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THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION
SKILLS AWARENESS IN DEVELOPING MINDFUL COMMUNICATION
IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS
(CASE STUDY: TEACHERS' INTERACTIONS IN KB – TK AL FATH,
CIRENDEU, SOUTH TANGERANG)

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Abstract

As a teacher, mastering the skill of mindful communication is very important, particularly when teaching students in early childhood education classes. Teachers must maintain a constant awareness of content, delivery and comprehension levels in every teaching activity. With this in mind, using a qualitative research method, this study will describe and explain how the implementation of awareness of interpersonal communication skills has helped teachers in KB-TK Al Fath school, as they developed mindful communication in order to interact more effectively with their students. The research method chosen was a descriptive qualitative method, in which semi-structured interviews of the teachers were conducted. As a result, teachers' interpersonal communication skills as demonstrated at KB-TK Al-Fath have been deemed adequate, or highly satisfactory, when they have implemented the five general qualities of interpersonal communication defined by Joseph A. Devito and built their communication skills utilizing the five keys of mindful communication interaction identified by Susan Gillis Chapman. Thus, it is proven to be true that the implementation of interpersonal communication skills awareness can enhance teacher-student interactions by increasing mindfulness in communication.

INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal communication as part of communication is an essential skill for an individual to possess. As stated by Suryanto, every person is required to use some level of interpersonal communication skills in order to be able to share information with others, get along and form relationships, and establish reciprocity and cooperation in order to survive. With effective

interpersonal communication skills, an individual can establish good patterns of communication and develop good relationships with others. Interpersonal communication is a vital part of everyday human life, since daily opportunities for interpersonal communication can occur in a family setting, in the workplace, and within educational institutions. (Suryanto, 2015) One example of interpersonal communication that occurs within an educational institution is a teacher's interpersonal communication with his students.

Any teacher, whether they are a classroom teacher, a study teacher or a counselor, needs to communicate with their students formally and informally, both on a personal level and in groups of students (Harahap & Ahmad, 2014). A teacher who models good interpersonal communication equips students with the skills to communicate interpersonally as well. Teachers as communicators in an educational institution obviously play a big role in teaching students to apply good communication skills any time they are interacting with each other and with their teachers, including on the level of interpersonal communication. It is especially important for a teacher to teach good interpersonal communication skills to his students when they are still at the early childhood education age, because it can set the foundation for good interpersonal communication when they become older.

In this case study, by giving teachers the tools to apply good interpersonal communication skills, with the express intention to build mindful communication interactions with each other and their students, the expectation is that teachers will be an example for students, who then can reflect what they have seen modeled, apply it in their daily lives, and in turn model it for others.

In order to understand what constitutes good interpersonal communication, it is helpful to identify what occurs when these skills are lacking. Sometimes during the process of interpersonal communication, a misunderstanding occurs. This can be caused by differences in points of view or by differences in the communication itself. Some examples that may trigger misunderstandings are unacceptable use of language, cultural differences between communicators and receivers, disruptions in the delivery of information, ways of communicating information unacceptable to those receiving, and more.

One of the sources of misunderstandings in communication is found in the process of listening. According to Field in Manjet (2016), listening employs two explicit sources of information: perceptual and conceptual. Perceptual information, which based on auditory input, can be further broken down into two categories where misunderstandings can be isolated. The first category depends on the listener (also known as the receiver) having sufficient knowledge of words, the component pieces of language; even if the listener has conceptual knowledge of a given word, it does not mean that it will be perceived, that is, recognized, when it is heard in connected speech. The second category of misunderstanding based on perception relates to the entirety of the communication; the input which is received by the listener does not always represent the full intake, because all of the input will be not be successfully decoded unless the receiver has achieved proficiency in listening. This is especially critical in cases involving second

language learning and knowledge. The other source of information, conceptual, is dependent on the listener's own world and topic knowledge as well as the recall of what has already been said. (Manjet, 2016) Thus, because listening is such an important part of the communication process, then it should be done in mindfulness, to prevent perceptual or conceptual misunderstandings.

