

ECIE4012

The Principles of
Learning and Teaching

Portfolio

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Blog 1

In the following blog, I will be showing my understanding of a theory from the famous 'Frederik Burrhus Skinner' (1904-1990). Skinner's theories demonstrate the illusion of 'behaviourism'.

Who was Skinner? – Skinner was one of the most influential theorists of the 20th century. Skinner believed behaviourism looks at the environmental and external factors that have a prominent role in influencing behaviours. He defined his own research of behaviourism as '*Operant Conditioning*'.

What is Operant Conditioning?



'Skinner's box' was an experimental chamber used to control an animal's behaviour. It was a learning process where voluntary behaviour is changed by consequences like reinforcement or punishments. Skinner used a device to study animal behaviour and its relationship to consequences. The box had a lever that an animal could manipulate to deliver a food reward or **trigger** an electric shock. Skinner used rats and pigeons in the 'Skinner box'.

BUT...Did it work? – actually YES! Skinner's operant conditioning box trained animals to perform specific actions like pressing the lever for food. Amazing right?

- **Reinforcement** increases the likelihood of a positive behaviour being repeated.
- **Punishment** decreases the likelihood of a behaviour being repeated.

How would you influence behaviour? Would YOU reward wanted behaviour like Skinner did? What would your reinforcements be? So many questions and answers that could be discovered.

Did you know, Skinner's theories were all based and predicted on 'Behaviourism'? He believed that we would predict and control behaviours by manipulation. He believed



behaviour is not random but that it is shaped by the environment and the role models around the individual.

Lets talk.....

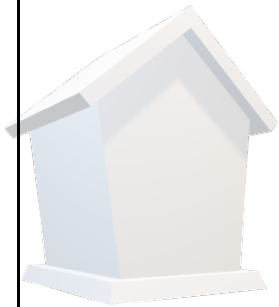
Behaviourism in the classroom plays a large roll in a child's learning. It reinforces wanted behaviours, positive learning outcomes and builds good future relationships.

Rewards for positive behaviours:

- Dojo points, stickers, extra play time, positive praise

Punishments for unwanted behaviours:

- Detention, loss of golden time, letter home, warnings



(Griffiths,2025)

What do you think Skinner would suggest about behaviourism in the classroom? He believed that behavioural principles in the classroom could greatly improve teaching and learning. He saw a classroom as an environment where behaviour could be shaped. As a learning practitioner myself, I strongly agree. Without adult modelling influencing in the classroom, children/young adults would be able to view positive experiences of behaviourism.

According to Skinner, students learn best when they receive **immediate** reinforcements.

- Correct answer - instant reward
- Incorrect answer - immediate correction

Skinner's theory has been used in various areas including teaching and learning in the classroom, animal training, and therapy. All used to shape and change behaviour through consequences. The 3 term contingency of Skinner behaviourism theory are stimulus-response-reinforcer!

Applying Skinners theory in the classroom is simply quite measurable. Teachers and LSA's apply behaviourist methods through positive/negative reinforcement, punishment, modelling, and direct instruction.

What about rewards and reinforcements? The following table of interest shows the variety

Positive Behaviours	Negative Behaviours
	
• Smiling • Polite • Hand up when wanting to speak • Helping • Kind • Completing tasks on time • Effort • Respect • Sharing • Managing emotions appropriately	• Hitting/kicking • Ignoring • Lying • Throwing objects • Answering back • Wandering • Not completing tasks on time • Refusal • Inappropriate language • Aggressive or harmful behaviours

“Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten” (B.F Skinner 1904-1990)

The core of Skinner's theory is a learning process to which it involves a behaviour and its consequence. Anything that strengthens or increases the likelihood of a positive behaviour again should therefore have a reinforcement. Positive reinforcement adds a desirable stimulus to increase a behaviour just like if you give a student praise for putting all their books back in the correct draws. Punishment will weaken or decrease overtime the likelihood of the behaviour happening again just like not completing tasks on time. So, Skinner said that behaviour is a result of environmental stimuli and their consequences, positive adult modelling is crucial in a child/young person learning.

Do you agree with Skinner's and his Operant conditioning theory? What could he have done different to further his theory?



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Blog 2

In the following informative blog, I will be exploring and analysing theorist Friedrich Froebel. Who is Froebel and what was he famous for? Well, Froebel was born in 1782 in Germany and he was a leading theorist of his time. Froebel was also the founder of the first nursery school and kindergarten.

So, what is Froebel's theory? Froebel's play theory highlights that through structured play, children gain a deeper understanding of the world around them, fostering imagination, problem solving, independent thinking (Froebel, 2015 pp, 19-25) You name it!



