

METHODS OF TEACHING AND EVALUATING – Urmila Devi Dasi

Although the general approach to learning will to some degree determine the particular method, most teaching methods can be used to some extent in all the above-mentioned systems. We may think of teaching as telling the students information, either verbally or in writing. But, even a good lecturer or textbook makes use of a variety of ways to communicate. Mary Pride, in *Schoolproof*, lists methods of teaching as follows: read to students, lecture, demonstration, visuals (teacher-made, canned, unfolding), imaginative pictures, videos, experience, experiment, simulation, walk the student through it, have the student research, challenge the student, put on a play or puppet show, field trip, repetition, songs, chants and poems, games, and asking the student to learn on his own.

Just to teach reading, Jean Gillet and Charles Temple, in *Understanding Reading Problems*, itemize methods as dictating stories, repetition and echo, labels and signs, projects, readers' theater, predicting, summarizing and restating, movement, drama, art, music, and reading to students.

Actually there are unlimited varieties of many of the basic methods. Mary Pride and Gillet and Temple often list different parts of the same method as separate. Even the ten categories which we analyze below are often combined, as when we both read and discuss.

Specific Teaching Methods

1. Reading

Reading is one of the simplest teaching methods. The teacher reads aloud to the student—sometimes pausing to explain a word, to discuss a particular passage, or to ask questions. Reading stories teaches not only the story itself, but also a lot about the process of reading and analysis. Students hear inflection, pronunciation, and become familiar with the structure of a plot. If the story is transcendental, the spiritual exchange of chanting and hearing solidifies the student-teacher relationship. Reading factual or “technical” information can be a good way of teaching if the reading material's explanation is more clear and concise than the teacher's could have been.

We can teach not only by reading aloud to the student, but also by giving him books on a particular topic to read himself. This works if the students already possess the skills, especially reading and research, to make good use of the books. Such reading can often supplement other types of instruction. For example, after the student studies migration in a textbook with class discussion and comprehension exercises, he can read factual books or story books about migratory birds. Reading, either aloud to the students or by the student himself, is not the method of choice when the material is so advanced that the students become bored or frustrated. It is also inappropriate if the reading material has more information than is necessary. The teacher's summary, perhaps with reading brief passages from the source book, would be more appropriate.

2. Lecturing

Lecturing by the teacher is an ancient teaching method that is particularly useful when the teacher is a good source of knowledge on the topic. We have all attended lectures or seminars where we learned more in less than an hour than we could have by extensive reading and experience. For a lecture to be effective, the teacher must not only be knowledgeable, but be able to capture and keep the students' attention. The presentation must be relevant to the students' needs, and in terms they can readily understand.

3. Visual Tools

The use of visual tools such as blackboards, ready-made pictures, felt boards and films can be an excellent teaching method. A simple lecture is greatly enhanced even by chalk drawings to illustrate difficult points. By combining lecture with pictures, the teacher takes advantage of both the rational and imaginative learning abilities of the students.

Visual tools can also be used as the basis for a lesson, with verbal explanations supplementing the picture. This is particularly useful when teaching about, for example, the climate and animal life of a region far remote from the classroom. Pictures or film of the place will make a far more lasting impression than discussion or lecture.

The best visuals are dynamic rather than static. A felt board where pieces are added and removed is better than a completed, ready-made picture. A chalkboard drawing made as the students watch is also good. Dynamic visuals keep the students' attention and involvement.

Visual tools, even when used almost exclusively for a particular lesson or group of lessons, generally need to be accompanied by some other method. For example, students have been reading textbooks about the digestive system and listening to lectures. A class is then devoted to video or film strips that show the same lessons. Used in this way, especially after other teaching methods, visual tools can be powerful reinforcers for learning. In this connection it should be carefully noted that video or film should never be used by itself as a teaching method. The medium is not interactive enough for deep and long-lasting learning and must therefore be supplemented with or be a supplement for, other learning.

