

Behaviourism in the classroom

[Psychology](#), [Behaviorism](#)



Behaviorism in the Classroom Behaviorist learning theory has been discussed for many years. Although it is an older learning theory, it still can be used in the classroom today. There are instructional strategies that incorporate behaviorism. Teaching math at the secondary level and having to prepare students for state standardized test, I can appreciate many of the ideas that behaviorist learning theory has to offer. Also, how technology can help enhance some of these ideas in the classroom. There are many articles that explain about behaviorism. Two articles that I have recently read are Behaviorism: From Emerging Perspectives on Learning, Teaching and Technology by Melissa Standridge and The Behaviorist Orientation to Learning by M. K. Smith. Behaviorism is the idea that humans learn from activity, repetition, and reinforcement (Smith, 1999). These three ideas have been involved in teaching since I was in elementary school. The idea that teachers create lessons that cause students to take an active role in their learning has always been thought of as good teaching. Also, it is important that students understand simple ideas that are learned by doing again and again. For example, spelling, learning names of states, and multiplication tables are all things that we have learned by repeating information. Finally, positive reinforcement helps the students understand what behaviors are appropriate in the classroom and if the work they are doing is correct and accurate. Behaviorists believe that although behavior is learned that it could also be unlearned (Standridge, 2002). Reinforcement, both negative and positive, can help unlearn unacceptable behavior and replace it with acceptable behavior. Two instructional strategies that use the ideas from behaviorism are homework and practice, and reinforcing effort. Both of these

strategies are described in the book *Using Technology with Classroom Instruction that Works* by Howard Pittler, Elizabeth R. Hubbell, Matt Kuhn and Kim Malenoski. The first strategy, homework and practice, gives ideas how to improve assigning and grading homework. The first suggestion is to establish and communicate a homework policy. Students need to know what is expected from them and how their homework is going to be graded. Next, homework that is assigned has to have a purpose to what the students are learning. This would prevent the students from thinking that the work they are doing is just busy work and keep students interested in the assignment. Finally, there are different approaches to providing feedback. I have always felt that when I assign math problems to my students, that it is important that I make sure that they understood and attained the correct answer. The second strategy, reinforcing effort, suggest ways to show students that effort has an effect on success. As a geometry teacher, the last statement sounds simple, however many students will not try and complete math problems that they do not understand. Geometric proofs have always been difficult to teach because students will not even try to begin the problem. The idea of this strategy is to teach students that effort is important if they want to be successful. To teach students this, it is beneficial for them to keep records on effort and compare it to their achievements. By keeping a record, students should see that effort does have an effect on achievement. One program I used when I taught in Ohio called Moogie Math was a review program for the state's standardized test. All the questions were multiple choice, which mirrored the state's test, and provided feedback whether the student was right or wrong. If a student did not get the right answer the program would

ask the student if they would like to try again or show the student the correct answer along with how the solution was obtained. Also, the program would keep track on how well the students were scoring in each different section and how long they had worked in each section. This would show the students that effort leads to success. This program was a great review because it covered the areas where each student struggled and the students did not have to review sections that they already mastered. Another area which I change this year was how I assign and grade homework. This year I started grading homework on the students' attempt rather than if the problems were right or wrong. Also, I have cut down on the number of problems that I give the students each night. One of my main reasons for doing this was that in the past many students seemed to be unmotivated to actually use the homework for learning and finished it just to get it done. At the beginning of the year, I gave students a homework rubric that explained what I was looking for when I grade their homework. Also, I started grading their homework at the start of class while they are working on something else. This way I can tell the student what I liked or disliked from their work. Another idea I am using to increase effort on homework is that I require the students to write a reflective statement at the end of their assignment. The statement can describe what the section was about or state which homework problems the student had trouble completing or understanding. I have not yet tried having the students compare their homework grades with how well they did on the test for that chapter. After reading about the reinforcing effort strategy, I might try having the students keep track of their homework grades on a spreadsheet and comparing them to the overall homework

grade with their test grade. References Pitler, H., Hubbell, E., Kuhn, M., & Malenoski, K. (2007). Using technology with classroom instruction that works. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Smith, M. K. (1999) " The behaviorist orientation to learning", the encyclopedia of informal education, [www. infed. org/biblio/learning-behaviourist. htm](http://www.infed.org/biblio/learning-behaviourist.htm), Last update: September 03, 2009. Standridge, M., (2007). Behaviorism. In M. Orey (Ed.), Emerging perspectives on learning, teaching, and technology. Retrieved January 10, 2011 from [http://projects. coe. uga. edu/epltt/](http://projects.coe.uga.edu/epltt/)