Behavioral Model of Teaching

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**Introduction**

I was first introduced to the behavioral model of teaching in my freshman year of college. In the introductory education class we focused of the works of B.F. Skinner and his peers. After discovering what the behavioral model was, I realized that I had experienced it my whole life. The direct instruction in high school, simulated games at baseball practice and my mother providing explicit instructions on how I was to treat my sisters are all examples of behavioral teaching in my life. As I entered the classroom I quickly realized that my administrators preferred the behavioral model as I repeatedly was docked points on evaluations because of my “classroom management” skills. As a veteran teacher I understand that the behavior model has its place and I try to incorporate the skills that students will need throughout their lives into my lessons.

**Statement of Problem**

The behavior model of teaching is entrenched in our educational system. It starts the first day of school when teachers instruct students of the rules and procedures of their classrooms and the student code of conduct accepted by the school. The behavior model of teaching has become stigmatized in higher education classrooms as faculty attempt to improve education by encouraging student teachers to utilize the social learning model but what they leave out is the importance of the behavioral model. The behavioral model is not simply teachers lecturing to students sitting in neat rows, this paper aims to inform readers of the benefits of the behavioral model of teaching.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study is being conducted in an attempt to inform educators that the behavior model of teaching is not as evil as some would lead them to believe and that it has a place in our educational system. Hopefully the information provided with encourage educators to incorporate some of the methods into their classrooms.

**Research Questions**

* What is the history of the behavioral model of teaching?
* What are the families of the behavioral model of teaching and are the effective in classrooms?
* What are the strengths of the behavioral model of teaching?
* What are the weaknesses of the behavioral model of teaching?

**Delimitations**

The origins of the behavioral model of teaching will be researched and discussed along with the instructional families that are included. Much of the research will revolve around the families and the effectiveness. Results of the research will be presented along with personal opinions.

**Significance of the Study**

The results of this study will be shared with classmates and readers at MUGC. The information provided will allow them to make their own decisions on the merits of the behavioral model of teaching and assist in incorporating the behavioral model into their classrooms.

**Methods**

Personal observations and reflections were combined with information provided by Google Scholar and Marshall Library databases.

**Literature Review**

The behavioral model of teaching stems from the positivism movement in the early 1900s and dominated education until the 1990s. B.F. Skinner provided massive contributions to the field in the 50s and 60s (Boghossian, 2006). Skinner is the most recognized figure in American psychology. In 1938, Skinner wrote *The Behavior of* Organisms. His influence spread across psychology and into education (DeBell & Harless, 1992). Skinner was a believer in the Darwinian metaphor. He believed that what was learned from experiments involving animals could, and should, be applied to the education of humans. Skinner believed that in order to retain a desired response, positive reinforcement was much more effective than punishment (Staddon, 2006). This approach, known as reinforcement theory or operant conditioning, is defined by small pieces of information that are sequentially acquired by each learner. An example of Skinner’s theory looks like this; a student reads a short passage, responds to multiple choice questions, and self-checks their work. If the work is correct, learning is reinforced, but if their work is incorrect they must reattempt the assignment. This sort of programmed learning is evident in our education system today. Teachers are bombarded with learning objectives and assessments provided by the state (i.e. the programmer) and students must meet these criteria before moving on to the next grade (Ediger, 2012).

There are a few specific methods that this paper focuses on; mastery learning, direct instruction, and explicit instruction. Mastery learning can be traced back the Aristotle and the Greeks but both Bloom and Carroll are credited with founding the mastery learning theory but most of their work is based upon that of Washburn and Morrison. Carroll believed that if a student is allowed the time needed for individual learning then the student will succeed when tested. In other words, time spent must equal time needed for each individual. Bloom believed that if students were allowed to master prerequisite skills then the need for remediation would drop to nearly zero. Bloom is credited with the creation of the “cognitive objective” in which mastery is defined by the achievement of various objectives that prepare learners for an ultimate learning goal. Bloom recognized that for mastery to occur time must be allowed to vary. By doing this teachers provided students with lower IQs the opportunity to achieve along with their peers. Research has shown that mastery learning can lead to high levels of student success (Motamedi, n.d.). Whiting and Render (1984) reported that mastery learning lead to 80% success and Guskey and Gates (1986) reported that studies showed positive effects on several student outcomes.

