FEDU Reflection Assignment

1. Counter-conditioning

Counter-conditioning replaces an undesired response with a new, more desirable response.

I noticed a teacher in a kindergarten class who worked with a boy who was dropped off by his mother and then would start crying. To me it looked like the boy had separation anxiety from his mother. The little boy had a small stuffed animal with him and the teacher prompted him to get it out of his back pack when he started crying. Once the boy had it out of his back pack the teacher asked the little boy what he was going to say to George, his stuffed animal. The little boy then started talking to the stuffed animal telling him he was going to have a fun day at school and he would get to tell his mom all about it after school. By the time the boy finished he had stopped crying and the teacher prompted him to his seat and got him started on his work. This is an example of a classically conditioned response anxiety related to Mom leaving. The teacher made Mom leaving okay and pleasant by allowing the boy to have his stuffed animal and comfort his stuffed animal. This helped him move beyond the initial separation from his mom.

1. Positive Reinforcement
Positive reinforcement involves the presentation of a stimulus after the response. It does not necessarily mean “positive” as in “good”.

In the first grade classroom I observed the teacher did a great job using positive reinforcement. She continually praised the students who were following the rules, saying things like “I like how (student) is sitting quietly on the rug” or “I see that (student) is ready to learn.” I noticed that when she did this the other students would catch on and do what she wanted them to do. For the most part, she did not comment on negative behavior. She kept her comments focused on the good behavior. She did not reinforce negative behavior by commenting on it.

3. Punishment
Punishment decreases behavior.

During my observations in kindergarten and 1st grade classrooms I saw many children have breakdowns. The teachers handled this situation by sending the child out of the class and to the room across the hall. I would say this is punishment since it is designed to reduce the behavior. It was hard for me to say how well this worked since a) I was not able to observe the child once s/he left the room and b) I was not able to see if the child’s behavior changed over time. In most cases it seemed the children were able to calm down and then re-enter the classroom.

What I was able to observe were the children who entered our classroom from another class. These children sat on the floor and were very quiet. They were so quiet that I didn’t even notice them at first. I think that being sent out of their classroom was a form of “time out” punishment and that it seemed to work for some children because once they were in time out they became quiet and reserved.

4. Teacher addressing a student avoidance and/or escape behavior
Escape behaviors are ways we avoid unpleasant tasks in the classroom and elsewhere.

I observed a third grade math class where a little boy was reading a joke book instead of doing his worksheet. The teacher finally saw him and approached him, took away the book and told him “you know how I feel about books in my classroom!” and then locked the book in a cabinet. Honestly, I was appalled that a teacher would do that. One technique I learned about this year is to approach the student and ask “what are you doing?” Then you ask “what are you supposed to be doing?” Then you make a contract with the student. You might ask him to work so many of the problems so that you can see that he has the concept down. You would say “work three problems for me and show me that you understand the lesson and then you can read your book.”

I don’t know for a fact that this student didn’t like math but I think that the “what are you doing?/what are you supposed to be doing?” technique would be a good one to use if you notice that students are using escape behaviors instead of doing their assignments.

5. Modeling
Modeling happens when a person performs an action and another person performs the same action afterward. Modeling can be what a model does or what the observer does.

The kindergarten and first grade teachers I observed did very good jobs modeling for the students. Both of these teachers seemed positive and happy, for the most part. They were engaged with the students and worked to keep the students on-track with their desk work.

The kindergarten teacher modeled the assignment for the students, cutting an insect out of construction paper and gluing it to another sheet of paper which she decorated, and they all thought what she did looked really great and they were excited to try to make something themselves.

The 8th grade science teacher I observed seemed frantic and was all over the place. Her students were all over the place, as well. They wandered around the room when they should have been engaged in some activity.

The third grade teacher seemed like she didn’t care about what her class was doing. She stood off to the side of the room and read a report then she reprimanded a student for reading. For the most part she didn’t check on her students at all. She seemed disinterested in what her students were doing and her students didn’t seem to be interested, either.

The history teacher I observed seemed a little bored with the lecture she was giving and didn’t come across as being excited about the content she was covering. Her class seemed bored by it, as well.

Another third grade teacher modeled how to use florist tape to attach a silk flower to the tip of a ball point pen. At first the students were frustrated and didn’t know how to hold the flower against the pen while they wrapped the tape around it. She showed them again and when they were able to do it they were very happy.

I noticed a difference in the students when their teacher seemed happy and interested from when the teacher seemed grumpy and disinterested. As a teacher I hope to model enthusiasm and a love of school and learning.

6. Tapping into Prior Knowledge
Tapping into prior Knowledge helps students connect new ideas to things they already know about.

