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Non-conscious (Unconscious) Method of Teaching and Learning

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**NON-CONSCIOUS (UNCONSCIOUS) METHOD
OF TEACHING AND LEARNING****ASSOC. PROF. DR. S. KUMARAN**kumaran@um.edu.my**ABSTRACT**

Learning and teaching can be done by unconscious and conscious ways. Aims of this paper is to discuss how leaning and teaching can take place through unconscious and conscious method. For this discussion, the paper is divided as two parts. The first part of the paper proposes to discuss what is meant by unconscious and conscious learning and teaching and how these things can take place. And the second part of the paper decides to suggest certain views how the students who can able to speak and write in English and do not know Tamil language can be taught Tamil language through the unconscious and conscious learning and teaching method. There are three ways of learning and teaching. They are 1. Unconscious learning and unconscious teaching 2. Learning unconsciously and teaching consciously 3. Conscious learning and conscious teaching. The method of unconscious learning and unconscious teaching is likely to happen in family profession. Here the learner may be an illiterate. Though the learning unconsciously and teaching consciously method could be seen in various fields, here we can give the example of house builders. In a family, the grand father and his son may work as house builders. And the grandson of this family may also go along with them as their assistance. In conscious learning and conscious teaching method teachers, doctors and most of the professional people come under this category, men and women join in some course. They studied the subjects and they do work consciously. The paper also pointed out how the teacher can make use of various methods-oral, writing, listening cum repetitive-in order to kindle the learner's interest in learning Tamil language consciously as well as unconsciously.

Introduction

According to Dr Emile Donchin at the University of Illinois, more than 99% of our learning is non-conscious (unconscious). So pupils are learning much more from the way the classroom is arranged, the way you are teaching, the way you behave, even the way you are dressed, than they are learning about the subject you're trying to impart to them. At a basic level, are you teaching by your behaviour that learning is quick and easy (for example, by breaking the subject down into small bits, explaining things over and over again, keeping the knowledge within your control rather than handing over to the students, etc), or are you implying that it is difficult, and therefore setting up a self-fulfilling prophecy?

The mind can be likened to an iceberg. We are taking in huge amounts of information through our senses all the time (represented by the vast majority of the iceberg below the surface), but at any one moment, only a very small fraction of that information is brought to our conscious awareness ('the tip of the iceberg'). The conscious and the non-conscious minds work in very different ways. Traditionally we take a 'top down' approach when we teach to the conscious mind, but the way human beings learn naturally (and the natural state for human beings is to learn) is through a bottom-up approach - we take in large amounts of information non-consciously (I am using the word 'non-conscious' rather than 'unconscious' to avoid the implication of being knocked out, and any use of the term in psychotherapy) and those things which are of importance rise to conscious awareness when we need them.

The important word, of course, is 'need'. How much of the information we want pupils to learn is actually something they need - except to pass an exam? If learning is to happen naturally, it almost certainly will not follow the national curriculum, so the big question, then, is how do we harness the power of non-conscious learning? How can we teach to the non-conscious mind? In fact, there are lots of things we can do, which can make it easier for pupils to learn by appealing to their non-conscious minds.

Peripheral learning

We notice all sorts of things going on around us without conscious awareness - and the non-conscious picks up subtle signals much more than obvious ones.

Decorate the walls

In your own classroom, have a varied display of items, which are visually pleasing and interesting in their own right. (For temporary displays when the room is not your own, put lots of small items on large sheets.) We learn best things which interest us or which we like - pictures, cartoons, jokes, quotations, interesting stories, etc. Within the display include information about topics recently - and about to be - covered in the course book. Encourage pupils to add their own contributions too.

Conscious

Active & controlling
Part analysis; build from part to whole
(focus on separate units)
Low volume, reductive
Specifics, exactness
Interpretation, consistency
Right/wrong; obsession with correctness
Machine-like fixed approach; attachment to the status quo
Analytical, going deeper into detail
Does it make sense?
High focus, concentration
Competitive (separating/ranking)
Mental dominant
Objective
Serial function

Non-conscious

Receptive, spontaneous, participatory
Whole comes first; from whole to part
(interconnection, patterns, fields)
High volume
Ambiguity
Incorporates new material
Errors are learning material
Organic plasticity; let it emerge
Creative, looking for new relationships
Does it give pleasure?
Relaxation
Co-operation, bonding is first impulse
Holistic - feeling, sensation, intuition dominant
Subjective
Parallel function

From 'The Quantum Revolution in Education: Organic Learning' by Grethe Hooper Hansen, in *Proceedings of 9th International SEAL Conference: Opening Minds to Holistic Learning* SEAL 2001.

Learning environment

Following on from the previous point, have a learning environment, which is conducive to learning. Do anything you can to make the physical surroundings more pleasing (welcoming music, flowers, a bright sheet used as a table cloth which can add a big splash of colour) - but the most important aspect is how you respond to the learners. A welcoming, accepting teacher who likes the pupils and is enthusiastic about the subject and their learning will have much more impact than any method. And you can't fake it. The non-conscious takes notice of the subtle signals of body language, gesture and expression rather than the words you use. (People who don't like pupils should get another job - they're never going to be successful teachers.)

Overload

The non-conscious mind works by taking in huge amounts of information and then making sense of it. It does not easily learn from step-by-step information presented out of a realistic context. You've already looked at the final unit of the course book. Why not start at the back of the book with the final unit and work backwards to the beginning? Your lessons get easier and easier rather than more and more difficult. Use the earlier parts of the book for reference to enable you to deal with more complicated information. After the initial surprise, learners rise to the challenge and you get through the book much more quickly and efficiently. It really is a myth that subjects need to be taught in a certain order.

