Using theory, critically discuss the challenges posed by internal and external factors on the learning environment

In this assignment the author will research the different internal and external factors that pose a challenge in the learning environment. The author will research what cognitive development is and what role it has on the influence on the development in a child's life. Discussing the different factors, the author will explore what behavior theorists have to offer and how their recommendations and theories differ on how these challenges are faced, what interventions can be put in place to help promote positive behavior and if these barriers are able to be overcome. Reflecting on the different kinds of challenges imposed on children through internal and external factors and the affects it has on an individual personally and in the learning environment, the author is hopeful to conclude how schools can offer support in order to help that child.

What is cognitive development? Cognition is the development of the way the brain processes things, it involves everything we do such as memory, problem solving and language. For example, following instructions when baking a cake, starting the engine of a car by putting the key into the ignition, remembering things such as the days of the week or someone's telephone number. So how do children learn how to do these things? Is it correct to believe that maturation the development of the way the brain processes begins from birth? For many different reasons, not all babies get the attention they need and desire physically or emotionally, so how do they develop their cognition? Most infants when they cry someone will come to comfort them and will give them what they need, what if for example a newborn baby has drug addicts for parents and when he or she cries nobody comes. The Psychology notes (2015) published that Jean Piaget a Swiss biologist and theorist of cognitive development in 1896, believed there are four stages of cognitive development which are sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational with each building on the stage before. Piaget believed that children would only learn if they were allowed to self-learn, make mistakes and learn from them (Psycho Hawks 2010). The first stage is called sensorimotor which is from birth up to the age of two, where the infant begins to understand him or herself and how things work through interacting within the environment they live in. Children mirror behavior that they see in their environment and copy what they see as the norm, if the father hits the mother the child

might grow up thinking this is the way to act. The challenges faced of living in a difficult environment in which a child is being brought up in affects the way he or she will develop known as cognitive conflict. Babies will receive gifts when they are born or on their first birthday, toys to help stimulate them to develop, what about the children who don't receive these toys and are not given the opportunity to progress or learn. A securely attached baby living in a good environment will build a trustworthy and loving relationship with an adult whereas a baby living in a bad environment will not. It is important that social transmission happens and that other people intervene and help these children by giving them the opportunities and life lessons they need. Early intervention is key and the government have made progress in helping such families with different organizations such as team around the family and flying start, although these schemes are fantastic they don't always target the correct families and the ones that need the help the most. Vygotsky's a Russian psychologist theory of cognitive development varies from Piaget. Simply Psychology (2014) stated that Vygotsky believed that cognitive development stems from social interactions within a learning environment, such as learning through role play whereas Piaget stated that children develop through self-learning at different times and stages. Vygotsky believed that play shaped the way children viewed the world, acquired their language and thinking (Child development media 2017). Vygotsky stated that play helps develop a child's language and thought processes, imaginative play was vital for cognitive development but is at risk of being forgotten as busy lives and social media have taken over the ordinary person's life (Child development media, 2017). Unfortunately, the school's curriculum over the years doesn't give enough opportunities for children to just play, as a result we are now seeing a rise in play clubs such a Lego therapies. According to ASD Aid (2017) they state that play can provide a safe psychological from any problems they may be experiencing and allows the child to express their thoughts and feelings appropriately to their development. In Piaget's defense there weren't as many external factors around in those days 1869 such as divorce, single parents, drug or alcohol abuse to consider when he thought about the social aspects of cognitive development. Both theorist agreed though that children need interaction in order to learn and develop. Piaget believed interaction between the child and the environment whereas Vygotsky believed interaction between the child and the social networks (Simple Psychology 2010). Society has changed a great deal since then and the world we live in is not the same.

Children are faced by many challenges through external and internal factors in the learning environment and behavior problems are often seen in schools as a result of this. Some of the external factors could be bullying, environment children are brought up in, domestic violence, illness, family breakdown, poverty or bereavement. The impact of bullying can affect each child differently but can have major consequences short term or long term such as injury, emotionally, social problems and even death. NICHD (2017) published that children who are being bullied and the bullies themselves are at an increased risk of suffering from depression or anxiety often lasting through to adulthood. There are different forms of bullying including, cyber bullying on line through mobile phones or social networks, social bullying when someone might be deliberately excluded from a social group or someone might start spreading rumors, damaging other people's property, verbal and physical including kicking, hitting and pushing. A bullied child might start to skip school, hide away in the toilets, pretend to be ill to stay at home thus as a result having an effect on the child's mental health, self-esteem as well as education. Effects of bullying (2017) say that children who are being bullied are more likely to have a decreased academic performance and miss, skip or even drop out of school. Parents might have been bullied themselves in school and now fear even stepping inside the school gates. This could result in the parents having a negative attitude towards schools, unable to support their own children's education and possibly passing their own fears onto their child.

