Assessment Task 2: Essay

Topic:
Theories and practice of behaviour management

Essay Question:

In order to construct a practical approach to teaching that results in a positive classroom environment for effective learning, teachers must understand how to successfully implement behaviour management within the classroom. With reference to both Skinner’s behaviourist and Lee Canter’s Assertive discipline models, how can a teacher critically underpin this value in Education?

Through effective planning of successful learning outcomes of students, the discipline procedures enacted by teachers must also be considered for successful implementation within the classroom. There are a variety of discipline theories and models that teachers can refer to, during the development of a behaviour management policy within the classroom environment. A significant figure that influenced the Education system is B.F Skinner whom generated the Behaviour Modification model in 1937. His model is profoundly associated with the key concept that desired behaviour is most likely to occur if rewarded within the appropriate time frame and environment (Fetherston, 2006). Alongside Skinner’s model, Canter developed the Assertive Discipline model based upon Skinner’s behavioural theory. Assertive Discipline strongly emphasises the act of punishing unacceptable behaviours and providing appropriate reinforcements to those which are considered more desirable (Edwards & Watts, 2008). Both of these theories will be discussed through a manner in which they can be integrated together to be incorporated within the classroom, under the teacher’s discretion.

Behaviour modification has been extensively intended for classroom use for a long period of time. Its influence on the education system has profoundly been recognised by the work of B.F Skinner, who believed that teachers need to manage their students’ behaviour through reinforcement principles and procedures. As Skinner’s behavioural
model is concerned with modifying unacceptable behaviours to encourage desired ones, teachers must provide reinforcement or punishment strategies; depending on the circumstance (Edwards & Watts, 2008). When applying reinforcement and punishment strategies to a particular discipline situation, it is imperative for teachers to ensure they’re reinforcing only the desired behaviour; and not the unacceptable one (Ramon, 2008). An example of this mistake on the teacher’s behalf has been observed through a situation when the teacher intended on putting an end to a student’s misbehaviour of constantly being destructive to others. However, the punishment strategy utilised by the teacher failed and acted as a reinforcer instead which provoked the student’s misbehaviour further. In response the student displayed unacceptable physical contact towards the teacher which put both the teacher’s and fellow peers’ wellbeing at risk. This example illustrates a serious circumstance of the significance for teachers to ensure the reinforcer used, has sufficient power to alter the student’s behaviour (Edwards & Watts, 2008).

Although Skinner and many other behaviourists believe that “punishment may be used occasionally and if necessary,” teachers must understand when to employ any aspect of punishment towards a student’s misbehaviour. Skinner only regarded the use of punishment strategies as a “recommendation for when a positive approach has failed” (Edwards, 2008). Within the example exemplified above, the teacher’s attempt in disciplining the student did in fact fail, however, if the teacher’s knowledge of appropriate reinforcers was demonstrated and effectively used; then the result most likely would have occurred differently.

As mentioned above, the weaknesses may provide some difficulty for teachers to utilise this model. However, there are many positive and effective aspects of the Behaviour Modification model within the classroom environment. Some strengths of the model consist of the simple implementation and employment for teachers, the impact of standardised behaviours as consistent and the aspect of accommodating for teacher’s desire to control (Porter, 2008). All these strengths enable the teacher to successfully implement quality discipline control in the classroom.
Canter’s Assertive Discipline model was developed on the basis of Skinner’s Behaviour Modification model in the 1970’s. The Assertive Discipline model acknowledges the principle of punishing unacceptable behaviours similarly, as in the Behaviour Modification model. However, it also strongly emphasises the teacher’s role to also provide appropriate reinforcements to those behaviours which are considered more desirable (Canter, 2010). Canter state that in order for effective classroom control, it is imperative for teachers to expect students to behave appropriately within the classroom, and to also understand and recognise that some students ‘choose’ not to behave appropriately; although they can. This concept for teachers’ to understand relies heavily on their personal belief that they have the ability to maintain classroom control (Rogers, 2011).