As a result, mindfulness or consciousness becomes part of the set of interpersonal communication skills that are important for every individual to develop. Mindful communication interaction allows one to be able to communicate consciously, listen more effectively and understand the true interaction that is being experienced. Through mindful communication a true interaction will be formed—an interaction prioritizing communication with empathy and sincerity in listening, with knowledge and capability to listen with full awareness and communicate with full attention. Mindful communication will teach a person to communicate much more effectively by cultivating nonjudgmental traits, not using harsh words, not lying, being able to listen to others without interruptions, and reducing unnecessary or inappropriate opinions. Building a mindfulness interaction helps a person to build rapport and avoid conflict with anyone, anywhere, at any time.

Good interpersonal communication requires mindfulness. This is because the person practicing mindfulness will pay more attention, listen more, and will minimize causing irritation to others. Mindfulness is necessary when interacting with other people. When acting with mindfulness, one thinks carefully about what to say and do in order to accomplish the goal or desire, which in this case is communicating effectively with one or more other individuals. If one considers the accuracy and implications of the information they receive, then they can also be said to be practicing mindfulness (Health & Bryant, 2000). Furthermore Bavelas and Coates (1992) also added that mindfulness is a communication tool that requires the use of short-term and long-term memory in choosing words, forming sentences, and considering possible variations of the conversation.

Conflicts often arise due to lack of accurate word selection, or the effects of emotions and expressions when communicating with other people. In addition, we live in a social world and as a result we each have become members of that social world. It should be understood that in order to form social groups/communities, there are two or more people who share the same social identity and imagine themselves as part of a particular social category (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003; Turner, 1982). Gudykunst quotes Janis and Smith (1965), describing the meaning of becoming members of a social group. If we are aware that we are part of a particular social group or category, then we become members of that group. (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003)

KB-TK-SD-SMP Al-Fath is one such social group/community, as well as one of the schools that is invested in the world of early childhood education. Al-Fath has been established for 16 years and is considered one of the prestigious schools in the area of Cirende, South Tangerang. This school not only focuses on early childhood education, but also instructs elementary and junior high school students in separate buildings. With this separation, Al-Fath has asserted that learning activities and educational

levels are not mixed. As a result, each teacher in the KB and TK classrooms can focus on providing quality, age-appropriate education to his students.

The concept of active learning has been implemented at Al Fath and is already initiated at the early childhood education center. Active learning itself is a learning method that prioritizes activity, creativity, independence and problem solving. These children do not just accept learning materials and work on assigned problems, but are also involved in the learning process, participate in a great deal of discussion, and experience interesting media learning opportunities, which trains the children to think actively. With active learning, the child is invited to explore a given subject, rather than just be exposed to theory, which fixes the subject more deeply in the child's memory because the child is directly involved. This active learning method has been consistently applied by Al-Fath ever since it was first established in 2001. In 2001, Al-Fath was considered innovative; even now, not many schools are using the active learning method. This means many schools are still using the conventional educational method, especially in the Cirendeu, South Tangerang area where Al-Fath was built. This makes Al-Fath an interesting site to study the relationship between the application of teachers' interpersonal communication awareness at KB-TK Al-Fath Cirendeu and building mindful communication interactions.

Based on the description above, it was formulated that the focus of this research is The Implementation of Interpersonal Communication Skills Awareness in Developing Mindful Communication for teachers' interactions in KB – TK Al Fath, Cirendeu, South Tangerang. The selected research subjects are teachers in KB-TK Al Fath, Cirendeu, South Tangerang.

Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is a form of communication where interactions occur between two or more individuals. Joseph A. Devito (2013) discusses in studying interpersonal communication, the effectiveness of interpersonal communication begins by considering these five general qualities:

1. Openness

One's openness can be determined by the degree in which that person is open minded to and honest with another person.

2. Empathy

Empathy is a person's ability to know and understand what is being experienced by others.

3. Supportiveness

Supportiveness in effective interpersonal relationships is measured by the degree in which the relationships are open and supportive.

4. Positive Feelings (Positivity)

5. Equality/Similarity

Interpersonal communication will be more effective when the atmosphere is supportive. A supportive atmosphere can be achieved when two interacting parties consider themselves equivalent to each other (Devito, 2013).

