# BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION PLAN: FOSTERING THE DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF THE LEARNER IN THE CLASSROOM

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## Abstract

Behaviour modification refers to the shaping of individual behaviour by identifying undesirable responses and specifying constructive behaviour. To accomplish the goals set and to keep students within manageable bounds, we need a behaviour modification plan which helps the teachers to foster the developmental needs of the learner and to cater the individual differences. Classroom management is not just controlling behaviour but it's also a matter of leading learning. This paper presents a plan that a teacher can use to modify the behaviour of the students. The suggested elements of the plan are fostering students' sense of self-efficacy and stamping out inferiority, encouraging students to focus on appropriate learning goals and emphasising activity, inquiry, and social interaction, establishing a supportive classroom atmosphere by adopting an authoritative approach to classroom management and involving students in community service activities. This behaviour modification plan will help teachers to well manage the class and also to cater the developmental needs of the learner.

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## 1. Introduction

Human development is dynamic and complex. We live in a society that is changing and developing as technology advances. Since education aims at the overall development of the individual, schools should focus on maintaining order and discipline along with scholastic success. We must trace the way each type of behaviour changes as a child matures. Before the student is taught or subjected to behaviour modification, the personality and individuality of the learner must be known (Mangal,2008). In addition to having an understanding of our own psychological makeup, such aspects of the learner as physical, social, emotional, cultural and cognitive development and differences, self-esteem, motivation etc need to be known to formulate effective strategies for instruction as well as behaviour modification (Snowman & McCown).

The review of the literature reveals many plans and procedures that can be adapted to handle classroom behaviours. The study conducted by Baker, Moola, & Willoughby (1978) shows what teacher can do to eliminate disruptive behaviours through the use of principles of behavior applied systematically. Non-verbal language variables can be used as techniques to establish and reinforce better discipline and class management according to the study conducted by Grubaugh (1989). Stainback, Graham &Stainback (1986) outlined certain methods to prevent discipline problems such as developing and enforcing rules for appropriate classroom conduct, grouping disruptive students with well-behaved students, teaching self-management etc. Frieberg & Lamb (2009) studied dimensions of person-centered classroom management which facilitates higher achievement and positive learning environment. The learner dynamics that a person-centered classroom management program emulates are the social-emotional emphasis, school connectedness, positive school and classroom climate, and student self-discipline which can be applied to the classroom. Strategies for effective classroom management in the secondary setting, a study conducted by Pedota (2007) provides working strategies to maximise classroom instruction by incorporating effective classroom management techniques. The strategies proposed by Pedota were first things first, setting classroom standards for behaviour and work, and communication. Smith &Daunic (2004) conducted a research on preventing behaviour problems using a cognitive behavioural intervention which was designed to help students develop positive solutions to social problems in anger-provoking situations. Three strategies

were developed by Zuckerman (2007) which can be successfully used for managing classroom discipline problems. Those strategies were changing the pace of the lesson, using the least intrusive intervention along a sequence of nonverbal to verbal strategies, and conferring privately with a chronically disruptive student. Akos, Cockman&Strickland (2007) was of the opinion that school had the responsibility to adjust to the developmental needs and levels of students. Differentiated classroom guidance was found to be the important technique for diverse learners. The literature reviews thus also emphasise the need for a planned approach to classroom management to keep students' behaviour within manageable bounds since students vary in their physical, emotional, social, cognitive and cultural characteristics. The article thus aims to make an effective behaviour modification plan to cater individual differences giving due importance to the students' physical, social, cognitive, emotional and cultural states.

Teachers have to deal with diverse populations of students with varied and sometimes contradictory needs. Therefore, teachers are to constantly make decisions which should be based on a deep reservoir of knowledge and a wide range of skills. Good discipline is the by-product of interesting, exciting, and engaging instructions and interventions (Grubaugh,1989). Behaviour not only includes the mannerisms and actions made by the individuals in conjunction with themselves or their environment but also the response of the individual to various stimuli or inputs, whether external or internal, covert or overt, conscious or subconscious, and voluntary or involuntary (Mangal,2008). Each teacher faces a unique set of students in specific circumstances. For achieving good classroom control, the focus should not be only on delivering good classroom instruction. The classroom should be characterised by a fair amount of autonomy, physical movement, and social interaction if you want a shift from the contemporary views of teaching and learning to that of a constructivist approach (Emmer & Stough,2001). In the constructivist approach, learners are the active participants rather than passive listeners. The accomplishment of these goals and keeping the student behaviour within manageable bounds is the challenge of a teacher. A good disciplinarian and classroom manager should have confidence, an aura of personal power, as well as a degree of charisma all of which add up to a personal presence. An approach which includes various techniques and interventions are to be planned and executed that a teacher can use to prevent behavior problems from occurring, and also for dealing with misbehaviour once it occurred. When we look into managing student

behaviour, we not only need to address students in terms of their age and gender-related differences in psychosocial, cognitive, social and moral development but also address their cultural and socioeconomic diversity.

