The Student Is Always Right
(But Don't Tell Them That!):

Applying Basic Behavior Lessons to the Classroom

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2018 SWWC Behavior Conference

April 9th & 10th, 2018

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The rat is always right.

~ B.F. Skinner

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Outline

- Antecedent control of behavior
- Functions of behavior
- Case studies and examples
- Recommendations

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Environmental Determinants

- Behavior is influenced by two main factors
  - Antecedents
  - Consequences

- Unidentified control does not mean random!

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Types of Antecedents

- Motivational variables
  - Basic biological needs (hunger, thirst, sleep, illness)
  - Choice

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The Importance of Choice

1. Take a piece of paper
2. Write the steps of your morning routine
3. Pass your list to the person on your right

Credit: Jolene Swalin

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Opportunities for Choice

- Order of task completion
- Modality of task completion
- Participation / role in group
- Reinforcers, earned privileges

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Types of Antecedents

- Motivational variables
  - Basic biological needs (hunger, thirst, sleep, illness)
  - Choice
  - Deprivation (esp. reinforcers)
  - Satiation (esp. aversive or effortful activities)

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Types of Antecedents

- Cues and Prompts
  - Signal when to behave
  - Signal how to behave
  - Signal expectations
  - Indicate availability of reinforcement and/or punishment

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Adding Cues & Prompts

- Post rules, expectations, consequences
- Post schedules
- Announce changes to routine
- Maintain consistency, especially *across* students

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Types of Antecedents

- Skill Repertoires
  - Prerequisites
  - Targets
  - Complements
  - Alternatives

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Improving Repertoires

- Start with what they can do
- Program for success
- Peer partnering
- Teach alternative repertoires
- Make sure expectations match abilities

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Types of Consequences

- Reinforcing
- Punishing
- Extinguishing

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Functions of Behavior

- Positive Reinforcement
  - Attention (e.g. comfort statements, reprimands)
  - Reaction from others
  - Preferred activities
  - Tangible items

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Functions of Behavior

- Negative Reinforcement
  - Avoidance of or escape from instructional activities
  - Avoidance of or escape from other undesirable activities
  - Avoidance of or escape from social contact

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Functions of Behavior

- Automatic Reinforcement
  - Natural consequence of behavior
  - Sensory stimulation
  - Attenuation of itching sensation or other irritation

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Accounting for Function

- Programmed consequences must match function!

- Common pitfalls
  - Reprimands
  - Time outs
  - Academic assistance*

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Making Reinforcers Effective

- Ensure that there is sufficient deprivation
- Ensure that it is actually reinforcing
- Ensure that reinforcer matches the effort

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Debunking the Myths of Punishment

- Punishment is simply a consequence that reduces the behavior it follows
  - Touching a hot stove
  - Getting laughed at by peers
  - Earning a bad grade on a test
  - Getting a penalty in hockey

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Using Punishment Effectively

- Try reinforcement first
- Make sure the consequence actually functions as a punisher
- Don't start (too) small
- Be consistent
- Short-term intervention, not a long-term solution!

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Using Extinction Effectively

Punishment	Extinction
Withdrawing reinforcement	Withholding reinforcement

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Using Extinction Effectively

Punishment	Extinction
Withdrawing reinforcement	Withholding reinforcement
Rapid decrease in behavior	Gradual decrease in behavior

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Using Extinction Effectively

Punishment	Extinction
Withdrawing reinforcement	Withholding reinforcement
Rapid decrease in behavior	Gradual decrease in behavior
A: attention → B → C: no attention	A: attention → B → C: same attention

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Using Extinction Effectively

Punishment	Extinction
Withdrawing reinforcement	Withholding reinforcement
Rapid decrease in behavior	Gradual decrease in behavior
A: attention → B → C: no attention	A: attention → B → C: same attention
A: work → B → C: more work	A: work → B → C: same work

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Case Study: Xander

- 14 years old
- 6th grade (repeater)
- Problem behavior includes insubordination, verbal aggression, property destruction (hierarchy)
- Averages 2-3 behavioral referrals per week
- 27 suspension days this academic year

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Xander

- FBA showed clear escape function
- Additional observations
    - Minimal peer interaction during school hours
    - Most insubordination related to academic tasks
    - Teacher wants him moved to another class
    - Xander reports "why bother?" attitude toward school

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Variables to Consider

- "Masquerading Skill Deficit"
    - Academic expectations
    - Prerequisite skills
- Escape function for teacher
    - Inconsistent behavioral expectations
    - Fear factor
- Alternative sources of reinforcement
    - Control, independence

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Recommendations for Xander

- Clarify behavioral expectations
- Teach alternative ways to access reinforcement
- Offer choices
- Offer privileges contingent on behavior
- Create opportunities for positive peer interaction
- Set plan for academic success
- Include Xander in treatment planning process

