

Engaging Interactions: Making Learning Meaningful

Narrator: Hello, and welcome to this short module on making learning meaningful for children. In this module, you'll gain new knowledge and skills, and you'll hear about the ways that teachers plan activities and interactions that support children's understanding of the world around them.

Making learning meaningful fits into the foundation of our house. The house framework helps us think about, plan for, and use teaching practices that are important for achieving school readiness for all children. Engaging environments and interactions are the foundation of the house. These are critical for children's social and academic development. The foundation has three parts: social and emotional support, well-organized classrooms, and instructional interactions. This module on making learning meaningful fits into the foundation, and more specifically, it describes strategies for making instructional interactions more effective and engaging.

Teachers make learning meaningful and significant in a variety of ways. In this module, we talk about three strategies that teachers can use. They can link or connect new learning to children's previous experience, relate concepts to children's lives, provide children with hands-on learning. Let's find out a bit more about each of these strategies.

One strategy to use to make learning meaningful for children is to link new learning to children's previous experience.

[Video begins] Teacher: What kind of boat is this one here?

Children: A sailboat.

Teacher: Sailboat. Remember we talked about fun boats and work boats? Okay, this is a sailboat. Would that be a fun boat or a working boat?

Children: A fun boat.

Teacher: It's a fun boat. [Video ends]

Narrator: Help the children make the connections. Here's how. The teacher intentionally links new concepts or skills to previous discussions, learning activities, or events. The teacher alerts children to these connections. She might say, "Remember when..." or, "Yesterday..." Or she might ask, "What does this remind you of?"

[Video begins] Teacher: Do you remember when we walked over to the big field that way? Do you remember? We walked south and there was a big pond. Let's listen and see what we can learn today about ponds. [Video ends]

Narrator: Another way that teachers make learning meaningful is by relating concepts to children's lives and taking advantage of materials and activities that are familiar to children. For example, teachers include props in the dramatic play area that children recognize. And teachers select storybooks that contain familiar themes.

Teachers also plan lessons and projects that take advantage of events and activities that spark children's interests. In this example, the teacher knows that there is a large construction project in the neighborhood. The teacher adds construction vehicles to the block area and puts construction books in the book area and plans activities around key vocabulary and concepts.

A third strategy to make learning meaningful is to provide hands-on learning. Instead of just talking about or demonstrating a new concept, the teacher plans activities that allow children to touch, manipulate, or experience the concept in a real way. For example, the children might be learning about spatial concepts such as "in front of," "behind," or "next to." Here are some of the ways that children can experience those concepts in a hands-on way.

[Video begins] Teacher 1: Can you bring it -- can you put it far away from Sara? Far. Far! Very good. Now, can you bring it close to teacher -- near teacher? Thank you very much.

Teacher 2: You did it! You did it! Look at -- you can go home and tell your mom and say, "Today I walked through a cylinder!" [Video ends]

Narrator: Teachers use these strategies and others to make learning meaningful to children and to encourage their thinking and understanding. These strategies can be used throughout the school day and in a variety of activities. Children, just like the rest of us, learn better when the content is meaningful to them. By selecting materials, creating learning experiences, making comments, and asking questions, teachers help children make the connections.

This module highlighted the ways that teachers make learning meaningful to children. Teachers connect new learning to children's prior knowledge to familiar home, school, and community experiences and then let children truly interact and participate in their learning.

Check out our tips for teachers and useful resources to fill your teacher toolkit with ideas you can use. Remember, make it meaningful and have fun. Thank you for listening.