

Reinforcement as a Teaching Method in Nursing Education

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Education aims at full development of an individual's potentialities, abilities, skills as well as attitudes, values and personality. But due to lack of motivation and other factors the expected level of objectives are not achieved. In such a situation, reinforcement principles may prove to be useful.

Concept of Reinforcement

Reinforcement refers to any environmental event that increases the probability of a response. The environmental event acts as a stimulus a reinforcers-which is presented to a particular person (student) before or after she makes the response. The responses produced in connection with a particular stimulus show the change in behaviour of that particular person. The aim of nursing education is to bring change in the behaviour of the student nurse so as to prepare her for the practice of nursing in the clinical field.

In the reinforcement procedure, a stimulus is either added or withdrawn from the environment. The resultant effect is evident in the future behaviour (See figure 1)

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Fig. 1: Relationship of consequences of stimulus operation and their effect on behaviour.		
	Operation	
	Present stimulus	Withdraw stimulus
Increases behaviour	Positive Reinforcement	Negative Reinforcement
Decreases behaviour	Type I Punishment	Type II Punishment

Positive Reinforcement: The positive reinforcement occurs when behaviour is followed immediately by the presentation of a stimulus, thus, strengthening the response. To give example, a first year student nurse would feed a patient through ryles tube more efficiently if her clinical instructor approves and appreciates her nursing activity. Here the correct response/desired behaviour has been rewarded, hence, there is modification of behaviour. This reward can be verbal praise; or in the form of tokens like smile, nod, prize, etc.

Negative Reinforcement: The negative reinforcement occurs when the behaviour is followed immediately by the termination of the stimulus. To illustrate the point misbehaviour of a nursing student can increase as a result of being sent out of nursing con-

ference-room. The teacher might have sent the student out of the class as a punishment, but by walking out, the misbehaving student avoids conference-room activity and this treatment acts as a negative reinforcement, which if used too often can produce undesirable effects, e.g. student is likely to avoid such situation and develop aggressive behaviour toward the source of aversive stimulus (teacher/conference room).

Advantage of Reinforcement

- It increases the future probability of a wide range of behaviour in dealing with patients.
- It plays an important role in concept formation, in developing positive attitude and values and improves skill in nursing practice.

Educational Practice and Current Reinforcement Principles

Shortcomings	Suggested improvement
▪ Behaviour is dominated by aversion, stimulation, i.e., student usually learns to avoid the threat	Teacher can use a combination of positive and negative reinforcements. A teacher's job is to persistent and independent behaviour by application of reinforcement and then withdraw them gradually. This approach makes the activity itself a reinforcing factor for students and develops in them intrinsic motivation.
▪ Because of improper planning there is absence of programme of continuous reinforcement	Teacher can use reinforcement continuously to observe its effect of behaviour and may change it if necessary for instance to low grade student is found do better in nursing practice once she is appreciated and approved. She can be continuously approved or rewarded for her best performance so that she reaches average level.
▪ Great lapse of time between behaviour and its reinforcement	It is best to reinforce the desired behaviour immediately and appropriately e.g. daily evaluation of the students on the test taken at the end of month/session. Learning efficiency often increases if the student received feedback on the quality of her efforts
▪ Infrequency of reinforcement	A teacher can use a variety of reinforcements throughout the learning process because a simple nod/smile may have different meaning for different students. This, for example a teacher can use verbal reinforcement along with gestures. Micro-teaching techniques of student-teachers can prove effective in improving the skill of probing, reinforcement and interaction.
▪ Teacher cannot schedule reinforcement in crowded syllabus	She can plan her teaching process and can utilize different schedules of reinforcement process (continuous intermittent, no-reinforcement) and can modify it whenever and whatever it is necessary.
▪ Reinforcement is not generalized across time and setting	A teacher needs to reinforce her students at the place of work e.g. she can improve communication skill of a preliminary student, while she interacts with patients and not necessarily while delivering health talk to a group of patients.

Reinforcement for Improving the Quality Patient Care

- Reinforcement can prove to be an ideal method for improving and modifying the behaviour of students who are new to the nursing profession.
- The quality of patient care can be improved if the nursing staff are rewarded for their performances. Aggarwal (1972), in a study found that nurses who were rewarded very little for their outstanding performance were least satisfied which affects the quality of patient care.
- The verbal and non verbal behaviour of the nursing superintendent can be reinforcing factors in shaping the behaviour of nurses in the wards.

Conclusion

Reinforcement plays an important role in encouraging creative behaviour. Teachers being powerful reinforcing agents can effect creative behaviour among nursing students by the demands they make on student by the expectations they have form them, and by their reactions.

It is the best method for modifying behaviour with respect to independent study methods, and if practice-teaching is combined with positive reinforcement it can enhance autonomy and confidence in decision making in patient care situations though its importance diminishes somewhat in higher learning (Problem-solving) situation because successful learning at these levels generates its own feedback.

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