Kindergarten Philosophy

(Griffiths, 2025)

Froebel created a set of gifts to support children's learning and development in his Kindergarten in Germany in the 1840s . These firsts were 6 sets of cubes, spheres and cylinders and included one of the FIRST sets of wooden blocks developed specifically for young children to explore and play with.

What does he mean Kindergarten may you ask? Kindergarten LITERALLY means 'Children's garden' which covers Froebels concept of 'a place for children' (Froebel 1840). Froebel believed that the best place for young children is a place where a child's nature can be developed and nurtured. The Froebel method supports whole child growth while fostering creative expression in early learning. He introduced a child centred approach that is still today. He believed that Holden are naturally creative, curious, and capable learners who thrive in an environment that nurtures their abilities. The elements of the Froebelian approach:

- Nature and outdoor learning
- Educational materials
- Unity and connected (Froebel, 1782-1852)
- Play as fundamental

What is meant by "Learning through play?"

Learning through play is how children express themselves. It means gaining knowledge, skills and understanding by actively engaging in play-based activities rather than only through direct instruction (The Education of Man 1826). In this approach, play is not just for fun, it is

a meaningful way children learn. While playing, learners explore ideas, experiment, solve problems and make sense of the world around them.

“Play is the purest, most spiritual activity of childhood, and at the same time, typical of human life as a whole” (Froebel 1826)

Froebel believed that children learnt through play, would you agree? He believed that their own activities and skills would develop by their own, personal approach and original experiences (Froebel 1782-1852). The gifts that Froebel created eg wooden blocks would influence a child's education. Resources, multiagency and parents too are believed to be an impacting factor on education said Froebel. Why parents you ask? Well... the importance of supporting family in their education is a mandatory field to cover. As familiar role models, parents are the day-to-day adult modelling figures. Positive relationships between teachers, multiagency and educators themselves is crucial to a young person's development. From birth, children learn through the interactions with parents, which shape development across several key areas such as cognitive development, emotional development, social development, physical development and wellbeing, moral and behavioural development. Would you agree? Is Froebel correct? What are your experiences with “Learning through play?”



So, what happened to Froebel?

Froebel's theories on play, was a heavily strong fluency but ultimately had along lasting impact on early childhood education. Froebels ideas spread across Germany and other European countries during his lifetime. Imagine being a huge influencer on education. However, if you didn't know, unfortunately Froebel died in June 1852. After his death, Froebel's work became politically controversial.

- **FUN FACT** - In 1851, the Prussian government banned kindergartens. Froebel's ideas were wrongly associated with radicalism and socialism partly because kindergartens encouraged free thinking and child autonomy.

However, despite the ban, Froebel's ideas spread internationally, especially to

- Britain
- The United States

The ban was eventually lifted in 1860, after which kindergartens reopened in Germany.

So, Froebel's impact today on learning through play is now seen as the foundation to early childhood education. His emphasis on play-based learning has strongly approached early years frameworks. In my own opinion, I will still continue to support my educators by learning through play. It is a strong and promising learning development strategy with many exciting ideas.



Blog 2: Reference list

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Blog 3

Let's talk, together let's Identify, discuss, and evaluate the theoretical approaches to learning linked to my theories from Blogs 1 and 2. In Blog 1 I chose to write and look into Skinner(1938) and in Blog 2 I looked at Froebels(1840). We have looked so far at the theory about Skinner and "Skinner's box" and Froebels Kindergarten and learning through play approach(1837). The question is how are these two theories linked? How could two completely different people have such a realistic, delivering approach but not familiar acquaintances? The realisation of the theories is such a conversation starter. Realistically, if you think about it, 2 theories linked is 2 worlds that collide but make sense. Skinners box(1938) and Froebels learning through play theory actually have truly little in common. However, what they DO have in common is that the primary link is that both theories attempt to explain how learning occurs, but they do so from opposing philosophical viewpoints.



We need to break down the two theories and look a-bit deeper. I created a table to show the processes from both theories and what both theorists expected from the theories for them to work. Each minor detail for each theory means something, it counts.

	<u>Froebels Theory</u>	<u>Skinner's Theory</u>
Learning process	A deep, internal drive to learn that grows through self-directed activity, open exploration, and play.	Reinforcement and punishment
Role of the learner	Learning that is child-centred and self directed supported by autonomy and a natural motivation to explore	Environment controlled

Role of educator	An attentive facilitator who nurtures learning through observation and a purposeful, stimulating environment	Instructor who designed contingencies of reinforcement to reduce specific behaviours
Focus	Overall development – Physical, cognitive, social, and emotional.	Observable behaviours and the modification of those behaviours.

Drawing links between these two theories I found 2 different core differences. The 2 differences being the source of motivation and the nature of learning.

