

Beyond Rote Learning

Rote learning is the memorization of information based on repetition. In many schools in Nepal, as has been the case worldwide and throughout history, rote learning has often been standard operating procedure for pedagogy – even when the students are quite young children. They repeat the teacher’s exact words, over and over; they copy down the sentences on the chalkboard, word for word.

Rote learning is frequently applied as a one-size-fits-all approach, requiring minimal advance planning or in-class adjustment on the part of the teacher. On the surface, it can also seem productive: the children are repeating what they hear immediately, and can at least to some extent produce it again later.

Therefore, they must be learning, right? Well, sort of.

Memorization is obviously helpful for certain things. How many of us in the U.S. (and elsewhere!) grew up singing the alphabet song and reciting our multiplication tables? And wouldn’t we find it inconvenient, to say the very least, if we had to bring out a calculator every time we wanted to make a basic math calculation, or if we had to ask someone how to spell even the simplest words?

The trouble is that it is not nearly good enough in the long run. Memorization alone does not encourage children’s creativity, questioning, ability to connect old and new knowledge, or problem-solving – all important skills for any career path and for life in general.

[Educate the Children](#) believes that all children deserve an education that prepares them for life. To that end, we promote a well-rounded approach to teaching and the overall educational experience in Nepal’s rural schools, for children and teachers of all grade levels from pre-kindergarten through high school.

- We provide a variety of hands-on educational materials for students of various ages: blocks, puzzles, sorting toys, science experiment supplies, computers, etc. Children who participate in hands-on activities can come to understand the topics in much greater depth than children who merely repeat what they are told.
- We also train teachers in making their own hands-on and illustrative educational materials from available resources, including such simple and FREE items as stones and bamboo sticks.
- We provide unique professional development opportunities for teachers of various subjects and grade levels. Our most popular offering in the years since the massive earthquakes has been our three-day music therapy training workshop, led by a well-known Nepali musician. Incorporating music and movement into school activities affords an outlet for children’s boundless energy and provides a welcome break from desk work, as well as helping them to cope with lingering post-quake stress symptoms.
- Our teacher training activities inform participants about effective non-rote-based techniques such as asking open-ended questions and encouraging students to take part in

answering their peers' questions. We also help them develop lesson plans incorporating the newly learned techniques.

- We launch children's extracurricular activity clubs at many schools. Among the activities in which students may participate are art contests, team-based volleyball and quiz competitions, learning about and maintaining the school vegetable garden, and special cultural programs. These enriching activities encourage teamwork, creativity, and hands-on skills development.

[ETC](#) offers these opportunities and resources at no cost to the participating schools and teachers. We know that they would otherwise go without these valuable and practical resources, which will enhance the children's educational experiences as well as the teachers' job satisfaction and performance improve markedly. Over time, *everyone* is better off if we apply a holistic approach to education that goes beyond rote learning alone.

P.S. We at ETC would like to wish everyone the best on the occasions of International Day of the Girl (October 11th) and International Rural Women's Day (October 15th)! [Please click here to view our one-minute video made in celebration of girls and women in rural Nepal.](#)

[Photos by Rajanee Kunwar and Lisa Lyons]

[Educate the Children's](#) mission is to work with women and children in Nepal to improve health, welfare, and self-sufficiency by building skills that families can pass down to later generations. Through our children's education, women's empowerment, and sustainable agriculture programs, we provide training and resources to help thousands of marginalized and impoverished people make better lives for themselves. For more information about [ETC's](#) work, please [click here](#) to visit our YouTube channel.