When we need to "paint a picture" for our students but cannot draw it, have no ready-made picture or film, and cannot produce such, we can create the image in the students' imagination. Included in this category are the descriptive passages found in much of literature. The sastra is full of such imagery about the Lord, His pastimes, and His abode. Of course, when actual images are combined with verbal imagery, the "picture" has more than double the teaching influence.

4. Discussion

Discussion with questions and challenges is a distant relative of the lecture. Discussion can invoke students' curiosity so they will be more receptive to the lesson at hand, or it can delve more deeply into lessons already studied. Teachers should not abuse this method to embarrass children or to "catch" those who were not listening. Teachers who use the question/discussion method need to allow students to respectfully challenge the teacher's statements and opinions. This method is required for Krsna conscious philosophy classes, because Krsna instructs us to "inquire submissively." Students need to air their doubts and difficulties in order to resolve them. Teachers who provide an emotionally secure environment for such exchanges encourage the students in this important area.

Discussions should not be an excuse for wasting time, as when a student tries to divert the teacher from the lesson with irrelevant prattle. Teachers should also not excessively challenge very young students, or question in such a way that doubts and difficulties will be increased.

Rote Repetition

Rote repetition and memorization is one of the oldest teaching methods. The teacher says and the student repeats. This method is especially useful for learning multiplication tables and Bhagavad-gita slokas. Although valuable as straight "say and repeat," the memorization method can be enhanced for faster and more pleasant learning.

The simplest enhancement is song. Instead of saying the spelling rule we sing it. How much easier do we remember songs over prose? Another simple enhancement is rhyme and meter. ("T" before "E" except after "C" or when sounding like "A" as in neighbor and weigh.) When rhyme, meter, and melody are combined, we have a powerful teaching method. A good example is the alphabet song which is remembered by school children not only to learn their letters, but later when they alphabetize in order to use dictionaries, indexes, etc. Songs can be used to teach letter sounds, grammar rules, and anything else that can be memorized.

A slightly more involved memory enhancement is drama. The use of hand gestures to dramatize the meaning of Bhagaved-gita slokas is one example. Of course, we can combine such gestures with song, rhyme and meter. Children really enjoy learning in this way.

There are other ways of assisting rote memorization, such as creating a related mental image, especially if the image is unusual. Some teachers design memory games, as well. For example, each word of a verse can be put on a separate piece of paper. For added effect, each paper can be cut in a different shape. The papers are put side by side so that the verse can be read. The children say or sing the verse and the teacher gradually removes each piece of paper after every few repetitions.

Some lessons, such as the names of letters, can be taught solely through rote repetition. Most other lessons that lend themselves well to this method are greatly assisted by making sure the student gains a deeper understanding as well. It is useful to have children understand the reason for the various products in the multiplication tables, in addition to memorizing them.

6. Practical Demonstration

Teaching through a practical demonstration is useful for all enrichment activities, such as drawing, music, sewing, and auto repair. It is also important in composition—students need to see the teacher write, proofread and rewrite to thoroughly understand the process. This is an extension of the visual tool. Instead of drawing a picture of the way an arrow flies from the bow, we go outside and shoot an arrow. Science “experiments” are the main use of the demonstration method in the classroom. Students may not remember from a book, lecture, or discussion that salt remains after the evaporation of saltwater. But, they will certainly remember it if they see a demonstration of the principle.

When the teacher uses blocks, shells, or other manipulatives to show students a mathematical principle, she is using the demonstration method.

7. Practical Experience

Practical experience is often a natural outgrowth of other teaching methods. Students need to use what they’ve learned to appreciate its value and internalize the lesson. For example, a shopping trip to buy items for a project can give the students experience with budgeting and making change.

When the student discovers mathematical relationships and principles by using blocks or other manipulatives, he is learning by practical experience. Sometimes practical experience is not so much application as just observation and exposure. The major method for teaching Krsna consciousness is simply exposure to Krsna consciousness. Children learn to preach only by preaching/ to serve only by serving. They learn deity worship and chanting only by practically engaging in those activities.