- The source of motivation – Skinner, a behaviourist said that behaviour is determined by external reinforcements, rewards and punishments and Froebel believed that children have a desire to learn and understand the world through active engagement.
- Nature of learning – Skinner's theory involves conditioning specific behaviours controlled through consequences. Skinner demonstrated this with animals in a 'Skinner's box'. Froebels theory involves imaginative development through play with materials like gifts/blocks.

So, personally overlooking I suggest that Froebel focuses on natural development through personal expression whilst Skinner focuses on controlling behaviour through environmental control. Would you agree?

Let's talk about Skinner first shall we? Skinner's box was a chamber that was used to perform Operant Conditioning research using animals, usually rats. In the box, there was a lever that an animal could use to release food or water in the chamber as a reinforcement. I personally think this is a reasonable and practical approach, BUT do I understand Froebels theory approach too. Froebels "Learn through play" theory shows us that the highest form of human development is natural and from simple resources. Froebel created "gifts" like wooden blocks and balls to create problem solving all within a supportive environment where teachers would act as guides. The core principles being self-expression, guided discovery and play as the main foundation.

Connecting the two theories shows us that the primary link is both theories from Skinner and Froebel, try to explain how learning occurs but they do so from completely different approaches and completely different resources. Skinner using a chamber with animals, and Froebel making gifts to push problem solving/challenges.

What is your opinion?

My personal opinion is that the best theory is Froebel. Using a creative and problem-solving approach and also getting other role models involved. What do you think? Did you know...Froebels theory is used today. Opening up possibilities rather than minimising them. It helps children develop autonomy and self discipline which remains a powerful approach today.

What a combination of interesting and approachable theories don't you think? Meaningful, realistic but harmless.



Blog 3: Reference list

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Blog 4

Well, welcome to the finale of my blogs. I would like to talk about my own firsthand experiences in my own classroom with you, relating to the 2 theorists I chose and how I have personally used their theories in working practice. What could be more interesting than talking to someone who has used these theories and gained experience in a local environment. Education is fuelled with a wild variety of experiences and 'the unknown.' I mean, everyday is different, facing challenges, diverse types of learners, chaos, happiness... I could go on. We all know how important education is to everyone, but the foundation begins with our early learners. But how do we engage them? How do we keep our learners interested?

I am going to start with telling you about a personal example in my own setting. Believe it or not, I use my two chosen theorists' theories usually daily. In my earlier blogs I spoke to you about Skinner's box(1938) and Froebels 'learning through play'(1837) strategies. However, I am going to tell you about my personal experience using Skinner's box theory and how I used it in my own classroom. Reframing this, instead of having a 'box/chamber,' I have a GOLDEN TIME REWARD CHART. Sounds good right? Sounds positive? Just like Skinner's box there is a reinforcement and punishment to trigger wanted behaviours.

So, the **positives** are

- Each tick for good and positive behaviour earns 5 minutes onto Friday's golden time
- You can earn up to 45 minutes golden time every Friday
- You can choose to do anything you like within reason

And the **negatives** –

- If you get 3 strikes in the warning box for unwanted behaviours, you will lose your Friday Golden time
- You might not have any ticks at all, all week
- Any staff member can have input in the Golden time reward chart



To create a powerful tool such as a Golden time reward chart, I had to use resources and theorists like Skinner to give evidence as to why I was using such tools and what I was going to gain from using the chart.

So, its simple but straight forward... the charts is designed specifically for all educational needs starting from mainstream to special needs. On an A3 sheet (suitable for all vision), **BOLD** and **LARGE** writing, white background with only black writing so the page isn't too

busy, and with 1 specific symbol to each column, there is a names column, and a section for each amount of minuets and a **WARNINGS** strike box. Next to each pupil's name is there is a image of their face so they can formally find which section they are on! Each pupil always starts with 10 minutes of Golden time so they have to work towards getting more but there is no negativity to begin.

"Pupils love it and are always checking" (2025)– quote from a fellow college

To create the 'rewards chart for Golden Time', I researched Skinner's box (1938) to understand how to create a project to help pursue wanted behaviours.

	<u>Skinner's Box</u>	<u>My Golden time reward chart</u>
Positive	Positive, learnt behaviours trigger a lever to release food and water	Gets time towards golden time and choice of what activity the pupils would like
Negative	No food or water	Looses time or does not gain any time towards golden time

Schools' policies want you to make sure you relate positively towards any situation or circumstance. By reinforcing how a Friday afternoon could be a positive, downtime experience you can gain wanted behaviours. By starting with 10 minutes of Golden time, each learner can work towards their goals without having a negative start. The terms can be long, and you want to keep the learners engaged and want to learn. I allow many different activities for Golden time rewards such as use o iPads, computers, board games, colouring or even allowing visits from other pupils from another class.

CHALLENGE: Create a task to create positive and wanted behaviours, what would you do?

Blog 4: Reference list

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