## 1.2 Behaviour Modification

Behaviour modification refers to shaping behaviour by ignoring or weakening undesirable responses and reinforcing desirable responses.

In the article "Psychology as the Behaviourist Views It", psychologist John Watson argued that psychology would lose credibility as a science if it focused on internal, mental, and emotional states that could not be directly observed or accurately measured. The solution was to focus on what could be directly observed and accurately measures. In a word, it is termed as behavior, the external stimuli experienced and what people did in response (Snowman & McCown,2012).

Although many behavioural theories dominated the psychology of learning, the theory proposed by B.F. Skinner is the most prominent one. Skinner's theory of operant conditioning holds that the responses we make are strengthened when they are reinforced and weakened when they are ignored or punished (Skinner,1990). All behaviours are followed by certain consequences which determine whether these behaviours are repeated. Students get motivated if they are positively reinforced. Positive reinforcement strengthens a behaviour by giving a positive reinforcer while negative reinforcement strengthens a behaviour by removing an aversive stimulus. Punishment, time-out and extinction procedures reduce or weaken the behaviour.

The shaping of the behaviour can be achieved by the reinforcement of the responses and by the ignoring of non-approximate behaviour. Behaviour modification thus aims at helping students learn desirable behaviours by weakening undesired behaviours and reinforcing desired ones thereby meeting the developmental needs of the student.

## 2. Behaviour Modification Plan

The greatest challenge that a teacher faces is meeting the needs of diverse students. A teacher needs to be prepared with a definite plan while dealing with students who differ in their interests, attitudes, abilities etc. Care should be taken to ensure gender equity and also should

rightly address cultural and socioeconomic diversity. An effective teacher should be aware of the age level differences between the students. The teacher should be able to create a positive classroom environment that encourages social interaction and cooperation. Also, the classroom environment should be so designed that it has little chances of disruptive behaviours. Taking into consideration these facts, the researcher frames a behaviour modification plan to meet the developmental needs of the learner and also to reduce the probability of disruptive behaviours in the classroom. The major elements of the behaviour modification plan devised by the researcher that can be used in a classroom are as follows:

### 2.1 Foster students' sense of self-efficacy and stamp out inferiority

Most of the parents and educators view learning as a competition for securing top grades and rewards. In this competitive world, students are forced into an unhealthy type of competition which develops a sense of inadequacy and inferiority that will have a detrimental effect on the development of self-efficacy, self-worth, intrinsic motivation, self-esteem and self-management. Self-efficacy refers to how capable we believe to handle particular tasks. Self-efficacy is influenced by past accomplishments, encouragement from others, emotional reactions, and observing others (Snowman & McCown,2012). The teacher's consideration of each learner as a unique person and the knowledge of their individual differences can help the learners develop a belief in themselves. They should establish a positive classroom atmosphere in which students feel accepted. The classroom environment should encourage social interaction and cooperation. The teachers should help the students to acquire basic knowledge and skills by providing interesting and challenging tasks (Bandura,1977). With timely and effective feedback teachers can help students develop a sense of self-efficacy. Each and every individual should be able to develop a sense of self-worth. For this, the teacher should have an understanding of their interest, abilities, and attitudes. Keeping in view of these the teachers should provide differentiated instruction and should emphasise the participation of each student. Reinforcement of appropriate behaviors is very essential. Undesirable behaviors and responses should be weakened using different techniques like planned ignoring, signals, interest boosting etc.

## 2.2 Encourage students to focus on appropriate learning goals and emphasise activity, inquiry, and social interaction.

Individuals need to be motivated in order to satisfy their needs and strengthen their self-perceptions. Students care about learning when they are invited to learn. To be successful, students should be encouraged to focus on goals. When a student focuses on a goal and expends a certain amount of effort to achieve it, he is motivated, which come from within a person. Teachers can use behaviour modification techniques like verbal praise, modeling, shaping and symbolic reinforcers to motivate students. The goals set should not be too demanding and make sure that students know how to proceed. The teacher should find out students' interests and maximise those factors that appeal to personal and situational interests. It is the responsibility of the teacher to keep the entire class engaged and alert. By using alternative strategies which involve student-centered activities, inquiry, social interactions and development of exercises that make students aware that learning is transferrable help the teacher to keep the whole class motivated and involved. This can help the teacher to maintain smoothness and momentum in class. Keeping the whole class involved minimises misbehaviour. In a classroom where the teacher stressed upon variety and is enthusiastic and who varies, the pace and type of classroom activities will have fewer disruptive activities.

