

## **Learning Theories and Classroom Behavior Assignment**

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## Part 1: Synthesis

B.F Skinner (1957) was a behaviorist who suggested that modeling and reinforcement play an important role in learning. Family and community play an important role in providing reinforcement for language acquisition. Use of words is reinforced and developed into acceptable word combinations. This theory has been criticized because parents tend to reinforce factual actions rather than correct grammatical phrasing. Children will continue to make grammatical errors in speech during developmental years regardless of reinforcements.

Skinner also believed that children engaged in behaviors that lead to positive reinforcement. Examples would be persisting in activities that require effort which are then reinforced with extrinsic rewards like praise. Negative behaviors are motivated by a deep desire for attention. When negative behaviors are rewarded with the desired attention then the child will continue to demonstrate negative behaviors. Operant conditioning involves extrinsic motivation. Primary reinforcement satisfies primary needs for hunger, thirst, and affection. Secondary reinforcers involve praise, money, attention, or awards. Children could also be motivated by vicarious reinforcement such as being motivated when they see someone else gain praise, money, attention, or awards.

Classical conditioning assumes that learning occurs through interaction with the environment. There are five phases of classical conditioning: First, an unconditioned stimulus triggers an automatic response. As the weather cools down we get goose bumps or shivers. There is also a neutral stimulus like certain sounds that do not cause any reaction in the body like the sound of a fan or the sound of your pet walking across the floor. A conditioned stimulus is a stimulus that was neutral that now leads to a response. An unconditioned response is when the nervous system responds to an unconditioned stimulus. An example would be mouth watering

when a person sees chili peppers or gagging when a person sees dog food. A conditioned response is a learned response that is created after an event. An example would be post traumatic stress syndrome. Fireworks did not evoke a physical response but after returning from war, the sound of fireworks evokes panic and extreme stress.

Operant conditioning could be used in the classroom several ways. A teacher could use a sound to signal time for a brain break. An example is whole brain teaching. This technique incorporates hand gestures and sounds to signal time to listen, time to peer teach, time to celebrate, (jazz hands). This method of teaching involves active listening and spikes dopamine in the brain. Teachers could also use operant conditioning by three methods: Reward appropriate behavior, vary the time and type of reinforcement, and discourage inappropriate behavior by the use of consequences. The rewards and consequences should be appropriate to the developmental age and special needs of the students. Some teachers use free-time as a reward for completing work early. A principal allows free roaming around the school for straight A students to work in preferred areas. Some teachers give out tickets for appropriate behavior and the tickets can be used to purchase candy or bathroom breaks. Consequences could involve being removed from class or being assigned extra homework or paying back with tickets previously earned.

An example of positive reinforcement in the classroom would be earning tickets for good behavior or earning places on a graph for completing independent reading. An example of negative reinforcement would be standing in close proximity to a student who is not on task then moving away when they get back on task. This is something that I have used for students in the county education system. A student was whistling instead of doing work. With each whistle I took a step closer to the student. In intermittent intervals from 10 - 20 seconds of not whistling I moved away from the student. No verbal instruction was given. After the student figured out

how to make me move further away, the whistling stopped completely. The entire interaction was less than five minutes and was completely effective without disruption to the other students. Presentation punishment in a school setting would be standing in close proximity to the student. Another example would be in-school suspension. Removal punishment would be taking away something that a student likes. An example would be confiscating a cell phone or toy.

In order to encourage existing behaviors Woolfolk makes several suggestions. One suggestion is a reinforcer that will increase the chances that the behavior will occur again. An example would be allowing students to use their cell phones during the last 5 minutes of class if their class work is completed. A teacher could encourage students to persist in their good behavior by introducing a variable schedule of reinforcement. An example of a variable schedule reinforcement would be choosing random days of the week to allow students a homework pass. Students know that if the whole class completes their classwork on time that a random day will be picked for no homework. They have to work hard every day in order to qualify for the random free day. A ratio schedule of reinforcement would be rewarding students with lottery tickets every time they complete classwork, turn in homework, or display good behavior. The tickets can be saved to purchase a variety of predetermined items but the students know that they will earn a ticket every time they complete a specific task. Negative reinforcement can be used to teach a new behavior. Some schools have implemented random drug tests for students to reduce the risk of students using drugs. Students know that they could be randomly selected so they do not risk getting caught by using.

ASCA Student Standard A:A2 Acquire Skills for Improving Learning

- A:A2.1 Apply time-management and task-management skills: At the end of the lesson the students will be able to assess a multi-step task and manage time to complete the assignment on time.
- A:A2.2 Demonstrate how effort and persistence positively affect learning: Students will be able to assess challenging areas of learning and develop strategies to overcome those challenges. Students will complete a multi-step capstone project to demonstrate persistence to complete assignment and competence in the subject area.
- A:A2.3 Use communications skills to know when and how to ask for help when needed: Students will identify multiple ways of communicating when help is needed. They will identify multiple people who can provide support when needed. They will demonstrate knowledge of the correct language to identify what kind of help they need.

#### Mindset and Behavior Standards:

- M2 - Sense of acceptance, respect, support and inclusion for self and others in the school environment
- B-SS 8 - Advocacy skills for self and others and ability to assert self, when necessary.
- B-SMS 1 - Responsibility for self and actions

### **Part 2: Application**

Far too many students are distracted by their cell phones. Students are playing games, texting, or watching videos during classroom time. In addition, students are unable to get a full night's rest due to inability to put the phone away.

The behavioral plan involves a series of lessons in which students use their cell phones to take a pre-test on Mondays and a post-test on Thursdays. Students who arrive on time to class, stay off of their cell phones for the designated times, complete all assignments, and score 90% or higher on the unit summary will be allowed to use their cell phones during designated times. Students have multiple opportunities to use their phones during class in appropriate ways. They also have the opportunity to earn extra minutes on their phone by hitting positive behavior and academic goals. A bucket to collect phones is an option for students. Students are instructed to put their phones away where I cannot see it or put it in the bucket. Students appreciate the option to keep their phones and tuck them away until instructed to use them.

## References

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