and includes simple self-assessment.
- Experts (9–10 years): Students select or adapt their own symbolic objects, frame the connection themselves, lead peer discussions, and design multi-part or sustained actions. Feedback (peer and teacher) informs iteration. Reflection is metacognitive - students articulate how their thinking is changing and set next-step goals.

Using Learning activities for developing transversal skills

Purposefully designed learning activities provide meaningful opportunities to foster transversal skills, such as empathy, critical thinking, and others. We have chosen to place one central skill at the core of each learning activity. However, other skills are naturally developed as well. For each learning activity, we also indicate two secondary skills that are addressed.

From Activity to Skill Development

Each learning activity should follow a structured process, consisting of a core phase and a conclusion or recapitulation phase. It is important that the teacher actively observes students during the activity and asks guiding questions as needed.

During the reflective phase, the central skill being addressed should be explicitly highlighted, accompanied by debriefing and reflection questions to consolidate understanding and encourage deeper thinking.

This question are realy the key for developping the skills! They help make learning visible, prompt reflection, support skill development, and encourage students to articulate their thinking, strategies, emotions, and choices. To develop a particular skill effectively, multiple learning activities should be conducted over an extended period, with that skill serving as the central focus in each activity. It is only after performing a particular activity multiple times, with a specific progression and by practicing a certain skill, that it becomes a habit for the students.

Summary

Integrating short, interactive activities into the lessons helps 6-10 years old students understand and implement abstract ideas through hands-on experience. By shifting away from passive listening, the teachers allow children to enjoy and love to learn. These methods naturally weave the practice of essential life skills, like problem-solving, emotional control,

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creativity, connectedness, or resilience into everyday lessons. Guiding the process with targeted guiding and debrefing questions allows you to make their development visible and recognisable for the sudents and the teacher as well. Consistent use of these techniques builds lasting habits that prepare students to meaningfull happy life.

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