## 2.3 Establish a supportive classroom atmosphere by adopting an authoritative approach to classroom management

The teacher should be prompt, consistent and reasonable and he should be able to build a positive environment. The teacher should plan in advance how to handle classroom routine and begin the class by giving clear instructions, establishing rules and procedures and explaining why they are important but it should be done in a pleasant and supportive way. Also, good communication skills and being a good listener can help the teacher in preventing problems in the classroom. The creation of a classroom atmosphere that will give the opportunity for open discussions will be helpful. The teacher should make sure that the students practice expected behaviours, reinforce expected behaviours, and when necessary use negative consequences. The teacher should identify disruptive behaviours and specify a more constructive behaviour. For this adoption of the authoritative style of classroom management is more superior. Authoritative teachers establish rules but discuss the reasons for them, teach students how to meet them and

reinforce students(Walker,2009). It is the responsibility of the teacher to find out if the problem is owned by the individual and if it is so, try to help the student solve the problem. Listening to the student is a suggested way to help him. Re-establishing rapport with the students whenever we have dealt with them harshly is also appreciable. Students thereby learn to eventually regulate their own behaviour and they tend to understand the need for rules and operate within them most of the time.

## 2.4 Involve students in community service activities

It is important to give the students opportunity to transfer what they learn which will broaden their knowledge they acquire in school. Solving a real problem in a community setting will give them chance for it. It will also help students develop a sense of social responsibility and will give the students opportunity to learn from and about one another's culture. It will be an exposure for the students as it gives them an opportunity to interact with people outside the classroom. Involving students in activities such as simulations and the discussion of newspaper articles that explore differences in perceptions, beliefs, and values will help them to respect others and accommodate individual variability.

## 3. Discussion

Education aims at the overall development of the learner. A systematic planning is needed to ensure that students master the objectives. To accomplish these objectives, we need to plan in advance how we are going to establish and maintain a classroom environment that keeps students focussed within manageable bounds.

Behaviour modification is essential in the classroom scenario. A well-managed classroom is essential if the teacher wants to help students accomplish the goals set. Various influence and intervention techniques can be used to prevent behaviour problems from occurring. Behaviour modification plan helps the teacher to effectively shape the behaviour of students and cater to their developmental needs.

But we should also consider certain criticisms of behaviour modification. Many students believe that they get reinforced only when they do what the teachers want them to do. Some students

may resent this and may exhibit problematic behaviour. Some others may weigh the amount of effort required to earn a positive reinforcement. Some may consider learning something, to be done only to earn an immediate reinforcer. The teachers without recognizing that individual differences are not necessarily deficits may set up high expectancy effect. We have to be aware of the potential dangers of teacher expectancy effect. Without considering the individual difference, a teacher cannot devise goals and strategies to handle students. some of the behaviour modification methods may lead to inappropriate or even unethical uses teacher may shape students to be quiet and obedient but such behaviors may not always produce optimum conditions for learning.

If we do not plan in advance and systematically use the effects of stimulus and the responses, we are leaving things to chance. Most of the individuals will have favourable experiences that will equip them with desirable attitudes but others will suffer an unfavourable set of experiences that will lead to undesirable behaviours in an uncontrolled situation. But in a controlled atmosphere, we can arrange experiences so that each individual could acquire desirable traits. The challenge of the educator is to use the behavioural modification plan wisely rather than being unethical.

## 4. Conclusion

Understanding and managing the teaching-learning process is a challenge as it is affected numerous variables that interact with one another. Since human behaviour is complex and changes with age, it is the responsibility of the teacher to establish a positive environment that helps students accomplish goals and keep their behaviour manageable. Classroom management is not just a matter of controlling students but it's a matter of leading learning. Since teaching is a complex activity, it can become chaotic if not managed properly. The teacher should be firm and authoritative and should specify constructive behaviours. Effective teachers plan in advance the classroom procedures. Thus, the researcher hopes that the behaviour modification plan developed will have a positive and significant effect in fostering the developmental needs and reducing the probability of disruptive behaviours of the learners.

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