

# Why We Don't Use Worksheets

Dear Parent –

True story: A preschool teacher created a mock class with parents, in which the lesson was to learn about kiwi fruit. Half of the parents were told about kiwis and then given a coloring sheet, along with brown and green crayons. The other half took a “field trip” to the tree in the hall, where they were able to smell, feel, and taste the fruit. Not surprisingly, the latter group of parents left with a much greater understanding of kiwis. And those were adults who, unlike young children, are capable of abstract thinking.

Children are experiential learners who acquire knowledge through all of their senses. When children move over, under, around, through, beside, and near objects and others, they better grasp the meaning of these prepositions and geometry concepts. When they perform a “slow walk” or skip “lightly,” adjectives and adverbs become much more than abstract ideas. When they're given the opportunity to physically demonstrate such action words (verbs) as *stomp*, *pounce*, *stalk*, or *slither* – or descriptive words (adjectives) such as *smooth*, *strong*, *gentle*, or *enormous* – word comprehension is immediate and long-lasting. The words are in context, as opposed to being a mere collection of letters. This is what promotes emergent literacy and a love of language.

Similarly, if children take on high, low, wide, and narrow body shapes, they'll have a much greater understanding of these quantitative mathematical concepts – and opposites – than do children who are merely presented with the words and their definitions. When they act out the lyrics to “Roll Over” (“There were five in the bed and the little one said, ‘roll over’”), they can see that five minus one leaves four. The same understanding – and fascination – results when children have personal experience with such scientific concepts as gravity, flotation, evaporation, magnetism, balance and stability, and action and reaction.

Noted educator and author Eric Jensen labels the learning described above as *implicit* – such as learning to ride a bike. At the other end of the continuum is *explicit* learning – such as being told the capital of Peru. He asks, If you hadn't ridden a bike in five years, would you still be able to do it? And, If you hadn't heard the capital of Peru for five years, would you still remember what it was? Explicit learning may get the facts across more quickly than learning through exploration and discovery, but the latter has far more meaning to children and stays with them longer. That's because the more senses we use in the learning process, the longer we retain the information.

Worksheets do not involve the senses, other than vision.  
They do not qualify as active, authentic, implicit learning.

By the way, do you know that a young child's preferred method of learning is through movement? I often wonder why we would want to teach them in any way other than their preferred way! After all, if we want them to become lifelong learners, we want them to continue to experience the *joy* of learning they were born with.

Playfully yours,  
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