Developing Instructional Control and Learning to Learn Skills

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I’ve come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It’s my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and make a child humanized or dehumanized.

Haim Ginott

Objectives

• This training will focus on how to get your students ready to learn by attending, to following directions and responding.
• It will also help you determine how to help your students develop the skills needed to participate in classroom environments.
• It is designed for staff interesting in using instructional time more productively.
What is “instructional control”? 

- Let’s define it.

Learning to learn

- Learning about positive reinforcement: what’s in it for me?
- Learning about negative reinforcement: How do I avoid/escape/“get away with it”?
- Learning about requesting (manding): How many times/ways do I have to ask before they will listen?
Recap

- Positive reinforcement
- Negative reinforcement
- MO's or EO's

- What is the relevance of these principles to instructional control?

Thinking about programs

- With regard to a child’s program....
  - What is positively reinforced?
  - Is it something that you wanted to reinforce?
    - Or is a maladaptive behavior being positively reinforced?
    - What is negatively reinforced?
    - What is punished?
  - Is it effective? How do you know? Data?

More questions...

- Can you reinforce nothing?
- Can you reinforce more of something?
- Less of something?
- Behaviorally what is happening if you see a behavior like pinching increasing from 2 to 10 occurrences in a week?
- What else can you reinforce?
Thinking about Communication

• By strengthening relevant communication skills, it may be possible to replace challenging behavior so that such behavior becomes much less frequent or is eliminated altogether.

Maintaining behaviors

• Who maintains a behavior? The child? The adults? Others?

An important point!

• Practically, we need to think about behavior in terms of the function of the behavior AND
• The contingencies (big word for things) that maintain the behavior in the child’s environment
• Adults are responsible for maintaining many of the behaviors that we see in children.
Behavior management

• Never label a child! No child is lazy, aggressive, stubborn, etc.
  Instead, look at what you are doing to maintain the behavior you don’t want.
• Are you reinforcing behavior you want?
  Can you bring children back to task by changing your behavior?

"Mr. Wickers called me ‘gifted’ in front of the whole class. I’m ruined."
History of reinforcement

- Different people arrive at a given situation with different histories of reinforcement
- These are behaviors that have produced reinforcers or have helped to escape/avoid in the past
  - Some responses are strengthened
  - Some are weakened

Pairing

What is it?
How does it work?
Practicalities?

Establishing operations (EO) (aka motivational opportunities)

- Establishing operations alter the effectiveness of the reinforcer and the response to a stimulus
  - May only be momentary
  - You have to be ready to move in quickly
  - Deprivation usually works
  - Novelty works too
  - Figure out what the EO is...
    - going shopping when you are hungry
    - Why does Jane always want the toy as soon as John picks it up?
    - Finding a toilet after drinking a litre of water
Remember...

- It is often easier to maintain instructional control at a table, but that is often accomplished by working to escape work (i.e. breaks).
- Often you can only get through 3 or 4 tasks before needing to reinforce with a break; any more than that and they may start to "lose" the student.
- Because the reinforcement value of learning is fairly low, and that the reinforcement value of escape from learning is much higher.
- These two factors are in constant flux; a balance of difficult tasks with easier tasks combined with other structured teaching procedures will keep the reinforcement value of learning high.
- If this balance is ignored, students will tolerate a brief period of instruction that is over just before the value of escape becomes higher than that of learning.
- This breaks up the rate of instruction and prevents fluency.

Pairing

- In starting to establish instructional control you first pair yourself with positive reinforcement
- The student is first reinforced without having demands placed on him or her.
- There must be an absence of undesired behavior (tantrums, aggression, etc.) for reinforcement to be delivered.
- Initially the only requirement for accessing reinforcement (besides the lack of undesired behavior) is that the student take the reinforcers from the teacher.
- Then you gradually fade in demands, slowly increasing the response requirement before reinforcement is delivered.
- Eventually you will be able to present more trials of varied difficulty without lowering the reinforcement value of learning.
Pairing

- Pairing involves 3 elements which must be in close association with each other:
  - 1) The student;
  - 2) the teacher;
  - 3) the student’s MOs/EOs and reinforcers.
- The teacher must know and understand the MOs/EOs and identify strong reinforcers in order to become a reinforcer herself.
- Once this happens everything associated with you will become reinforcing.
- You must be the channel through which the student gains access to reinforcement.
- It is not enough to be in the room with the reinforcement while the student is contacting it; you must be an integral part of it.

Practicalities of pairing

- Clean the environment
- Apron: have the reinforcers ready at all times
- Hand out reinforcers frequently and immediately...what do you have to lose?
- Be fun to play with and allow the child to seek you out
- Don’t be a taker, be a trader in the initial stages of pairing

Understanding and delivering reinforcement

- Understanding of the value of reinforcement
- Effort of the response
- Rate of reinforcement
- Magnitude of reinforcement
- Immediacy of reinforcement
Be Specific with Reinforcement

- Name the behavior that was positive.
- Let the individual know what exactly the did appropriately.
- Avoid shaping challenging behaviors by providing unspecific verbal praise.

Methods of reinforcement

- Social/Verbal
- Tangible
- Sensory
- Tokens-conditioned reinforcers

Methods of reinforcement

- Strength of reinforcement schedules
  - Timing: immediate to delayed
  - Consistency
  - Amount
  - Quality
  - Concurrent schedules
  - Novelty
  - Deprivation
The power of reinforcement

- Tokens and eating
- While watching this, look for both positive and negative reinforcement

Non-contingent reinforcement

- Use non-contingent reinforcement within your pairing process

Reinforcer assessment

- Identify reinforcers based on reinforcer inventories and preference assessments
Other strategies

Maintaining composure

Shaping

Praise

Visual performance

- Visual performance tasks allow us to reinforce the following:
  - Completion of tasks
  - Increased cooperation
  - Fine motor skills
  - Age appropriate repertoires of visual, spatial and matching skills: form box, puzzle, matching words, matching numbers, following schedules
  - Matching to sample is a prerequisite skills for picture based communication skills

Gain and Maintain Eye Contact

- Always make sure that you gain eye contact with an individual before giving a directive.
- This will allow you to be able to ensure that they are attending to what you are saying.
- Additionally, it will allow you to see if they are confused by the directive.
Provide appropriate prompt level and body positioning

- Are you too close to the student?
- Are you not close enough?
- Are you towering over the student?
- What are your hands doing?
- Appropriate touch (Different for each individual)

Use appropriate voice volume

- Do not speak in a voice that is too loud.
- Also when giving directions make sure that you are speaking loud enough.
- When challenging behavior is being exhibited use a matter of fact voice. Not too loud or too soft with a tone that will convey the sense that your directive is not an option.

Redirect challenging behavior in a firm but neutral manner

- Reduce the amount of emotional inflection in your voice.
- Your voice should be different in tone and quality from when you provide verbal reinforcement.
- Do not raise your voice
Shaping game

Final words

- Keep data while you work through the feeding behaviors
- Remember it is messy, slow and difficult
- Reinforcement is not bribery
- Don’t discontinue too soon
- Use visuals: clocks, pictures, first...then etc
- Vary often

- Always maintain a positive working relationship
- Show your child that you are the one in control of the items that he wants
- Always mean what you say
- Following directions is in the child’s benefit and is the easiest way to get what he wants
- Reinforce often
- Be consistent about not providing reinforcement if there is inappropriate behavior.
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