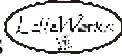


The Active Learning Newsletter

Tips and Techniques, News and Stories of Active Learning

“Every One Can Learn”

A Free Service of LilliWorks
www.lilliworks.com



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The *Active Learning Newsletter (ALN)* is a periodic electronic magazine – an e-zine devoted to the education and promotion of Active Learning, the approach to enhanced learning for those with severe or multiple disabilities authored by noted educator Dr. Lilli Nielsen of Denmark. As a free service of LilliWorks, committed to make Dr. Nielsen’s specially designed equipment available to all who can benefit, the *ALN* is an open forum for the growing community of Active Learning practitioners among parents, educators and therapists. Submissions from all are invited!

First Issue

Welcome to the first issue of *ALN*! Spurred by the growing demand for Active Learning equipment and information, *ALN* is here to help inform, connect and share the emerging pool of knowledge about Active Learning and how it works. If you have never heard of Active Learning, have heard of it, know some or a lot, there is plenty to discover! While in what may be its early stages, Active Learning has been instituted in Denmark and Europe for several decades and has an outstanding track record. Australia and South Africa are also ahead of the US in use of this highly effective approach.

The time has come for this proven effective approach to be adopted by mainstream America. While used in followings in Michigan, Texas, Illinois, Alaska, Mississippi, New Jersey, Iowa, Minnesota, Florida and California, there are widely scattered practitioners. If you practice Active Learning, let us know!

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1. Feature Story

One Family's Experience of Active Learning

By Michael Monaghan

Reprinted from "Off To A Good Start" – The Newsletter of the Blind Babies Foundation (BBF), Winter 2000, by permission. www.blindbabies.org

We first learned about "Active Learning" through our [BBF] home counselor, Katherine Neale-Manalo. Our daughter Miranda, having been asphyxiated during birth and suffering severe brain damage, was simply not able to do much of anything. Between the cerebral palsy, cortical vision impairment and a whole host of other ills children such as ours experience, Miranda's ability to play was non-existent. Katherine would come to our home counseling visits with various methods to help Miranda (and us)...Her advice was always good, however, I remember well the day Katherine brought a "play tray" to try with Miranda. I knew immediately that this approach might actually work for our child. Like many parents, I was saddened that my daughter's disabilities would forever keep her from the work of childhood...play...ergo; I have always had this as her number one goal...that Miranda would learn to play on her own. I made a play tray that very night and this tray is still in service.

Intrigued and excited about the Active Learning approach, my husband and I began our journey to learn more about the teachings of Lilli Nielson, the creator of this program. Katherine, of course, was able to provide us with much of the basic concepts. In addition, my husband Rand contacted Lilli regarding her work via email. Even in these early emails, Lilli gave us ideas and ways to help our Miranda. We went as far as Anchorage, Alaska to meet Lilli and to attend her lecture series. We found that the more we learned about Active Learning, the more it made sense for us. So, we continued our dialogue with Lilli, bought her books and made our own resonance board. We had another visit with Lilli most recently in October, when she came to California to lecture. At this conference, we met many other families and therapists who felt as we did, that "Active Learning" had merit and was a viable teaching method not only for visually impaired kids, but, perhaps more importantly, multiply handicapped children as well.

Why, you might ask, would we be so focused on Active Learning when there are so many methods available to help children like Miranda (Conductive Education, etc...)? For us the choice was an easy one. The method of teaching and the creator (Lilli Nielsen) respect the individuality of each and every child. One of the reasons I feel such devotion is because I know in my heart that Lilli has never seen a child as a lost cause or unteachable. Individuals exposed to Active Learning are allowed to find their own path towards learning; in fact this is the premise of this particular method. Working on the basis of emotional maturity, rather than "age appropriate", children can find comfort and security in their attempts at learning. Further, using the methods developed by Lilli, children are always successful. If even on a miniscule level tiny steps are made, there are still steps.