The significant aspect for the assertive teacher to possess in order to maintain a well disciplined classroom environment is the ability to establish explicit instructions and enforce them consistently to the students (Canter, 2010). Through recent experiences, an example of a teacher consistently applying the classroom rules and expectations was demonstrated. This situation involved a student who continually displayed offensive behaviour towards another student who was physically smaller in size. During one incident, the teacher observes the student’s behaviour and firmly stated to the disruptive student to stop fighting as they will not tolerate their behaviour in class. The teacher also provided the choice of discontinuing the disruptive behaviour or a severe admittance to the Principal’s office. The student reacted with pleading to not be sent to the Principal’s office, as they were frightened of him. However, the teacher stated that if the behaviour continued, then this would be the consequence of that repeated offense. Within this example, the teacher demonstrated the assertive role of classroom discipline, through the actions of intending to follow through with their instruction. This example highlights the popularity of the Assertive Discipline model within the classroom as it represents the simplest behaviour discipline model to integrate within the classroom. The effectiveness of this approach has been widely depicted across the world, as it addresses student behaviour; rather than student character (Fetherston, 2006). Its impact with linking the personal desires of a teacher’s
philosophy with the involvement of parents and administrators throughout the discipline process, allows teachers to be able to implement an effective discipline model in the classroom.

Applying these theories into practice requires teachers to examine the principles and understandings associated within both these theories. As mentioned above, both the Behaviour Modification model and the Assertive Discipline model share similar principles and understandings with behaviour management in the classroom. In order to effectively integrate both these theories within the classroom environment, there are fundamental phases which need to be addressed firstly. The most significant of all phases is associated with the requirement of the teacher to establish sound relationships with their students. Through forming these relationships, the teacher is able to earn respect through “ensuring students understand that it is their behaviour the teacher is punishing; not them” (Ramon, 2008, p. 127). One other essential phase is for teachers to implement effective classroom discipline within first contact with the students. With this approach, the teacher is able to effectively establish the limits and expectations of the students which will then aide in maintaining control for teachers; especially first-year teachers (Fetherston, 2006). The implementation of Skinner’s Behaviourist model and Canter’s Assertive Discipline model within the classroom requires an integration of both as there is some differences between both theories. This particular discipline plan will emphasise the integrated principle of both unacceptable and acceptable behaviours being acknowledged by the teacher, however, with the focus of providing rewards to acceptable behaviours and providing punishment strategies for unacceptable ones; to encourage more desirable behaviour in the classroom. O’Neill & Stephenson (2012) confirmed the effectiveness of the integration of both these theories into the classroom. An example which exemplifies the effectiveness of both theories involved the following incident. This incident occurred when the teacher noticed a few students not listening to them while stating explicit instructions for an activity. At first, the teacher ignored the students’ misbehaviour and continued speaking to the class. Then
the teacher stopped the class and demanded all students involved to move away from one another or else there were to be serious consequences. However, the same students were still exhibiting unacceptable behaviour so the teacher stopped the class again. The teacher asked the misbehaving students to return to their desks and firmly stated that their punishment would be staying in during lunchtime. To reinforce the appropriate behaviour, the teacher praised the rest of the class and provided them with 10 table points each. As demonstrated within this incident, the teacher was able to re-establish the appropriate behaviours within the classroom using reinforcers for acceptable behaviours and punishment for unacceptable ones (Mackay, 2008). It is significant for teachers to continually reinforce the desired behaviours as well as making connections between what is appropriate and what is considered inappropriate. To ensure teachers can institute both types of behaviours and provide relevant reinforcement strategies, planning becomes extremely important. Through thorough planning, effective discipline plans can be incorporated into the classroom where both theories are acknowledged and provide successful order and control for the assertive teacher.

Through practical teaching, teachers can provide a positive learning environment which addresses behaviour management and discipline issues through an assertive manner. In order to establish a positive learning environment which reflects successful learning, the teacher must critically examine behaviour management theories. Examining behaviour management theories enables the teacher to associate the principles within the theories to their own personal beliefs and practices of teaching. As mentioned above, both B.F Skinner’s Behaviour Modification model and Canter’s Assertive Discipline model can be implemented effectively as their underlying principles and understandings share common similarities. Through an effective discipline plan within an organised learning environment, the success of the learning involved will enhance and overall minimise the possibility of any discipline problems to occur.

Word Count: 1450
References


