

Week #: 3

Team Name: Who is Number 3?

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Don't throw the behaviorism out with the Skinner box! [An opinion piece to be published in the *American Journal of Education*.]

Skinner believed that "learning can be understood, explained, and predicted entirely on the basis of observable events" (Driscoll, 2012, p. 36). While we no longer torment infants with rats, we feel that behaviorism still has much of value to contribute.

Teachers and parents use the principles of behaviorism all the time, whether overtly or covertly. We reward desired behavior with praise, good grades, allowance, and even smiles. We alter the environment to encourage good behavior by creating a warm classroom environment or letting learners know what the expectations are before we start a lesson. Thompson (1998) states "A peaceful classroom where individuals have enough encouragement, praise, and attention for positive behaviors is a productive one."

We are constantly shaping behaviors through our actions. If the teacher does not have 100% control of the class, then 100% of the lesson will be lost. This control is considered good classroom management but its foundation is behaviorism. Even when the lesson being taught uses constructivist or explorative methods, we are applying behaviorism as we teach it. Positive behavior reinforcement makes students aware that their choices have consequences. According to Jones and Jones (1998), "While it may be fashionable or lucrative to criticize behavioral interventions, anyone who has spent years teaching knows that some students desperately need the assistance provided by behavioral interventions thoughtfully applied within the context of a caring classroom community" (p. 344).

Direct instruction, an instructional model based on behaviorism, has been “found to be effective and superior to other models” (Magliaro, Lockee, & Burton, 2005, p. 42). Direct instruction is useful when the information to be learned must become automatic, and where complete mastery can best be achieved through incremental steps (Magliaro, Lockee, & Burton, 2005). Teaching literacy skills to students with learning disabilities is one area where direct instruction has proven to improve student outcomes (Seifert & Espin, 2012).

Instructional design models in the ADDIE paradigm include objectives for the learners stated as the behavior they are to exhibit (Dick, Carey, & Carey, 2009). Given this requirement of observable actions to track the success of an intervention, we cannot overlook the effect of behaviorism on the development of these models (Driscoll, 2012).

As long as instructional design models like Dick & Carey and Morrison, Ross, & Kemp are relevant, as long as classroom management is vital, as long as direct instruction is useful, so too is behaviorism.

References

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