Moreover, interpersonal communication is a process of exchanging meaning between people as they communicate with each other. Understanding the process involves continuous adaptations on the part of

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both individuals as they send and receive messages. Interpersonal communication is also an exchange, namely the act of conveying and receiving messages on a reciprocal basis. Within the meaning, something that is exchanged in the process, is the commonality of understanding among people who communicate with the messages used in the communication process (Sendjaja, 1994).

Elements in Interpersonal Communication:

1. Source or communicator. Interpersonal communication involves at least two people. (Communicator and communicant)
2. Encoding and decoding. Encoding is the act of generating a message before sending. Decoding is the act of understanding the message after receiving.
3. Competence. This is the ability to communicate effectively. This capability includes knowledge, adaptability and propriety in controlling volume, touch, and physical actions and gestures.
4. Message. A message is the packet of information which is intended to be communicated, and can be transmitted through one or more of the senses: hearing, sight, touch, smell and feel. Interpersonal communication does not have to occur orally but can also be in other forms.
5. Channel. The channel is the media through which messages are delivered.
6. Noise. This is anything that disrupts or impedes the message. There are three types of disruptions: physical, psychological, and semantic.
7. Context. There are four dimensions of context in the communication process: physical context, temporary context, socio-psychological context, and cultural context.
8. Purpose.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness in communication, simply put, means the person is thinking about what will be said and done to fit the goals to be achieved. If one considers the accuracy and implications of the information they receive then they are said to be mindful (Health & Bryant, 2000).

Bavalas and Coates (1992) also added that mindfulness in communication requires the use of short-term and long-term memory in choosing words, forming and structuring sentences, and considering variations and nuances of the conversation.

Mindfulness is a conscious, self-aware mental state in which the individual can consider their goals and reasons for communicating, and even in the midst of the communication they consider how they are communicating and what they can choose to do to communicate well. In interpersonal communication mindfulness becomes especially important, because with mindfulness, the communicator will consciously consider their choices while communicating. Each person acts with full awareness of the choices available. According to Susan Gillis Chapman (2012) there are five keys to mindful communication:

1. Mindful Presence

Mindful presence means having an open mind. Chapman's definition of

open-mindedness includes thinking of others more than themselves, not being selfish, reducing their own expectations and controlling their own ego.

2. Mindful Listening

Listening is, of course, one of the keys of communication. Mindful listening takes it a step further to understanding the other person's situation and position. Those who demonstrate good interpersonal communication skills listen to each other thoughtfully and with full awareness. Chapman says that by listening, one can feel more appreciated. Good relationships are built and established on good listening skills.

3. Mindful Speech

Mindful speech means speaking plainly, efficiently and effectively according to what has been said. According to Chapman, this enables others to listen easily and with a high degree of comprehension.

4. Unconditional Friendliness

From the perspective of mindfulness, the sense of unconditional friendliness indicates that an individual does not become overly dependent on other people, nor do they avoid reaching out and communicating effectively. Indeed, Chapman suggests that to avoid someone is actually a desire to avoid feeling the loss of holding on to something. Therefore, a friendly attitude to everyone is the mindful response, so that each individual is free to interact with everyone, not just depend on one person.

5. Mindful Responsiveness

Mindful responsiveness is the way in which a person responds, rather than reacts, to the messages they are receiving, and in turn communicates messages that are clear and easy for the receiver to understand.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Approach

This research required a research approach to gather information from multiple sources. Hence, this research uses a qualitative qualification. This approach makes researchers aware of the objects that are personally researched so they can see how the objects of research have contributed to building their understanding of the world (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975).

Type of Research

This type of research uses descriptive qualitative research methods. Kriyantono explains that the goal of descriptive research is to compile a systematic, factual, and accurate description of the facts and properties of a particular population or object. In this type of research, the researchers already begin their study with a clear concept and conceptual framework. (Kriyantono, 2014)

Research Methods

The research method that was used is the case study. This method looks for patterns of life, action, and concepts identified within the object under study which can then be interpreted as a whole (Newman, 1997).

Kriyantono explains that case studies are research methods that draw upon various data sources which can be used to research, describe and explain comprehensively and systematically about various aspects of groups,

individuals, programs, organizations or events. Because a variety of data sources may be considered and reviewed, the case study methodology can utilize several kinds of data collection instruments. Therefore, researchers may choose to use in-depth interviews, participant observations, documentation, questionnaires, recordings, physical evidence, or other tools (Kriyantono, 2014).

