I want to describe to you the behavioral perspective of looking at youngsters with social, emotional, and behavior problems. As I see a perspective, a perspective is something you look through; it's a way of looking at things, and I think that's the most helpful way to think about the behavioral perspective. It's a way of observing; it's a way of thinking about behavior. Behaviorism, formally defined, is an examination of human activity to discover recurrent patterns and to deduce from those observations what rules or laws are governing these actions.

To my mind, the important aspect for us as educators is to think in terms of applied behavioral analysis of our students and of their needs. Applied behavior analysis is the main modus operandi of behaviorists, and it's one that has a great deal of merit just to think about. By applied, we mean that the analysis is going to be used in actual practice or to work out practical problems. When we think about the word behavioral, that's the way the person behaves or acts. Formally, the definition is "an organism's muscular or glandular response to stimulations, especially those that can be observed." So when we're thinking about muscular response, we're thinking just about what a person does, his behavior. When we think about a glandular response we really are also thinking about how a person feels. If we think of a simple example of the adrenal glands, we know that has a lot to do with feelings of anger and fright. So, we're going to be concerned here with a full complex of these concerns. And finally, when we engage in analysis we are studying and thinking. What we want to do is to separate or break up the whole into its parts and find out the nature, proportion, and interrelationship of them. And that's what I think we do then in applied behavioral analysis.

The way we conduct this analysis, a general paradigm for thinking about what we will be doing, is as simple as ABC. This is a very familiar construct. A stands for the antecedent of a behavior; what happened before the behavior of concern occurred. B is the behavior of concern. And C is for the consequences of the behavior, its results, outcome, or effect. So, in making a behavioral analysis and in thinking in terms of how we will be behaviorists,
we observe what's happening right now, what happened just before, what happened afterwards. These are the parts of the whole that we analyze to understand how they're related, how they work together, cause and result from each other. And then we draw conclusions about what is keeping that behavior going on and on; what keeps a child doing the same thing over and over again. And the ones that worry us most are those things that don't follow the rules of our school or of our society or even of common sense. What the child does is actually following some rule of behavior. Not a rule that was written by someone, but a rule that is rather more like a law of nature. Put most simply, these laws or rules of behavior are:

- Creatures are more likely to do next time the thing that worked that got them what they wanted this time. Then we will say that a child was reinforced for what she or he did.

- If the outcome of what was done this time was unpleasant for the behaver, then we say that she or he was punished for that action, is less likely to do that again.

- If the person didn't get any reaction at all from the behavior, he or she is likely eventually to stop doing it altogether. And then we say the behavior has been extinguished.

These are rules of behavior for all creatures. Our challenge is to analyze human behavior, specifically our children's behavior. Then, as their teachers, we help them learn ways to act, react, and interact that will bring about the outcomes they desire: one, acceptance by those they care about; two, competence, a feeling of doing things well; and three, significance as worthwhile people in the world, people who make a difference.

When we see things through this behavioral perspective, we are continually analyzing not only our children's behaviors but our own, too. As a teacher, I am in a position to establish an environment and select activities that will be likeliest to reinforce my students' productive, competent, socially-desirable behaviors. I will recognize, however, that many or even most of the reinforcers or punishers that are influencing my students are not under my direct control. I am only one factor of the combined impact of my students' friends, enemies, families, and personal heroes.

Part of the behavioral perspective is the recognition of the unique power and effectiveness of social consequences on human beings. It is social learning that most strongly affects us, and so we can call one manifestation of behaviorism social learning theory.
When I have the trained ability to analyze what's going on, I will make hypotheses about just what is reinforcing on a desirable behavior or behaviors. I will make the best plan I can to arrange things so that my students are likeliest to experience personal and social satisfaction for doing the things that are right and productive.

Then I can test my hypotheses and plans and check out these educated guesses that I have made:

• I can observe my students' reactions to changes I arranged in antecedents; the things that seem to provoke or prompt certain of their behaviors.

• I can observe what happens when I change the consequences they experience for their behaviors; when I reinforce the things they do that will help them out, or punish the things they do that are absolutely unacceptable, or ignore the annoying-but-tolerable behaviors that we would like to extinguish.

• I can continually analyze myself as a teacher or an agent of change: my words and actions, the assignments I give; the social interactions I encourage, permit, or discourage; the richness of the reinforcements I arrange to help kids experience successes.

• Having done all of this, I can change what I do to make things better, continually analyzing and re-analyzing and applying what I learn to work out the practical problems that we all experience.

Now there is a down-side to behaviorism as it is often practiced. We educators have tended to take short cuts, forgetting to analyze and jumping to apply certain standard interventions, even when they don't make any true behavioral sense at all. We forget to be analytical, that part of the analytical behavioral analysis that is so important to us. When we do that, we run the risk of doing things that are actually non-productive, even harmful, thinking, perhaps, that we are just being good behaviorists.

