Thought Paper #1

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Behaviourist principles, when systematically applied to academic skills, knowledge and understanding, move behaviourism beyond its classroom management role to address the mechanics of learning.

Traditionally teachers incorporate behaviour strategies in their practice to increase desirable and/or decrease undesirable behaviours with the intent of creating an organized and orderly learning environment. (Standridge 2002) When applied consistently these techniques increase the behaviours associated with learning such as remaining on task, working independently, participating appropriately and transitioning to a new task quickly and easily. For example, the inclusion of a Colour Wheel to signal classroom transitions is an effective classroom management tool based on the behaviourist principles of cueing and reinforcement. (Fudge et al. 2008)

These same principles can also be applied to the mechanics of learning, particularly the lower level cognitive processes (remember, understand, apply) and knowledge dimensions (factual, procedural) associated with Bloom's Taxonomy. The focus moves from observable pro-social or pro-classroom behaviours to observable academic ones. Typically, when applying behaviour strategies, the desired target behaviour is defined and often deconstructed before a program or strategy is put in place. (Standridge 2002) This same process can be applied to learning where the skill is broken down into steps or the task is structured into a framework, to be modeled, cued and reinforced.

In the video "Classroom Observations (White 2008) the teacher applied many traditional behaviour techniques to promote a positive classroom. She also applied these same strategies to learning. White modeled good writing, cued students with key works and frameworks, and shaped the writing process through guided instruction. In true behaviourist fashion, White

tracked student growth and rewarded it. The systemic and systematic application of behaviorist principles improved not only the behaviour of the students but their writing skills as well. While behaviourist strategies do not support higher order thinking or complex problem solving, they can, when applied consistently, support foundational learning.

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