Data Collection Techniques

The data collection techniques used in this study are semi-structured interview techniques and non-participant observations. Berger (in Kriyantono, 2014) explains that such an interview consists of a conversation between the researchers (those who hope to obtain information) and sources, or informants (individuals who, it may be assumed, have important information about the object being considered). Therefore, the interview itself is the data collection method used to obtain information from the source. Non-participant observation is an observation technique where the researcher does not position himself as a member of the studied group (Kriyantono, 2014).

Bungin identifies that interviews are used to obtain information by means of common questions asked face-to-face, using guidelines but not necessarily providing interview guides to informants (Bungin, 2011).

In addition to interviews, other data collection techniques include observations, the collection method, and plunging directly into the object to be examined with the assistance of the researcher's five senses as a tool. This type of direct examination encompasses participant observation, which is data collection through observations taken while the research is directly participating and living together with the object of observation. Furthermore, participant observation involves not only directly living together, but also experiencing the feelings and being involved in the life and activities of the object of observation (Bungin, 2011) In this research, the researcher conducted non-participant observation by going directly to the field as a junior assistant teacher, or in other words the classroom teacher's assistant, both in KB and kindergarten. In this way, the researcher could make direct observations regarding the interpersonal communication activities conducted by the teachers at KB-TK Al-Fath Cirendeu, South Tangerang.

The final data collection technique is literature study. This method of collecting and compiling data involves searching for supporting data, theory and understanding of the concept, from scientific books or sources relating to the issue being studied; once compiled, the information is then analyzed (Theresia, 2001).

Data Analysis Technique

In our study, the most important step is the process of analyzing data from all information obtained from interviews, observations and case studies. The data analysis technique used in this research is data reduction. Reducing data means summarizing, choosing the things that matter, focusing on the things that are important, seeking to identify the central theme and pattern. Thus the reduced data will give a clearer picture, and

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make it easier for researchers to collect the next set of data (Sugiyono, 2016).

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis in this study consists of the teachers at KB – TK Al Fath, Cirende, South Tangerang.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Interpersonal communication is a form of communication where interactions occur between two or more individuals. Joseph A. Devito (2013) discusses in studying interpersonal communication, the effectiveness of interpersonal communication begins by considering these five general qualities:

1. Openness

According to Joseph A. Devito (2013), one's openness can be determined by the degree in which that person is open minded to and honest with another person. This was demonstrated by a teacher at KB-TK Al-Fath who always speaks honestly to his students. By doing so, the students learn to believe what the teacher says. As the teacher continues to prove he is trustworthy, trust increases and, the students then become even more comfortable trusting their teacher. Openness is also important for students to be more accustomed to interacting with the teacher and with each other.

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2. Empathy

According to Devito (2013) empathy is a person's ability to know what is being experienced by others. The empathy that a teacher has in Kindergarten at Al-Fath Cirende becomes important because it is necessary that the teacher understands the students' individual situations and recognizes any changes in their circumstances or condition. The form of empathy demonstrated by the teacher can be as simple as a touch so that the students feel a connection to the teacher and feel relaxed and at-ease. Devito (2013) states that the closeness of the relationships of the communicating parties will be reflected in the types of messages encoded in their non-verbal responses, such as touch, expression, gaze and close physical proximity. In this case the connection created by the teacher was intended to show empathy to the pupil, according to Devito (2013), because it meets the parameters described in the literature which include a touch such as hugging, speaking personally or approaching the child slowly with close proximity to the pupil.

3. Support (Supportiveness)

Devito (2013) states that effective interpersonal relationships are open and supportive relationships. This means that support provided by the teacher and given to the students is very important; with support, the students will continue to feel capable, supported, and motivated. The type of support the teacher provides for his students can be considered a crucial factor in establishing good interpersonal communication. By being supportive, teachers can help motivate their students; additionally, support from their classmates will engender more enthusiasm for school projects and the learning experience itself. The form of support can vary as time and needs

permit; for instance, support can begin by coordinating with the parents of the students to identify when and where they can provide material or other support for the teacher; this begins to have a ripple effect as parental support of the teacher also contributes to the students feeling supported as well.