What all of this means to us as a family is that the child that we adore has a chance to be more than a lump in a chair. From the beginning, Miranda's life was not fun filled and playful as a child's life should be, but an arduous series of therapies day in and day out. Now we can see that she is beginning to blossom and, yes, even PLAY! It has been a long haul, but just a couple of weeks ago Miranda actually played with her play tray for one-half an hour, permitting me, at long last, to prepare a meal for the rest of the family with my daughter at my side. It took over three years for this to happen for the first time, but it did happen and for us this was huge. Believe me, it was absolutely worth the wait...I have also had the opportunity to see other children in sheer joy of being able to affect the world they live in on their own, without help. Active Learning for us the best way to provide our sweet Miranda with a decent quality of life as well as helping her grow to whatever potential she is capable of...we know now she will find her way.



2. News

A. LilliWorks Announces Active Learning Equipment Availability

This new company, formed by a parent of special needs child, makes Dr. Lilli Nielsen's Active Learning Equipment available. Resonance Boards and Essef Boards may be ordered now. Little Room and Support Bench are scheduled for September. HOPSA Dress, Scratch Boards and Multifunction Tables available later.

B. Lilli Nielsen 2001 US Tour

Dr. Nielsen visits the US in November 2001, giving full 3-day seminars in Detroit, Los Angeles and San Francisco. This is a rare chance to learn directly from the author of the technique. Conference rates are reasonable, and size is limited. See www.lilliworks.com/news.htm for more information.

3. Theory

10 Basic Principles of Active Learning

These are not the only "10 Basic Principles" but they give a good idea of what Active Learning is about. The role of the adult is a facilitator, providing the environment, not involved in the act of playing until invited.

1. Every One Can Learn

Lilli has met a very few learners that could not learn – they were dying. Unless impacted by survival, every child and older learner can learn. It is up to the parent, therapist or educator to keep finding the right situation with enough support, responsiveness and interest to engage the learner.

2. Active Learning is Hands Off

Challenged learners often act passive and are treated as passive (everything is done for them). Active Learning involves creating supportive and responsive environments that are tuned to entice a learner to become active. When Lilli realized that blind and disabled learners often resisted any “guided hands” approach, she set about to create environments and situations that would increase a learner’s inclination to explore on their own. This means the “teacher” must disengage and not talk nor prompt until the activity is concluded. (See our “Joke” under Tips.). Kids learn through repetition (see #8)- don’t interrupt them.

3. Auditory Primacy

Learners with vision impairments and neurological deficits rely upon hearing as a primary sense. Vision tends to be secondary, owing to control and processing difficulties. Tactile sense is also a prominent sense.

4. Work up to Weight Bearing

Given the discomfort of bearing weight, provide support until the learner has some control, and slowly increase the weight load. The Support Bench and HOPSA Dress are used to control weight on the legs. Start with no weight.

5. Responsive Environment

The environment should provide excellent auditory and tactile feedback (not just stimulation). Use of the Resonance Board provides key vibratory input. The Esfef Board provides optimal reaction to leg movements. The Little Room provides a warm inviting echo and exploration chamber. As Lilli says, “if the child cannot go to the room, the room must come to the child.”

6. Mix Variety and Constancy

As anyone does, a learner benefits from moderated variety. That is, don’t change everything every time, but provide enough variation so that the environment has interest. Our experience is that adults need to change the environment more often than they are inclined to. Cycling through a large inventory of objects/toys allows for a rich, constantly interesting environment. Change some of the objects in the Little Room whenever the learner shows habituation to the objects available.

7. Emotional Development Involves Mastery

It’s that smile of accomplishing something, doing something **to** their environment, rather than the environment doing it to them that fosters a critical step in emotional development. Related to the Active vs. Passive learning, that “ see what I can do” smile is a crucial goal.

8. Learning is by Repetition - Allow to fail

Kids learn by repetition. They must do something over and over to invoke memory and get the variations to make sense. Therefore, allowing them to have negative results without intervention (e.g. without moving an object into their

hand as they miss on a reach) is as important as not interrupting with any cheerleading.