The term direct instruction was introduced by B. Rosenshine in 1976, but the practice has been used for ages. When educators think of direct instruction they think of systematic instruction, modeling and task analysis. Although these things are part of direct instruction, they do not define it. Direct instruction is a system of instruction that incorporates effective practices with curriculum design, classroom management and student monitoring. Perhaps the most important aspect of direct instruction is the blending of curriculum and effective teaching practices. Direct instruction does not overwhelm students with information from poorly written text books. The goal of direct instruction is to increase student learning by developing background knowledge and connecting and applying it to new knowledge. This can be done by identifying and evaluating big ideas, teaching explicit strategies, scaffolding instruction, integrating skills and concepts and provide an worthwhile review. It is important that each step be evaluated by teachers and/or administrators before moving on to the next (Stein, Carnine, & Dixon, 1998). Direct instruction is currently falling out of favor with many educators but it still is an effective instructional strategy. It could be argued that a swing back towards direct instruction could be in the near future (Magliaro, Lockee, & Burton, 2005). State tests have started to focus on problem solving and direct instruction has been shown to improve students’ problem solving skills (Good & Grouws, 1981).

Explicit instruction is a method of instruction that can provide maximum student growth. It is a structured approach that focuses on clear instruction of scaffolds. These scaffolds guide students through the acquisition of a new skill by utilizing clear instructions broken into small steps and demonstrations. Explicit instruction involves 16 steps; focus instruction on critical content, sequence skills logically, break down complex skills and strategies into smaller instructional units, design organized and focused lessons, begin lessons with a clear statement of lesson’s goals and your expectations, provide step by step demonstrations, use clear and concise language, provide an adequate range of examples and non-examples, provide guided and supported practice, require frequent responses, monitor student performance frequently, provide immediate affirmative and corrective feedback, deliver the lesson at a brisk pace, help students organize knowledge and provide distributed and cumulative practice (Archer & Hughes, 2011).

**Conclusions**

Research question 1 - What is the history of the behavioral model of teaching? The behavioral family of models has a long history, dating back to Aristotle and the Greeks. Perhaps the most influential contributors to the field are Skinner, Bloom, Dewey and Carroll.

Research question 2 - What are the families of the behavioral model of teaching and are they effective in classrooms? Three extremely effective models in the behavioral family are masterly learning, direct instruction and explicit instruction. Research shows significant improvements in student growth when using these methods.

Research question 3 - What are the strengths of the behavioral model of teaching? The behavior model allows students to work at their own pace and learn the prerequisite skills needed for success in prescribed activities. It also improves the problem solving skills of those students who experience it.

Research question 4 - What are the weaknesses of the behavioral model of teaching? The behavioral model is teacher-centered. Students are receivers and not creators of knowledge. This method is not my method of choice but it does have some merit in that it encourages learning in small steps.

**Discussion and Implications**

Research has shown that the behavioral family of models contains some very effective teaching strategies. Models in the behavioral family allow students to learn at their own pace, teach necessary prerequisites for newly acquired skills and improve problem solving skills. I utilize models from the behavioral family in my special education classroom daily. Many of my students come to class missing necessary skills to solve elementary math and science problems. Most of my students have been overlooked or passed by their peers in many academic aspects due to the pace at which they learn. Teaching using explicit instruction and mastery learning methods allows my students to bridge the gaps between their own abilities and those of their peers.

Direct instruction, as defined by Stein, Carnine & Dixon (1998), is not the lecture heavy instruction that many educators view it as but a blend of curriculum and instruction that allows students to connect newly attained knowledge to prior knowledge. This is vital for special education students. When they are able to connect what they know to what they are learning they are typically more involved in learning. Teachers who effectively utilize direct instruction, in its prescribed form, allow their students to develop their problem solving skills and with the new focus of End of Course exams (EOC), problem solving skills are at a premium.

**Implications for Further Research**

As a special education teacher, I am naturally attracted to the benefits of the behavioral family of teaching models. I think that the structured format of the behavioral family eliminates classroom distractions that can create gaps in the learning of special education students. Sadly, the focus of this paper was not on the effects that the behavioral family of models can have on students with disabilities. In the future, I would be interested to see the impact that the behavioral family of models can have on the learning of students with disabilities. While researching for this paper I came across many studies that focused on students with disabilities and I would like to explore these in the future as I plan to make the move to higher education and the training of preservice special educators.

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