4. Positive Feelings (Positivity)

The interaction created by the teacher at the school will be more enjoyable if it elicits sense of hope and positivity within the student. With a positive atmosphere, the interaction between teacher and students becomes more conducive for learning, and school becomes a more enjoyable experience for students. Positive feelings in the Master's pupils were generated by intersecting learning with playtime or singing, or choosing to vary the school day with a range of activities so that students did not become bored easily. Fostering a sense of joy in the students is essential because the children in early education classrooms are prone to mood swings and emotional outbursts, so maintaining their positive outlooks and feelings of joy and happiness has a great impact not only on their learning activities during the school day but also on their future success.

5. Equality/Similarity

According to Devito (2013), interpersonal communication will be more effective when the atmosphere is nurturing and supportive. The supportive atmosphere can be achieved when two interacting parties consider themselves equivalent to each other and respect one another. In this case, the teacher shows his attitude of equality by always looking at and responding to all students equally and not distinguishing between the students. All students get the same treatment.

Mindfulness is a conscious, self-aware mental state in which the individual can consider their goals and reasons for communicating, and even in the midst of the communication they consider how they are communicating and what they can choose to do to communicate well. In interpersonal communication mindfulness becomes especially important, because with mindfulness, the communicator will consciously consider their choices while communicating. Each person acts with full awareness of the choices available. According to Susan Gillis Chapman (2012) there are five keys to mindful communication:

1. Mindful Presence

Chapman (2012) says that mindful presence means having an open mind. . Chapman's definition of open-mindedness includes thinking of others more than themselves, not being selfish, reducing their own expectations and controlling their own ego. In this case, the teacher seeks to encourage the pupils to have an open mind by planting seeds for moral attitudes and behaviours. The teacher tells stories and shares their own understanding so that the children can gradually understand and practice it themselves in everyday life.

2. Mindful Listening

3. Listening is one of the keys of communication. Mindful listening is understanding the other person's situation and position. Chapman says that

by listening, one can feel more appreciated. Good relationships are built and established on good listening skills. To enable the students to listen well, the teacher strives to impart understanding to his students and ensure their comprehension. This can be done either by providing a variety of examples to the students, or giving verbal aids to understanding, until eventually the pupils achieve a level of understanding and can listen and appreciate others as well.

4. Mindful Speech

Chapman (2012) explains that mindful speech means how one can speak plainly, efficiently and effectively according to what is being said. According to Chapman, doing this ensures that others will be able to listen effectively when we are talking. For early childhood age pupils, speaking in a concise, straightforward manner is certainly not an easy thing. At that age they have only recently begun talking and have not yet mastered the ability to speak as fluently as older children and adults are able to. Using correct vocabulary still requires a conscious effort, therefore accomplishing the goal of teaching each student to speak plainly requires a great deal of patience with the process. The teacher has the opportunity to enable children to converse with a straightforward teacher by familiarizing them with speaking in front of their classmates. This gives them the chance to gain confidence in themselves in speaking, as well as practice and expand their knowledge of vocabulary when talking so they can learn even from necessary corrections, and can gain practice in speaking more directly.

5. Unconditional Friendliness

Chapman (2012) explains that by developing a sense of unconditional friendliness, one learns not to be overly dependent on others; Chapman suggests avoiding someone only leads to a feeling of other kinds of loss. Therefore, a friendly attitude to everyone is the mindful response, so that each individual is free to interact with everyone, not just depend on one person. In relation to the types of interpersonal communication and interactions established by a classroom teacher, the attitude of unconditional friendliness is demonstrated whenever teachers can empower their students to be independent, and less dependent on particular people or things. In doing so, the students become more comfortable with themselves, leading to the confidence they need to socialize with anyone. In this particular instance, the teacher makes each child accomplish the first step, whatever can be done first independently. The teacher then continues letting each child attempt new challenges and skills by themselves, in order to get accustomed to being independent. That independence can then lead to increased confidence levels, which can eventually have a long term impact as they gain the ability to socialize better with others.

