

Behaviour Change for Effective Education



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By this time, you may still ask: *why do we need Behaviour Analysis in Education? Why do we need behaviour change procedures for effective education? What is it to improve on the art of teaching to pursue the science of learning?*

Teaching and learning are necessary aspects of life. I may not encounter an astronaut or deal with a lawyer or request for a plumbing service for my house in my adult life, but in all my life, as a child and as an adult, I have encountered, am encountering and will still encounter teachers. Certainly, parents encounter their children's teachers and they had their own when they were young. My point here is, most of us will encounter teachers: teaching and learning will always be part of our lives. And with this great significance of teachers and the teaching process, we need to use a very robust system to support teaching and learning. In my experience, the fundamental principle of Behaviour Analysis, applied to education, that you have learned in the previous chapters of this course, helps to pursue this endeavour.

In 1968, Fred Keller, one of the early pioneers in Behavior Analysis, published an article entitled "Goodbye Teacher." I read this article with smile + nod because part of what Keller was saying was true; but also with some critique + reflection. Keller (1968) has described how traditional and obsolete forms of teaching have contributed to the decay of the educational system, or even the social demise of the individualized forms of education catering to diverse learners. Keller was not really asking teachers to leave the educational system, because they are no longer needed. He was not saying that students should say "good bye" to their teachers. But what he puts at the table is a challenge to think about and think through the teaching and learning experiences that teachers and students have, amid the social-structural decay in education. I believe that teachers, with great calling and vocation to mould and teach children and learners from diverse backgrounds, must stay. I believe that children, students and learners will have the best days of their lives spent with some of the teachers they had. I believe that the application of Behaviour Analysis in Education is one tool that the teachers can use to make learning accessible and have effective forms of education that will help a community of diverse learners. There is a lot from the application of Behaviour Analysis in Education that will help the education system and all the actors and interlocutors in the system: the child, the learner, the family, the teachers, the educators, the school staff and all the members of the school community and beyond.

While ABA is more famously known as an intervention for children and adults with diagnoses of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), largely because of the many researches on ABA and the population with ASD, the principles, science and methods of Behaviour Analysis has a lot to offer to education. In fact, the first observance and point are that when the methods of Behaviour Analysis is applied to education, learners in various streams: gifted, general, mainstream and special education (those with clinical diagnoses that are linked to the labels of exceptionalities) are treated better. In Behaviour Analysis, skills and behaviours are considered beyond the labels. Well, we label jars, and not people. And because Behaviour Analysis looks into the observable, clear and concise form and feature of behaviour (topography) and the causes of one's actions (function), we go beyond the limits of the labels or diagnoses.

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Far-reaching and very encompassing, the application of Behaviour Analysis in Education looks into the real circumstances of the “operant” within the systems of schooling: because the subject matter is behaviour, which is the dynamic by-product of a living organism’s interaction with his or her environment: the school as the environment. Behaviourism, and its application can productively lend its tools in order to support the technology of teaching and bring improvement to develop socially significant behaviours. This includes the school as an environment, where there are variables which affect the behaviours of learners and teachers, and all other stakeholders. Behaviour Change for effective education is necessary because at least one-third of a human life is spent on schooling and educational activities.

Behaviour Analysis in Education and the use of behaviour change procedures can help in areas of classroom management through group contingencies, curriculum and instruction through individualized teaching and adaptive instruction, educational technology through the behaviour change procedures, learning management system through the behavioural contingencies like token economy and level systems, effective teaching for evidence-based education, teacher education and improvement in the systems of schooling through performance management, and school-wide positive behaviour supports. There are many other areas that the tools of ABA can be utilized and we can think of all and any as long as the subject matter is behaviour. It should be noted that ABA is not only a tool to address maladaptive behaviours, but it is a technology of teaching for skills and behaviours to increase and behaviours to decrease, using evidence-based practice that embraces research, training and the values and preference of the learners and their families.

We must reiterate that ABA gives us the tools and devices on “how to” teach and “what to” teach. This means that the empirically validated teaching can apply to any content with reference to learning, as long as the learner and the families find the skills and behaviours socially important. The wider dissemination and practice of Behaviour Analysis in Education will benefit all kinds of learners and will create a community of diverse learners.

In terms of teacher education and continuous learning, the application of Behaviour Analysis in Education allows teachers to use the very methods of ABA to gain the skill set needed to teach, by examining their teaching repertoire and engage in behaviour change procedures themselves to improve their teaching. If the act of teaching is a behaviour and all response classes within this umbrella are socially significant for the teachers and educators, therefore, teaching skills should be improved and changed for the better, systematically.

In over-arching, with the principle of Behaviourism, the use of Science and a behavioural-systems approach, the greatest promise of Behavioural Analysis in Education is that when behavioural techniques and strategies are applied systematically and with fidelity, it becomes more human, more compassionate and view the child as a person and the child as a learner, with intrinsic motivation to learn, with value, dignity and worth.

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