9. Talk and Reward at the End of Play

At the end of play is the time for the adult input, the language and commentary to describe what the learner was doing, and to positively reinforce their activity. Point at and jiggle the objects and talk about what they did. Use short sentences.

10. Limit Input, Wait for Response

As a general principle, remember that neurologically impacted learners usually need more time to take in, process and assemble a response. If you ask a question, remain quiet as long as possible before asking something again, and try not to supply their answer without some sign. This is always subject to judgment, as after a while the question may be forgotten. Repeat using the exact same words, so additional processing to understand new input is not needed.

4. Technique

Using an Esfef Board



An Esfef Board is a simple springboard, having two 16 x 18" pieces of plywood and six (removable to 4) extra springy springs. This was such a commonsensical piece of equipment that Lilli literally named it for the Danish "common sense": "Sund Fornuft" or S F ("ess-eff"). It pays to keep that perspective in its use.

An Esfef Board can make all the difference to a learner that has some orientation to leg use. It can have interesting qualities, as many learners have discovered. However, most uses of it the Esfef Board is not used alone, but with auditory and support items, it can create a most enticing response should a learner kick. It begs for another kick. It can also be used for arm feedback.

CONFIGURATIONS



A case in point is our daughter Miranda. With severe CP, she has some ability to do a stereotyped kick. Seated in a tumbleform chair in a hammock suspended by one or two

points, she has spent hours happily kicking and swinging. It has been a breakthrough for her as she has had limited self-play before.

As noted, the learner can be in a hammock, and as well can be suspended in a HOPSA Dress, or seated in a chair. Those with adequate balance and close supervision (i.e. spotting) may stand on it holding on to wall mounted bars.

To have the most responsiveness, the top of the Esfef Board should swing free on its springs. Hanging it from two hooks on a wall is good for vertical orientation (LilliWorks has a floor stand in the works as a future product). Attach various auditorially responsive objects to it. Bead chains are one of our favorites. We have had jingle bells on them, but be warned that the high frequency sound is often not appreciated by those with multiple disabilities. Plastic spoons strung together are a good object. A rimmed cookie sheet with marbles and rock and things, or water or beans to start, is good in a horizontal position. The slightest push on the board should make all kinds of noise.

As with all Active Learning situations, a mix of familiarity and variety is important to its acceptance. Use judgment favoring variety in mixing up objects (that is, more often than you might be inclined). In a hammock, try both single point (spin around) suspension and two point (as a regular swing). If using a chair, you might try a rocking chair for variety. A mirror is OK, but do not expect a learner to pay any attention to it.

As with all Active Learning, besides setting up the environment each time to be optimal for the learner, one of the most critical things is then to walk away. Let the learner learn on their own, and do not provide input nor feedback until their play is completed.

Tip

Hammock Cross String

String objects on an elastic string across the front of a hammock that a learner is seated in, from side to side.



Just be sure the objects are fairly lightweight – so if they fall they will not hurt anyone, AND tie one end with a quick release (bow) knot or use velcro, so that they learner can be removed easily.

A True Joke

We have a joke about Active Learning that is truer than we like to think:

“It takes two practitioners to do Active Learning – one to hold the other back!”

Stories/Case Studies

HAVE YOU GOT A STORY?

Share your experience! Case studies, stories and letters welcomed. Send your paragraph or article to info@lilliworks.com

Classifieds

Classified Ads Available (limited listings per month) – FREE.



LilliWorks Announcements

- **Discount Program** Available: For low income households only. Call for more information. Tax return required.
- **Active Learning Gathering**, Northern California, Saturday Sept. 15th, 12-3pm at the Wrobel's, 535 Palace Ct. Alameda, CA. All interested in Active Learning invited including children and older learners. Equipment will be available for play. Pot luck - Bring a dish. (510) 522-1340.

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