6. Mindful Responsiveness

According to Chapman (2012) mindful responsiveness is the way in which a person responds, rather than reacts, to the messages they are receiving, and in turn communicates messages that are clear and easy for the receiver to understand.

In this case, teachers in KB-TK Al-Fath demonstrated this vital communication skill as they teach the children to understand and respond to things quickly. The teacher's methods to develop this included endeavoring to ensure that the learning media was both interesting and familiar, so that

the pupils could easily comprehend the lessons, or to provide an example of an historical or hypothetical event so that the child can formulate a response to that event, and evaluate that response in accordance with an ideal response, or the way it should be done.

Conclusions drawn from a qualitative study which investigated experienced participants receiving mindfulness interventions for 8 weeks, known as Meditation Awareness Training (MAT), suggests that mindfulness can guide people not only to a full awareness of their emotions and what they themselves feel, but also establish connections to emotions that others would feel. (Shonin, Van Gordon, & Griffiths, 2014)

Communicating with full awareness allows humans to think very effectively about words, sentences and meanings and determine exactly what they want to convey. If group members are sufficiently able to communicate consciously, then unlawful acts can be avoided. This method of communicating can also prevent members from being trapped in noise and quarrels especially if they are communicating by text, which is unable to transmit messages encoded in nonverbal communication which normally accounts for 58% of encoded messages. If there is then no common perception or meaning. In general, communicating with mindfulness brings benefits to senders and recipients in any communication medium if the communication process is not accompanied by skepticism (Ugbah & Majors, 1992)

The result is an effective social interaction that may have further implications concerning the ability to generate attribute messages that configure the unconscious mind into greater awareness of what is being communicated. Message producers can always bring various aspects of speech-generating back into full awareness, if they so wish. The trick is to know when to bring any attribute under full awareness, how to master that attribute consciously and when to set it according to values or release it without thinking again. (Burgoon, Burger, & Waldron, 2000)

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the analysis of teacher interpersonal communication skills at KB-TK Al-Fath were definitive enough to demonstrate the five general qualities that, according to Devito (2013), reveal the effectiveness of interpersonal communication, namely Openness, Empathy, Support, Positive Feelings and Equality/Similarity. These five items were applied by teachers at KB-TK Al-Fath Cirendeu: a) created openness with the students by always being honest and acting in such a way that students were able to develop belief and trust in the teacher; b) the teacher demonstrated empathy for the students in order to foster a feeling of closeness between the teacher and the students; c) positive feelings became important in interpersonal communication, in turn interpersonal communication engendered a positive atmosphere in which the student-teacher interactions and the learning experiences were enjoyable; d) establishing support with interpersonal communication is important because an interaction will be better with a favorable atmosphere between communicator and receiver, and support networks build on themselves and foster an increasingly supportive

atmosphere; e) the existence of similarity or equality in interpersonal communication can make an interaction more beneficial because it takes place in an equal and non-discriminating atmosphere.

Efforts were made by teachers to build awareness of communication skills focused on the interaction of teachers practicing mindful communication, referring specifically to the five keys of mindful communication according to Susan Gillis Chapman (2012) which are Mindful Presence, Mindful Listening, Mindful Speech, Unconditional Friendliness and Mindful Responsiveness. These five keys can manifest in a person who is interacting mindfully, and observations indicated they were indeed manifested by teachers in KB-TK Al-Fath Cirendeu: a) teachers taught students to have open mindedness, to refrain from being selfish and to think about others and their needs; b) teachers promoted understanding in students of the need to listen to others which enabled the students to demonstrate appreciation of others by listening; c) teachers familiarized students with the opportunities to speak both personally and publicly, so students became accustomed to speaking in a straightforward manner in accordance with what they really think; d) teachers encouraged students to be independent, teaching students to be able to do things themselves so that students are not dependent on others which resulted in better socialization skills stemming from confidence and independence; e) students' developed the ability to demonstrate responsiveness to something the teacher tailored to the characteristics of each individual pupil, in which the teacher takes an ordinary object or introduces something related to the objects normally encountered by the student so that the pupil gains more understanding of their own reactions and responses, and that understanding is then extrapolated when the student is given additional examples which allow the newly-mastered concept to be easier to understand.

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