I observed an 11th grade history class. This would be a class where I think that the teacher could tap into prior knowledge. She was going over the time period from 1970 to 1990. This is the time right before these students were born. I would imagine they have seen movies and maybe TV shows from these years. When she was talking about Watergate she related it to a scene from the movie “Forrest Gump”. She also asked the class if they had seen people do the “I’m not a crook” impersonation of Nixon. I would have thought the students would have seen some of this before but none of them had. It is very important to find out what your students know so you can tap into their prior knowledge.

I think movies are a good way to reference historic events even if the movie isn’t exactly 100 percent accurate. One thing I might try to do is ask my students to do a survey and find out what movies they have seen and what books they have read. I would make a list of the movies and books I feel are most relevant to the material covered in the class. This might be one way to create some connections.

7. Activities to minimize forgetting and enhance memory (such as repetition, elaboration, promoting attention meaningful learning etc).

Visual aids enhance long-term memory storage. (pg. 215) A visual aid is a form of elaboration and gives students another way to connect to the material.

In an 8th grade science class the teacher did a demonstration where she made a model of the watershed. The students, who had not been very engaged up to this point, gathered around and watched the demonstration. I think they are more likely to remember the demonstration than a straight lecture because they actually observed a model of the concept. Earlier they had watched a video but the video was very outdated and had old- fashioned animation. Most of the students ignored the video. I felt like the demonstration did more to promote meaningful learning than the video. The following day the students were to make their own model aquifer. This type of hands-on activity likely allows the students to make more mental connections to the content they are working with because

the students are physically manipulating the items they use to build the aquifer. They will remember how the dirt smelled and how it felt when they touched it. They will remember how the little pebbles spilled on the desk when they poured them into the bottle. All those little things create retrieval cues so the students can name all the parts of an aquifer and describe how it works later on when they take a test and hopefully they will retain that knowledge for a lifetime.

8. Teaching Metacognitive skills
Metacognitive skills can be defined as “knowing about knowing” or “learning about learning”.

This has been the most difficult topic to write about for all my observations because I really haven’t noticed much of this happening in the classrooms I have visited. I heard, in another class I take, that about 75% of students who fail do so because they do not know how to learn the material. I would tell my students that they need to think about how they learn and that I am going to teach them how to learn by teaching them study techniques. I would explain to my students that we all learn differently so it is important for them to start paying attention to how they learn best.

1. Promoting Transfer
Transfer occurs when something you learn in one situation affects how you learn or perform in another situation. There are different types of transfer:

Positive transfer—when learning in one situation facilitates learning or performance in another situation

Negative transfer—when something learned in one situation hinders a person’s ability to learn or perform in a second situation

Vertical transfer—a learner acquires new knowledge or skills by building on more basic information and procedures

Lateral transfer—when knowledge of the first topic is helpful but not essential to learning the second topic

I guess an example I saw of transfer would be the reading lesson in the first grade class I observed. The students were learning to read but they were reading a story about Africa. The vocabulary words, like “equator”, applied to geography. So, they were learning to read but they are also learning about geography which is a form of positive transfer.

1. Enhancing motivation
Students are not always motivated to learn so it is important that teachers instill motivation in them. Motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic.

During my observations I feel as if I saw some pretty good classrooms and that I saw some pretty bad classrooms. In the good classrooms the teachers were active and engaged with the students. They handed out stickers, stamped homework, gave positive reinforcement of

behavior, modeled good behaviors and encouraged the students to figure out things on their own (using “think, pair, share” to remember what the equator is, for example). In the “bad” classroom, the teacher was not engaged with the students, did not check their work, had them working well below their grade-level on activities that had little to do with the content area (having 3rd graders spend 30 minutes coloring a graph while the teacher stood with her back to the class reading some kind of report) and generally giving a lecture that even they themselves seemed bored by.

Teachers need to be excited to teach. We all have bad days but we can’t show that to our students. When the teacher is forgetful and unprepared the students will be that way as well. When the teacher sounds confused about the content the student will be confused, too. I observed a history class where the teacher could not answer many of the students’ questions. She didn’t say “we will talk more about that tomorrow” or “let’s look that up” or anything. She just didn’t know the answer and didn’t seem very motivated to find out. If she isn’t excited about the content then she cannot motivate her students to be excited.

I want to model learning for my students. If they ask me a question and I don’t know the answer I won’t be afraid to suggest that we look up the answer. If they think I’m smart and they will never be as smart as me (I felt that way about some of my teachers) then I will tell them that the only reason I am smart is because I read a lot and I look up answers to questions I have. I will say things that encourage my students and let them see that I am interested in what they are learning and in their progress. I think knowing that I am in their corner will be a huge motivator for my students.

I would also be willing to give out stickers and other rewards but I don’t want my students to only strive for extrinsic motivators like praise or prizes. I want them to be intrinsically motivated. I plan on teaching them about the rewards of intrinsic motivation by talking to them about how they feel when they accomplish a new skill or understand a new concept. I want to find out what motivates each student and try to provide a means for them to motivate themselves.