

Behaviourist Classroom Management and The Mechanics of Learning

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According to Standridge, neither John Watson nor B.F. Skinner were interested in much more than just stimuli, responses, and overt behaviours (2002). Compared to what actually takes place in a classroom, this is a very narrow scope. Given that these two leading authorities of behaviourism have, by their own definition, limited the scope of behaviourist classroom management techniques, it is inappropriate to suggest that these techniques can be used to describe anything but the most rudimentary of stimulus responses and overt behaviours.

While the *scope* of classroom behaviourism is limited, its *value* is not. By using it correctly to provide a safe, orderly learning environment and attain the most basic levels (physiological and safety) of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Schunk, 2012, pp. 351–354), teachers build a foundation upon which the upper levels of the hierarchy (belongingness, esteem and self-actualization) may also be met, as shown in White's video (*Classroom Observation*, 2010). However, if the base of that hierarchy is not firmly supported (with behaviourist techniques ) those upper level needs cannot be reliably met.

A key aspect of human development is motivation, which can be described as a *continuum*—with extrinsic motivation at the undeveloped beginning point and intrinsic motivation at the more fully developed endpoint (Schunk, 2012, p. 389). Behaviourism relies on extrinsic motivation and overt behaviour at the beginning of that continuum; therefore, much of the learning that occurs in the early stages of life is concerned with the rudimentary skills that children need to comply with desirable classroom behaviour—as described in the CWS paper (Fudge et al., 2008)—and behaviourism plays a large and effective role.

However, as children mature, motivation develops a more internal locus, extrinsic motivation (behaviourist techniques) become less crucial, and intrinsic motivation becomes essential to the mechanics of learning and meeting higher level needs (Schunk, 2012, p. 389). Therefore, behaviourist classroom management techniques cannot be used to describe the learning that meets those higher level needs.

## References

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[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RY3t2sijb4M&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RY3t2sijb4M&feature=youtube_gdata_player)

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