Some lessons cannot easily be experienced or directly applied. We can also have a simulation of experience. We can dramatize a lesson by, for example, role-playing the different positions in government or an event in history. There are many computer generated simulations in the fields of mathematics and science that can be useful if we lack the facility or money for the actual demonstration.

8. Showing

The method of taking the child and showing him, combines demonstration and experience. This method is used when we hold the child’s hand to help him form letters, or physically guide him through a somersault. (It is often the case that the teacher demonstrates and then asks the student

to practically experience. For example, the teacher gives an oral presentation and then asks the student to copy her presentation with another subject. This, however, is not a separate method of teaching. Showing a child involves some physical contact where the teacher literally guides the student.)

9. Field Trips

A teaching method that could be described as a “big experience” or “big simulation” is the field trip. A nature walk with a treasure hunt or a visit to a factory is an experience; a trip to a museum that depicts historical events and artifacts is a simulation—one is not actually going back in history.

Sometimes a field trip relates directly to classroom studies. Students who are studying desert regions visit a conservatory to see desert plants and a zoo to see desert animals. Other times a field trip is a general learning opportunity unrelated to present lessons. Students see maple syrup made, sheep shorn, or a demonstration of crafts such as candle-making. The later type of field trip takes advantage of local events and seasonal changes.

Some types of field trips can be an essential part of the curriculum. Many teachers take their students preaching on a regular basis. For some schools, for example, Christmas time means a break from the classroom routine completely while the students distribute books and prasadam for a few weeks. Other schools plan harinama and book distribution programs around specific Vaisnava holidays and local events, such as farm exhibits and state fairs.

Field trips have some value simply because they provide variety in the learning environment. Sometimes the teacher and students need to get out of the classroom just to get a broader perspective of education. For example, one of the best ways to stimulate writing in children is to go for a walk and then ask the students to write a description of the surroundings.

10. Games

Making learning into a game is a teaching method that naturally creates a “need” in the student to learn the material. Srila Prabhupada explained that young students could be induced to take prasadam by having them pretend to be cows eating grass. This is a form of the game method. He also, however, criticized the Montessori approach for having unnecessary so-called scientific games. While educational games can certainly assist in learning, we don’t want to be afraid of hard academic work, especially as the students mature. We don’t need to create a total game-based curriculum out of a desire to make learning “fun.” Learning is enjoyable, ultimately and permanently, only when it is connected with Krsna. Sugar-coating education by turning it into fun and games may lead to a program where the teacher is afraid to ask the student to tackle any task that is difficult or “painful.” Yet this austerity of learning is one of the hallmarks of brahmacari life.

On the other hand, it is desirable to have a variety of teaching methods (variety is the mother of enjoyment) and to use the children's natural playing propensity in Krsna's service. If they can play a game that helps them advance in Krsna consciousness, we accept it with great enthusiasm. If a game will help our students learn their academics for Krsna yet does not distract them into sense gratification, we can also accept it as great motivation. It is the issue of motivation that makes game playing such an attractive method. Before anyone can learn anything, he has to want to learn it. Many people study a foreign language for many years, but cannot speak, understand, read or write it. Why? They had no real need to learn. Conversely, someone who moves to a foreign country can learn the same language in a short time. The difference? Need. Many students do not see any need for them to learn classroom lessons. They are concerned with present enjoyment and cannot understand how such learning will help them in the future. However, if, in order to play and win a game, a student must learn something new, he immediately accepts it. Some games may, however, give our students a taste for sense enjoyment. For example, one game to learn parts of speech involves removing key words from a story. The students are then requested to supply nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs to fill in the blanks, without knowing the original story. The result is a very silly story, the humor of which inspires the students to understand parts of speech.

On the other hand, some games, such as "Where in the World?" and "Pictionary" have learning as their prime objective, and are serious yet fun. These are good supplements to the curriculum and can be used as a reward for academic achievement or good behavior.

Games can be very simple and free, or complicated and expensive. They can be just a verbal exchange, played on a board with pieces, or on a computer. Almost any subject, from physical education to science, can be made into a game at least to some extent.