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Case Study: Kameron

- 3 years, 1 month old
- Only child, first year in preschool
- Problem behavior includes noncompliance, physical aggression
- Multiple referrals for developmental/psychological assessment; all results within normal range
- Classroom para serving as default 1:1

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Kameron

- FBA inconclusive regarding function; attention, tangible, and auto components likely
- Prior interventions include
  - Hourly token system for "safe hands" – traded for screen time before bed
  - Time out (para needed to supervise to block escape)

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Variables to Consider

- Skill repertoires
  - Accessing attention
  - Sharing attention
  - Following instructions
- Appropriateness of token system
- Does time out match function

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Recommendations for Kameron

- Teach skills
- Deliver tokens on denser schedule
- Ensure reinforcer is attainable
- Prompt and praise positive peer interaction
- If time out is used, do not pair with attention
- Maturation

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Case Study: Mrs. Baffin's Class

- 4th grade inclusion classroom, 18 students
- 2 paraprofessionals
- Problems include academic noncompliance, out-of-seat, walk outs, verbal aggression
- Tries to ignore problem behavior and teach those who are engaged
- Principal concerned about lack of discipline

Mrs. Baffin's Class

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- Paras' time allocated to redirecting & retrieving
- No consequences for noncompliance
- Immediate write-ups for escalated behavior
- Beginning to see increases in PB from inclusion students

Variables to Consider

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- Rules of classroom not enforced
- Inconsistent implementation of consequences
- Peer-delivered consequences more salient & more reinforcing
- Flipped consequences for behavior
- Inappropriate modeling

Recommendations for Class

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- Good Behavior Game

Good Behavior Game

Table 3. Eight Basic Steps for Implementing the GBG.

No.	Step
1	Establish what the rules of the game will be (e.g., you must receive permission to talk).
2	Choose a point threshold (i.e., how many points can the students receive and still win the game).
3	Establish a specific schedule for when the game will be played (e.g., during math class for 30 min each day).
4	Choose rewards for winning the game that the students will like (e.g., snacks or free time).
5	Divide the class into teams, distributing students who engage in problem behavior evenly across them.
6	During the game, consistently deliver points to teams when students break the rules.
7	At the end of the game, deliver rewards to students on winning teams and remind students who lose that will have another opportunity next time.
8	If both teams are under the point threshold at the end of the game, both teams may win.

Traub et al., 2017; adapted from Barrish, Saunders, & Wolf, 1969

Recommendations for Class

- Good Behavior Game
- "Unflip" the consequences for compliance
- Offer choices in reinforcement
- Engage peer support for learning
  - Group work
  - Games & challenges

Summary and Recommendations

- Function is valid, even if behavior is not
- Small changes can have big effects
- Be proactive, not reactive
- Expectations should be
  - Clear
  - Attainable
  - Consistent

Summary and Recommendations

- Get creative with reinforcement
- Offer choices
- Engage students in their own programming

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Purchases with Points:
- Use grooming products for 1 block (e.g., nail polish, hair pick): 250 points
- Eat a snack from home during class: 800 points
- Buy a snack from the crisis office (soda, chips, candy): 1000 points
- Use the computer during free time: 1000 points
- Buy a Gator Bond: 1500 points

Purchases with Gator Bonds:
- 1 Gator Bond:
  o Wear a hat during class
  o Wear a hoodie during class
  o Wear slippers during class
  o Wear your bookbag in class
  o Listen to headphones in class
- 2 Gator Bonds:
  o Skip 1 assignment
  o Erase a bad day from your week (excludes referrals and walkouts)
  o Sit on a balance ball in class
  o Sit in the bean bag chair during class
- 3 Gator Bonds:
  o 1 excused lateness to school (if C or above in your 1st block class)
  o 1 excused absence from ONE class (if C or above in the class)
- 4 Gator Bonds:
  o Get take-out lunch from local restaurant
  o Visit the weight room during free time
  o Visit someone (e.g., outclass teacher, coach) – must be prearranged
- 6 Gator Bonds:
  o Attend a high school sporting event with a teacher
- 8 Gator Bonds:
  o Excused day off from school (if C or above in all classes and parents consent)

Figure 2. Example of a token economy for use in a classroom for students with emotional and behavioral disorders.
Note. Points were earned each class period for compliance with class and school rules and for meeting individual behavior goals. Listed reinforcers were selected from student and teacher suggestions based on what was approved by school administrators and able to be regulated by teachers and staff.

Traub et al., 2017

The student is always right. He is not asleep, he is not unmotivated, not sick, and he can learn a great deal if we provide the right contingencies of reinforcement.

~ Fred S. Keller

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Thank you!

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