Need

The non-conscious mind looks for things that it needs. Need means immediate need for the human organism. A distant examination doesn't count - although an exam next week might! But one of the real difficulties about learning in school is that the non-conscious mind knows there's no

urgency about it and therefore doesn't make it a priority. So we have to find ways of creating need.

Asking questions, using real materials and letting learners choose projects of interest to themselves will create more of a perceived need to learn than giving information or doing unrealistic and de-contextualised exercises. The immediacy of improvised drama and role-play with an emotional impact on the learners creates a need to find appropriate responses (e.g. for historical or moral topics).

Pleasure

The non-conscious mind looks for things that it enjoys. Use material and subjects of intrinsic interest to people. Let them bring in their own materials or work on specific projects of their choice. Not everyone has to use the same material at the same time.

Do activities that are fun and interesting - songs, rhymes, games, stories and projects help non-conscious as well as conscious learning. And - most importantly - make sure that you don't destroy the pleasure by immediately following every pleasurable activity with searching questions on which learners are going to be judged.

Metaphor

The non-conscious mind loves metaphors and stories - preferably ones where the moral isn't given as a footnote. Remember how you enjoyed being told stories as a child? Try to recreate that atmosphere of involvement and magic when you're telling stories to your class, rather than delivering a reading comprehension.

Metaphors can be understood in many different ways according to the personality, experience and current mood of the reader or listener, so exploit that by letting people share their own personal responses to the story - the three things they remember most strongly, the phrases or sections of the story that pleased them most, for example. Between them, a group can usually reconstruct most of the story with pleasure, before working out 'the examiner's answers' at another time.

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Self-discovery

The mind likes to find 'the answer' - but when it does, it immediately moves on to the next 'challenge' or unanswered question. As we all know, understanding something is not the same as remembering it, but it is not so well known that understanding something too quickly can make it much more difficult to remember. It is therefore important to ask questions rather than give too many answers. By telling students information, we are effectively robbing them of it. Ask questions for students to discover their own answers. Don't worry if learners don't 'get it' immediately. Material that we have discovered for ourselves is much more memorable. So is information that we come to after a longer period of discovery. The non-conscious mind makes its own sense of material: chaos and the temporary frustration of incomprehension can lead to more retained knowledge in the long run.

Time

While the conscious mind looks for solutions and action, the non-conscious mind works better given time. Have you noticed how the answers to problems often pop into your mind after a good night's sleep or while you're in the bath? That's the 'bottom-up' approach in action. How can you access it?

- Leave questions and problems open for a period of time - preferably until a following lesson. Leave processing time between giving people new information and asking them to answer questions about it.
- Spend a few minutes pre-viewing homework in class, so that by the time learners come to do it, they will find it easier because their non-conscious will have been working on it.

Creativity

More learning will come from creative activities than from contrived exercises. Poetry, creative writing, producing and performing short plays, songs and raps, playing with the subject, producing a newspaper, artwork and dance are all effective. Producing the work for display, performance or in-house publication creates the need for editing and rehearsal, so we are not talking about creativity at the expense of accuracy.

Co-operation

The non-conscious mind likes to co-operate, not compete. Although a degree of competition can be fun, it's most fun for the winners and there are

many more losers than winners. There are lots of activities and games, which are just as much fun if everyone wins. Competition should be encouraged in the form of competition against oneself - over a period of time learning to do things better than you could do them before - rather than competition between class members. Everyone who shows improvement should be acknowledged, rather than limiting praise to those who do better than others. Encourage teamwork when things are being learnt. Benefiting from other people's work is only 'cheating' when you're in an exam. While pupils are working co-operatively on a project, they can be teaching one another.

Success

It is important to set up an atmosphere where errors really are viewed as an essential part of the learning process and an opportunity to improve without the stigma attached to failure. This means reducing testing and competition to a minimum and focusing on teaching, experimenting and playing with the subject. Focus on success, improvement and those things people do well.

Relaxation

The natural learning state of the non-conscious mind is one of relaxed alertness, free from stress. So once again, reducing testing and the possibility of failure is essential, while creating an enjoyable, positive atmosphere of learning in the classroom with activities of intrinsic interest and without pressure to perform. In addition, it can be really helpful to teach simple relaxation techniques (taking a deep breath and focusing quietly, relaxing from the top of your head down to your toes, etc) and to practise these regularly in class.

In order to be relaxed, we need to be physically, mentally and emotionally comfortable. So acknowledge emotions (the teacher's as well as the learners') and give learners the language they need to express their emotions.

Kinds of teaching

There seems to me to be two general ways of teaching - unconscious teaching and conscious teaching. By unconscious teaching, I mean showing someone else how, not by direct imparting of information, but by doing something or living in such a way that the other person observes and learns from your example. Parents are unconscious teachers to their children. Many

things, which a child learns, are obtained with no conscious instruction on the part of his elders. The child himself is often unconscious that he is learning something.

CONCLUSION

The important thing to remember is that the method to be used should be one best adapted to the point in question and best suited to the comprehension capacity of the listener. The latter point in particular should be kept in mind – that is, the attitude and receptiveness of the student. Simple, direct methods should be employed for beginners and those who are not capable of grasping the larger concepts, and more advanced complicated techniques where the need and desires of the student are apparent. Any method or combination of methods is good which induces the student to learn and comprehend the teaching.

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