**Artifact #5**

Developmental Aspects

Of Human Learning

Fall 2008

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Observation Paper #1

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My observation paper this month is on a student I will call “Z”. We have been in school for two full weeks, so these observations are from the first 2 weeks of school. Z had a lot of enthusiasm and seems to be a very happy child. I did notice early on that Z did like to talk to classmates, so I did have to move him away from his partner a few times. Z will sometimes react loudly to a minor incident, like the time when a student next to him accidentally had her notebook on part of his desk. Z said, “Hey!” so loudly that I had to stop class to see what the matter was. After I figured out that it was minor, and not meant by the other student, I talked to Z to see what the matter was. I asked if he would be more comfortable by himself so he wouldn’t be bothered.

Along with the talking, Z plays with a lot of objects during class time. I told my class the first week of school that I would confiscate any toys that kids brought out during class time. Z made a man out of eraser caps, so I took those. Then he has some magnets the next day. Then a pedometer that he had out during Reading time. The next day it was a play ring. I have also had to take away sharpies from him when I caught him drawing faces on his hand during Math. Each time I take something away from him he seems kind of shocked that I won’t give him another chance.

The final problem that Z has been having is spending time off task in the class. A specific example would be his attention to my pet rat in the room. My rat is in a cage at the back of the room away from where the students sit during instruction time. I allow the students to give the rat snacks during snack time each afternoon. They are also allowed to pet him when they leave the room for recess, or when they stay in my room for lunch once a month. If it is time to get back to work I will give them a 2 minute warning to get back to their desks from the rat. Z will always be the last one there when I am ready to start. Yesterday he finally went back to his desk, but then got back up a minute later and went back to the cage. Z also sticks things in the cage when I have told the class not to-things like pencils and papers.

I do know that Zach has attention issues, I am not certain that he is on medication yet. (Not that he has to be-I just have to find out). He is easily distracted, and I have to take that into account. I just got tired of giving him a negative response each time he broke a rule, which is often. I was interested then when in chapter 3 there was information on different types of reinforcement/conditioning. I started to try and apply these ideas to Z to see if any would help the situation without always making Z feel like I was always nagging him.

The idea of Operant conditioning is to learn a behavior by using consequences that can be either reinforcing, or punishing. In my class, we have an incentive card that has five spaces on it. If a child breaks a rule or misses homework etc, they get an initial on this card. If they get 5 initials in a month, they miss out on an incentive. This month’s incentive is a movie/snack day. In Z’s case, he has 3 initials so far from me. Two were from bringing toys into class and one was for a missing assignment. From my understanding, a negative reinforcer isn’t considered punishment because it could actually in crease a desirable or undesirable behavior. I think giving initials then would be a punishment instead of a negative reinforcer (Bergin, 2007 pg. 7) In Z’s case, he seems upset when I give an initial on his card, but it doesn’t really seem to make him want to stop playing with toys in class, or finish his homework. That isn’t quite working for him. I think that punishment has its place, but if it doesn’t work for the student, there needs to be other options.

I think that Z has found that talking out of turn in class has been a positive reinforcer for him because he gets a certain amount of attention. When I read about the idea of extinction (Bergin, 2007 pg. 9), that gave me some ideas to use. If my giving Z attention when he talked loudly or didn’t raise his hand was actually reinforcing that behavior, then I would have to start ignoring the behavior. I tried this in class the next day. When Z talked out of turn, I just kept talking like nothing happened. He didn’t do it again for awhile. It is hard for me to ignore while I am teaching, but I am really trying hard to stick to it. Maybe at home, talking loud is the only way that Z can get attention. It would make sense to me that he would do it at school if it worked at home. I intend to find out a little bit more background about Z’s family and home life to see if that give me any more insight into the matter.

In chapter 3 they also talk about behavior modification (Bergin pg. 9). I have had many students on a behavior chart where they get points to spend on items each Friday in their ED room. Z is not in any ED/LD program, so I would have to do a behavior chart for him in my room some way. Students who finish all of their homework get to play a reward game called Homeworkopoly. Again, this only works for some students. In Z’s case, I would think he would need something more direct and constant. Homeworkopoly is only once a week, I think he needs more feedback. If the problems I am having with him are mostly talking out of turn, wandering in the room, and playing with objects during class time, I could make a chart to reward him for times he is refraining from these behaviors. I do have tickets that I give out for a monthly drawing that I could give him at the end of each day. I would really have to sit down and think about what I would want on the chart. I would want it to be clear and simple enough so Z would really be able to understand and focus on his goals. Z does seem to want to please people, so behavior modification might work well for him. I will have to use the experience of some of our Special Ed staff to help with this matter.

Overall, for my whole class, I need to focus more on reinforcement, not punishment. If I can really focus on the good behaviors in my room, it will benefit all, not just Z. It is hard to stick to this, it seems to be easier to just punish or nag. I know that this type of punishment tends to fall on deaf ears most of the time anyway.