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INCIDENTAL TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM

Dr. S Arockia Elizabeth Josephine,

Abstract

Learning is the attainment of knowledge or skills that we gain via experiences, studies or when we are taught. There are many different types of learning in psychology but the ones the relevant ones to be discussed in detail is incidental teaching and learning. Incidental learning involves using naturally occurring opportunities and interactions with the environment to teach skills, provide information and increase a desired behaviour. This type of learning is often tied in with language and communication lessons but can also be used for acquiring social and life skills. This paper would examine the steps involved in incidental learning and advantages of incidental learning.

Keywords: *Incidental learning, Incidental Teaching, Classroom.*

INTRODUCTION

Incidental learning is often successful, as it's natural, unstructured, engaging, memorable and enjoyable. Incidental learning is the learning of one stimulus feature while concentrating on another stimulus feature too. A little more specific connotation of incidental learning is that it involves the learning of formal aspects through a centre of attention on semantic aspects. Incidental learning can occur in many modes inclusive of observations, communications with colleagues about tasks or projects, experiencing mistakes, assumptions and adapting to new situations. A reactive component of incidental learning occurs in the middle of a task completion action when there is little time to think.

Incidental learning has also been portrayed as implicit when knowledge is acquired independent of conscious attempts to learn. A little broader meaning of incidental learning is taken in a pessimistic way as it is the learning without the intent to learn.

Incidental teaching is called so because it takes advantage of naturally occurring "incidents" to teach important skills. Incidental teaching was initially recognized by Hart and Risley in 1978 and implemented as a method to increase language and improve social responses. It was primarily used among preschool-aged children. However, since its discovery, incidental teaching has been found applicable to a variety of skills across nearly every age group.

Incidental teaching is typically used with **children aged 2-9 years**, but it's suitable for people of any age who are autistic or have developmental delays. Incidental teaching is used to **improve language and other communi-**

cation skills in autistic children. It also aims to help children transfer skills from one situation to another, and to encourage them to start conversations.

Incidental teaching has been part of the Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) approach since the 1970s. It was the first naturalistic teaching technique. It offered an alternative to traditional techniques, which teach skills in very controlled environments.

Incidental teaching involves creating an environment in which the child's interests are taken into consideration and are used as motivational tools. This process maximizes learning opportunities through day-to-day activities.

WAYS TO MAKE INCIDENTAL TEACHING EFFECTIVE

- Incidental teaching capitalizes on child's highest interest, so child is very motivated.
- Incidental teaching typically happens in a natural environment.
- It helps child to generalize skills and prepares child for when natural environment teaching happens later during program maintenance.
- It is an evidence-based practice.

STEPS TO INCIDENTAL TEACHING

- **Set up an interesting environment for a child:** To make the most of this method, it is important for the teacher to understand the child, their natural behavior, and their interests. It is crucial that the teacher understands not only their positive behavior but also their areas of improvement.
- **Create the Right Environment:** Next, as a teacher, should set up an effective teaching environment that will embrace the Incidental Teaching method. Using props, materials, and activities that will prompt the child to initiate conversation. This will create a motivating operation as the child cannot go access the item themselves without the need to communicate with the teacher. For instance, for young children developing their language skills, the teacher could create this environment by displaying a number of different toys, musical instruments, or books on a table.
- **Get the Child to Initiate:** With Incidental Teaching, the most important person is the child, who is playing the most prominent role in this process. Interactions are started by the child, not the teacher.
- **Prompting the Child:** If the child does not initiate, the teacher will then help by prompting them through asking questions such as: "Would you like to play?", "What would you like to do?", etc. Another method is to provide the child with nonverbal cues such as pointing to an object to help the child initiate a move.
- **Using non-verbal Cues and Wait until the child responds:** If the child does not independently communicate after initial prompting has been attempted, then commence "The System of Least Prompts." This system refers to "least intrusive prompts" which are non-verbal cues to communicate or pointing to the object they desire. To gradually increase assistance, the teacher can then proceed with asking them what the item is or modelling to the child what they want him/her to do. If the child is still unresponsive, the teacher can say the words you would like them to learn out loud such as: "This is a guitar."
- **Positive Reinforcement:** When the child responds correctly, reward them with access to the object or activity that is being used to reinforce Incidental Teaching. For example, if a guitar is being used in the Incidental Teaching technique, then allow the child to play with the guitar once they have identified the instrument. For him/her to gain access to any particular object laid out on the activity table, they will need to first name it. If he/she wants to play the guitar, then they will need to say so by stating "Please give me the guitar" or "May I have the guitar?" Over time they will learn to form compound sentences like these with ease.

