

Applying behaviorist theory to solve the "classroom clown" problem

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Abstract. Classroom clowns refer to those students whose performance is exaggerated and disturbs the classroom order. Their negative performance even becomes more serious under the criticism of the teachers and becomes a difficult problem in classroom teaching. This paper analyzes the reasons for the behavior of the clowns in the classroom by using the behaviorism theory in psychology and puts forward effective solutions.

Keywords: Classroom clown; Behaviorist theory; Cause analysis; Solution.

1. Question

Many teachers will find such a class of students: they have average grades, but they actively participate in whatever questions the teacher asks, regardless of whether the answers are correct, and they especially like to interrupt the teacher's class, sometimes even making a fool of themselves in the classroom, making everyone laugh.

If the teacher criticizes, they often not only do not show guilt but also seem a little excited. When criticized, they promise to be good, but when they return to the classroom, they are back to their old ways. There is a foreign term for this type of student: "classroom clown".

So, why are these students willing to be "classroom clowns" and how should teachers deal with these students?

2. Cause Analysis

2.1 Attract the attention of teachers and classmates

It is human nature to desire the attention of others (David et al., 2002), and many studies have shown that most disruptive behaviors in elementary and middle school are caused by students' desire to attract the attention of teachers and classmates (Liu, 2013). The behavior of "classroom clowns", who actively participate in class regardless of whether the answers are correct or not, especially like to interrupt in class, deliberately make a fool of themselves to make everyone laugh, and get excited instead of feeling guilty after being criticized, reflects their desire for attention from others, and the underlying reasons for this desire include extroverted personality and family factors. The underlying reasons for this desire for attention include extraversion and family factors. However, according to Skinner's operant conditioning theory, the teacher's criticism and the students' laughter acted as reinforcers (S) to strengthen the disruptive behaviors (R) of the classroom clown, which increased the frequency of the disruptive behaviors of the classroom clown.

2.2 Psychological characteristics of "classroom clowns" with low self-esteem

According to cognitive dissonance theory, when there is an inconsistency between an individual's attitude and behavior, it can lead to psychological tension, and the individual will use cognitive or behavioral changes to try to reach a new balance in order to eliminate the tension. The "classroom clown" is likely indifferent to the teacher's reminders or criticisms because he or she uses low self-esteem to reconcile his or her disruptive behavior with his or her guilt-free attitude of "I'm just like that, what can you do?" (Qiu, 2015). In this way, on the one hand, the teacher's criticism or classmates' laughter serves as reinforcement to satisfy their need for attention and reinforces classroom disruptive

behavior; on the other hand, classroom clowns view classroom disruptive behavior as effective operant behavior.

2.3 The role of models

According to Bandura's social learning theory, the abnormal behavior of "classroom clowns" is likely to have been acquired by observing other students successfully gaining attention from others with similar disruptive behaviors.

3. Solution

3.1 Establish classroom discipline rules

Before correcting the behavior of "classroom clowns," it is important for the teacher to show students head-on what is right and what is wrong, and to establish appropriate rewards and sanctions.

3.2 Use of operant conditioning principle of action

3.2.1 Fading

According to Skinner's operant conditioning principle, any response that follows a reinforcing stimulus has a tendency to recur; if no reinforcement is given after the behavior occurs, the behavior will gradually fade away. The need for attention is satisfied by the teacher's criticism or the laughter of classmates as reinforcement, leading the "classroom clown" to perceive the disruptive behavior as valid operant behavior, thus reinforcing the disruptive behavior. Therefore, teachers can find students who frequently laugh at classroom clowns and negotiate with them not to give them any reinforcement or to ignore their words or actions when they are deliberately acting out in order to subdue their disruptive behavior.

3.2.2 Punishment

According to Skinner's operant conditioning principle, the presentation of aversive stimuli or the elimination of pleasant stimuli can diminish behavior. Because direct, severe criticism in class may act as a reinforcer for the disruptive behavior of the "classroom clown," the teacher can conduct individual conversations outside of class. During the conversation, the teacher may impose appropriate punishments based on the initial punishment rules, such as helping to clean up the class or writing a review.

3.2.3 Reinforcement of correct behavior

According to Skinner's operant conditioning principle, the presentation of a pleasant stimulus or the elimination of an aversive stimulus can lead to enhanced behavior. According to the initial reward rules, the "classroom clown" is praised and rewarded if he or she complies with classroom discipline. At the same time, according to the reinforcement principle, a continuous approach strategy can be adopted and each correct behavior can be reinforced in the early stages of behavior modification (e.g., praise for keeping the correct behavior for 15 minutes at first) and gradually shifted to intermittent reinforcement as the correct behavior grows stronger.

3.3 Using social learning theory

3.3.1 Provide positive role models for "classroom clowns"

According to Bandura's social learning theory, an observer is reinforced when he or she sees a role model being reinforced. Accordingly, the "classroom clown" can be repositioned in the classroom next to the disciplined classmates, so that he or she can see the disciplined classmates receiving positive attention for correct behavior, and then listen to the observational learning alternative to reinforce the correct behavior. At the same time, this method of seating transfer also reduces the amount of false reinforcement given by surrounding students to the disruptive behavior of the classroom clown.

3.3.2 Provide negative role model examples for "classroom clowns"

Observing or listening to the behavior of role models increases the speed of learning and avoids experiencing negative consequences of the behavior. The "classroom clown" can be introduced to cases where students who also disrupt the classroom are punished so that they can correct their behavior through alternative learning.

3.3.3 Increase the self-esteem of "classroom clowns"

According to cognitive dissonance theory, when there is an inconsistency between an individual's attitude and behavior, it leads to psychological tension, and the individual tries to achieve a new balance by changing cognition or behavior in order to eliminate the tension. The reason why "classroom clowns" remain indifferent even after teachers remind or criticize them is probably because they use low self-esteem to reconcile with their disruptive behavior. Therefore, on the one hand, classroom clowns can be counseled to help them reverse the misconception that disruptive behavior in the classroom is an effective manipulative behavior to gain the attention of others and to help them improve their self-esteem through communication and guidance. On the other hand, the "classroom clown" can be assigned a suitable role in the classroom, such as disciplinarian or teacher's assistant, to satisfy his or her sense of classroom participation and strong attention-seeking needs, and at the same time, put him or her in a high self-esteem position that is not consistent with his or her original behavior, so that his or her self-esteem can be enhanced, and after his or her self-esteem is enhanced, he or she can change his or her original self-esteem in order to eliminate cognitive dissonance and change the original misbehavior.

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