Here are some examples:

Our field, perhaps more than any other, has glommed onto the notion that positive reinforcement and punishment meted out in formal systems of rewards and penalties are mandated as the primary components of BD classrooms. The over-use of over-simplified maxims of reinforcement theory
has been aptly dubbed **pop behaviorism**. Reinforcers (such as tokens, dollars, stars, stickers, privileges) are awarded children for being good. Penalties (names on the board, losses of points, trips to the time-out corner) are exacted for doing wrong. Some of these plans grow into extremely complex structures. Often they seem contrived primarily to permit teachers to control students instead of teaching students to control themselves. Some arrangements such as these may be necessary or helpful to use until a child begins to experience genuine social encouragement and internal motivation. But such techniques are by no means necessary for all kids—or even remotely sensible for some of them.

Social success and personal satisfaction are the reinforcers that will bring about enduring positive change. Contrived, artificial reinforcements are temporary replacements for (or stepping stones toward) the real thing, and using them is meaningless unless, first of all, their use is an outcome of a careful applied behavioral analysis and, two, that we see that they really work; that is, that we can observe and prove that they are a) making our students' lives better, b) teaching them to be socially competent, and c) helping them cope with their own problems and situations.

From a true behavioral perspective, we only know what works, what is really a reinforcer or a punisher, by the outcome that results when it is given to a behaver:

- It doesn't matter whether I meant the M&M I gave Sam for doing what I wanted to be a reinforcer or not; unless the effect of giving the m&m is that it did make Sam behave the same positive way again, the M&M wasn't a reinforcer.

- Similarly with punishment, unless the result of scolding or threatening Jessica or suspending her from school is that her undesirable behaviors decreased in number or severity, I wasn't really changing her behavior at all. I was just beleaguering her or doing something with my own anger. In fact, some oppositional children may find that all that exciting clamor actually is reinforcing, and they go on behaving more and more defiantly the more I scold, threaten, or penalize. On the other hand, if I give James an M&M for doing something I like, and James hates M&Ms or hates me for giving it to him so much that he never again does what it was I liked, then the M&M was a punisher, no matter what I meant by it.
Similarly, when we use pop-behaviorism, we sometimes ignore really awful behavior that needs to be negatively consequated or, to use the behaviorist’s term, punished. When we do, we actually reinforce the awful behavior we hope will go away. Elizabeth behaved awfully and got what she wanted, e.g., she got the toy, got the attention, got the teacher’s goat, without experiencing any discomfort except my ignoring, and that may have been no big deal for her.

The genuine behavioral perspective, then, is really about close and thoughtful analysis of what we see children do and what we ourselves do to encourage or discourage their doing it again. There are a thousand behavioral strategies we can learn and many of them have fancy names: DRA stands for differential reinforcement of alternative behaviors; time-out is short for time-out from reinforcement; positive practice is another such term. They are our power tools, but like all power tools, they must only be used with care and accuracy and after a full analysis of what needs fixing.

If used purely (as in the way that John Watson or B.F. Skinner talked about behaviorism), it rejects the concepts of mind and consciousness and focuses exclusively on behaviors; the actions that we can observe with our eyes. We can’t observe what brains are doing or how glands are causing things to splash around inside and make people feel angry or delightful.

But most of us educators are not willing to reject the importance of these because we don’t observe them with our own eyes. I will be as deeply concerned about what it is that my students think and how they feel as I will be about what they do. In fact, I will be likelier to make an effective analysis of their behaviors if I consider the thoughts and feelings that stimulated the behaviors. I will want to understand as fully as I can what my students know—their perceptions, their memories, and their judgments. These are the cognitions, and as they are all events, albeit invisible events occurring inside my students’ brains, I will subject them to the same kind of analyses as I use on their observable physical activities. I will know about them primarily by listening closely to what my students say. It is our human language that gives us a window through which to see and then begin to shape thoughts and feelings. Which of their ideas and beliefs are reinforced or punished by what happens? How can I teach this boy and that girl to think different thoughts about their experiences and social behaviors so that their feelings and the actions that flow from their thoughts will lead to more satisfying outcomes?

These considerations have led to new ways of helping people change called cognitive restructuring, or cognitive behavioral modification. My behavioral interventions will include teaching new things to think as well as
better ways to act. I will help them learn how to reinforce themselves by the things they say to themselves. I will involve them very directly in planning their programs. Together, we will work toward goals of achieving mastery, self-worth, and satisfying relationships with other adults and with other kids. My behavioral perspective will be one I share with each student, not just the name of something I do to him.