IMPORTANCE OF INCIDENTAL LEARNING

- Incidental learning helps us make sense of our world. Without incidental learning, words and concepts lack meaning.
- As the child's vision improves, his opportunities for incidental learning improve, too. That's why early intervention is so crucial.
- Fine and gross motor abilities are developed
- Children are good in Tactile discrimination skills
- Auditory skills
- Develop rich concepts
- Link language to objects, people, and experiences
- Increase independence
- Have more confidence
- Enjoy an increased sense of security in their world
- Instructional strategies that support learners to be active participants in their surroundings

ADVANTAGES OF INCIDENTAL LEARNING

- It reinforces a culture of 'learning by doing'. By applying the child's knowledge, behavior, vocabulary along with correct usage of the items displayed, they are able to reinforce their established language skills. While at first prompting may be needed, unprompted language usage has strong potential to be gradually observed.
- Learners will move from interacting with their teacher to interacting with a wider audience such as their peers. This will encourage them to adapt and communicate their needs in various settings which will help them implement their newly gained knowledge and skills.
- **Positive Reinforcement and Rewards:** Incidental Learning increase positive or desired behavior, but even more so than their emphasis on positive reinforcement, is their idea that rewarding behavior not only strengthens it but also increases the enjoyment of the student. If the learning environment is more fun, rewarding and natural, then there is a better chance that it will not be viewed negatively by the child.
- **More Easily Converted into Daily Life:** Incidental Teaching can be something as simple as gaining vocabulary by wanting to play with a toy, reaching for it, and being told its name, and then using the gained language the next time they want such a toy, or even having a scene set up so a child's curiosity aids in their learning.
- **Any Time Can Be Class Time:** A huge advantage of Incidental Teaching is the fact that it can be done both professionally and at home. parents are able to assist the child's learning on the way to school, the park, or the supermarket.
- **No Additional Materials Required:** Incidental Learning is used in daily life; no additional materials are needed. When Natural Environment Teaching is used, items are places to pique the interest of the child, however, this isn't needed for daily teachings, as whatever is near or interesting to the child can be the next lesson.
- **Self-Initiated Learning:** Because Incidental Learning is first initiated by the child (asking or reaching for a toy, etc.) they are able to set the pace based on their mood, desires and level. There is little pushing or prompting which allows the child to determine what they are most interested in and what they are therefore most likely to retain in their learning.

CONCLUSION

The important premise behind the incidental learning is that when a student is doing something that is fun, he can be learning a great deal without having to notice it. Learning does not necessarily have to be jammed down a student's

throat. Rather, students should be allowed to adopt goals and be given materials that will cause them to pick up the desired information “in passing.” It is up to course designers to construct situations in which factual knowledge can be naturally acquired. This is the basis of the Incidental Learning

Since it emphasizes the importance of getting students engaged in interesting tasks, the Incidental Learning can be seen as a version of the Simulation-Based Learning-By-Doing. Typically, in learning-by-doing exercises, we want the student to learn the skills involved in the task. But, in the Incidental Learning, the emphasis is on the facts involved. The student’s task is constructed so as to bring him into contact with the facts in a natural way. In incidental teaching, the teacher or parent follows the lead of the child in selecting the activity or situation in which the learning opportunities will occur. Once the teacher identifies a naturally occurring situation that a child is expressing interest in, strategies are then used to encourage the child’s responses. Incidental teaching strategies are designed to promote motivation and facilitate generalization.

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