



SeaWorld/Busch Gardens Husbandry and Training

9-12 Classroom Activities

Train a Person

OBJECTIVE

The student will understand and apply the principles of operant conditioning to shape the behavior of a classmate.

ACTION

1. Discuss as a class some physical behaviors people can teach to others. (Juggle, throw a ball, turn in a circle, type with ten fingers, do somersaults, respond to a whistle.) Some learned responses are conscious efforts, such as typing or turning somersaults. Others may be subtle. What happens when you stare at a person for a long time? Or stand too close to a person? Or turn away from a person who is talking?
2. Have students pair up and decide on a behavior they want to shape. Each pair may choose a different behavior or the class may all choose the same. Decide who will be the “trainer” and who will be the “learner.”
3. Student pairs should choose one or more reinforcers. Trainers also need to define a target and steps needed to achieve the final behavior. Trainers should NOT talk to the learners about the final desired behavior or the steps to be taken to reach it.
4. Have students practice for an actual training session the next day or next class period. Bring any extra training materials, such as objects used for targets, from home.
5. Student pairs work together for 15 minutes. Gather trainers to discuss problems they are having. Learners can meet to discuss problems too.
6. Trainers try again. Ask for volunteers to demonstrate learned behaviors. Ask the class to identify reinforcers. Do some work better than others? Which behaviors were successful?

DEEPER DEPTHS

Have students try training a sibling or parent at home without telling them what they are trying to do. Can behavior be changed?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

To train an animal it often is helpful to lead the animal through a behavior in small steps. SeaWorld trainers use their hands as focal points. When a behavior takes place farther away, a tool called a target is used as an extension of the hand. A target directs an animal toward a position or direction. How is an animal trained to follow a target? Trainers touch the target gently to the animal and reinforce the animal. This is repeated several times. Next the target is positioned a few inches from the animal. Trainers wait for the animal to touch the target. The animal has learned that when it touches the target, it gets reinforced, so it moves toward the target and touches it. Eventually the animal follows the target.

MATERIALS

For each student group:

- targets (pole, broomstick, yardstick or similar)



A SeaWorld trainer communicates with a false killer whale with a hand signal.