Recap of Lesson Study 5

On March 25, 2022, Talladega College hosted the Lesson Study “Rising Up: Active Learning”. Ms. Tiffany Sayles was the facilitator for this lesson, and she utilized the concepts: decoding quotes, scenarios, charts, stories, and game time. This lesson continued the ethics thread that had been emphasized in the previous lesson studies. To guide the lesson, Mrs. Sayles used the inquiry question: “How does operant conditioning motivate and promote learning in a variety of settings?” To focus the lesson, Mrs. Sayles utilized the following standards:

- Describe applications of psychology.
- Engage in innovative and integrative thinking and problem solving.
- Interact effectively with others.

As a means of guiding her lesson, Mrs. Sayles indicated that students will build upon prior knowledge utilizing their background knowledge to connect to the lesson content. Some of the misconceptions that were addressed were students’ previous association of negative reinforcement as a negative concept and positive punishment as a positive concept.

To introduce the lesson, Mrs. Sayles used quotes by B.F. Skinner and Nelson Mandela. Students were allowed time to reflect on the quotes. B.F. Skinner’s quote was: “A failure is not always a mistake; it may simply be the best one can do under the circumstances. The real mistake is to stop trying.” Nelson Mandela’s quote was: “I never lose. I either win or learn.” Three students shared their thoughts about these quotes. McKaela said, “there will always be something that you can take away from the experience. Make improvements.” Iyana noted, “Learn from what you did and you are still winning.” Elijah said, “You can never really lose. If you learn, you can take

that and go even further next time. Keep it positive." By utilizing these quotes, Mrs. Sayles engaged the students and allowed them to think and provide their perspectives.

Upon completion of the sharing of their perspectives, Mrs. Sayles provided a personal and academic example that were personally relevant to the quotes for her. Her personal example involved riding a bicycle and going through bruises, bumps, and pain to learn to stop the bicycle. Her academic example was going back to school to earn her psychology degree when she was a wife and had 3 school-aged children. Although this was a tough season for her, Mrs. Sayles discussed how she persevered and achieved her goal. She then challenged the students to think of a time when they were challenged to learn something that was really difficult and how they worked through it. One student shared an example of being an athlete and running track. She discussed the bruises that she received and how academically it was necessary for her to compartmentalize many things. Gabby discussed coaching track for kids and how she learned patience. Furthermore, being able to coach track, work a job, and attend classes taught her how to work on balance and time management.

Students were allowed to watch a brief YouTube video concerning operant conditioning. Mrs. Sayles then related the examples to operant conditioning. Immediately afterwards, she discussed how operant conditioning was a term coined by B. F. Skinner. Our behaviors are not indicative of what we are motivated to do; rather, they are due to what happens when I do particular actions. This term was heavily influenced by Edward Thorndike's Law of Effects. Based upon their work, we learned that more desirable outcomes are more likely to be repeated. Undesirable outcomes are less likely to be repeated. Consequences that follow our behaviors determine if they are strengthened or weakened. During this time, students were allowed to take notes as Ms. Sayles did a grid displaying stimulus presented or removed and subsequent behaviors being

increased or decreased. Four classes of stimuli were presented: Positive Reinforcement, negative reinforcement, positive punishment, and negative punishment. Throughout this learning segment, Mrs. Sayles reiterated that positive is about adding and negative is about removal.

Immediately after thoroughly discussing these concepts, Mrs. Sayles allowed the students to work in groups to practice scenarios on a handout. During the review portion, several of the students challenged some of the responses. Mrs. Sayles pointed out that sometimes there were not absolutes. She emphasized that it is a matter of perspective in many situations. It was beautiful to observe the way that Mrs. Sayles guided the students through this activity.

Next, Mrs. Sayles did a group activity with the students who had the same color popsicle sticks. Each group selected a reporter and a recorder. They focused on the article they were assigned: red did the article on page 18, yellow did the article on page 21, and turquoise did the article on page 24. They were asked to extract the reinforcement learning objectives from each article. Mrs. Sayles rotated amongst the groups while they worked to observe and answer any clarifying questions they may have had. She used music to signal that time was coming to an end. Once time ended, the students were allowed to share what they extracted based upon positive and negative punishment and reinforcement in the articles.

After the students completed this activity, Mrs. Sayles allowed them to play a brief game where they were required to respond to a few more scenarios. They used sticky notes to write PP, PR, NP and NR. As she shared the various scenarios with the students, they had to hold up the corresponding sticky paper to indicate what type of operant conditioning they believed was being used. Upon completion, students were asked to respond quickly to the inquiry question. After responding they were asked to ball up the response and throw the wadded paper into the middle

of the classroom. If time had not been a factor, they would have picked up the paper and shared with their classmates and had discussion.

Mrs. Sayles taught lesson very closely correlated with the written lesson. The activities were directly relevant to what was emphasized with the inquiry question. The alignment of the activities allowed students to practice each step of the way. What was even more apparent is that the activities demonstrated have been practiced with the students in the classroom. The students were able to provide thorough responses to each of the activities provided by Mrs. Sayles. I would have loved for the students to be able to share their takeaways out loud.

Based upon what was observed, one question that we should all ponder: is our classroom time allotment too short? Each of the lesson studies have followed along beautifully with the written lesson plans, and they have been engaging for the students; however, time has repeatedly been a factor. In fact, during the reflection, Mrs. Sayles indicated that the lesson she tried to cover during a 50-minute period was what she normally covered during a few days. This allowed the students to think deeper about their responses and engage more with the instructor and one another. Are our time frames that we utilize designed more for the sage on stage and less for engagement through active learning? The timeframe is not a long enough duration for students to actively think, process, and engage with one another. This is something that we may have previously not considered, but this is a pivotal component for students to actually achieve the level of learning that we desire. Truly listening does not allow students to learn as much as they would acquire if we actually allow them to continually engage.

Overall, Mrs. Sayles did an excellent job with this lesson. The issue I raised immediately prior to this paragraph is reflective upon a much larger paradigm involving how we teach and the teaching that has previously been modeled for us. Even as I reflect upon the edTPA process,

there are great expectation surrounding planning, instruction, and assessment with these activities; however, there is very little time afforded for depth of knowledge. We, as educators, need to revisit the process to see if we are doing the educational process an injustice by having so much build into tight timeframes. Maybe we should have a more open ended approach with less breath and more depth within the curriculum so that true learning can be achieved.