A child may be living in poverty for many reasons including low income households, unemployment, parents may not want to work because their parents never did having a knock-on effect passed on through generations resulting in poor parenting. Poverty has an effect on the environment a child will be living in, there might be no money to pay bills such as electricity and heating or the child will not attend school on wear what you want days because they are too embarrassed with the clothes they will have to wear compared to other peers. According to Maslow's hierarchy pyramid if children don’t have their basic needs met such as food, drink, shelter and warmth they wouldn’t be able to go on to fulfil their next needs in order to develop (Our hierarchy of needs, 2012). Schools have made slow progress in helping children receive their basic needs such as free school milk for children under five, meals, breakfast, which is a great way for a child who doesn't get breakfast at home to start his or her day. Maslow stated that everybody is able to move up the pyramid but only once the basic needs were met (Our hierarchy of needs, 2012).

The Welsh Government (2004) issued the Rights to Action, a policy which had seven core aims which are, 1) a flying start in life, 2) a comprehensive range of education and learning opportunities, 3) enjoy the best possible health and freedom from abuse, victimization and exploitation, 4) access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities, 5) to be listened to, 6) have a safe home and community which supports physical and emotional well-being, 7) are not disadvantaged by poverty. The Rights to Action policy allows every child to have a voice, the same rights, additional learning needs children for example can now go to main stream school and not be separated from other children, every school must follow the code of practice and the rights of the child. Progress has been made since this policy was issued and extra support and help has been made available through different organizations such as 'Funky Dragon', the children's and young people's assembly which gives them an opportunity to have their voices heard nationally on issues that affect them (Youth Parliament, 2014). Unfortunately, schools aren't given realistic budgets in order to help all of these children, breakfast clubs which have proven a huge success are now being cut in some counties due to funding. Pupil deprivation grants were issued to tackle the effects of poverty and raise attainment, although the grant is having a positive impact this money is not always spent on what the child needs but goes into a pot for the whole school because money is so tight (Wales Online, 2014). Nurture rooms designed to help vulnerable/emotional children build a secure alliance in schools are being neglected and are not been used correctly, with money so short in schools these rooms have a wide variety of children from behavioral to emotional challenges. A child who has built up the courage to go to a nurture room might be put off and never return if there are other children being loud and misbehaving.

As well as external factors there are also many internal factors that pose a challenge on a child's learning environment such as gifted children, dyspraxia, autism, dyscalculia, ADHD, Tourette's and Asperger's. Dyslexia is a common learning barrier and a proven learning difficulty, research and evidence proves that it affects more boys than girls and that it can be inherited through family genes. Identifying and diagnosing a child with dyslexia at an early age in their life is important in helping that child progress further, providing the correct support and resources will help that child with his or her self-esteem and confidence, in and out of the classroom and reduce emotional stress. Dyslexia (2000) published that many children with dyslexia suffer a lot of anguish and trauma within the classroom environment and that is why it

is important that they are made to feel safe and secure in school. When a child is proven to have dyslexia, they might not necessarily have the support they need because not all classroom teachers have the skills, understanding, tools or knowledge to help. A bad experience in school can lead to the child feeling stupid, ashamed, disappointed, withdrawn, frustrated or can cause behavior problems and the child acts out. Teachers need to be taught and offered additional resources for a child with dyslexia in order to support them in the learning environment. As well as teachers, parents play a major role in helping their child succeed and the support and environment they are brought up in will determine this.

There are many different behavior theorists who all have their own opinion and advice with regards to classroom management and behavior. "Behaviorism is very badly misunderstood everywhere" (B.F. Skinner, 1984). B.F Skinner believed that the learning environment should be made enjoyable and efficient, in order for behavior to improve the learning environment needed modifying first (Wiki Books, 2017). Skinner stated that punishment was not needed in schools and what was needed was repetition, praise, clear instructions, immediate feedback and rewards which would help influence student behavior (Wiki Books, 2017). For example, if a child behaves badly in the classroom the teacher may try and promote positive behavior by offering a reward such as extra play time or allowing the child to choose what activity they would like to do next. Skinner believed by rewarding the child you would reinforce good behavior (Wiki Books, 2017). We often see reward charts, privileges or prizes given out in schools maybe at the end of term but are these always a good idea? Do children deliberately misbehave in order to have an opportunity for a teacher to say for example, if you were to behave this term you can go on the trip or have extra play time next term. Alfie Kohn a professional critique of Skinners theory did not believe that Skinners reward system worked and suggested that it only taught children to expect to be rewarded (Wiki Books, 2017). Although he agreed with Skinner that positive encouragement does work he argued that it only made children seek out more positive reinforcement and the way forward was to discuss with the students their actions and behavior instead of rewarding them (Wiki Books, 2017). William Glasser an American psychiatrist believed like adults, children need to take responsibility for their own behavior and actions within the classroom environment (Behavior Management, 2017). He stated that children should freely be able to make their own choices within the classroom, for example setting the class rules should be a class decision not just for the teacher to decide (Behavior Management, 2017).

Allowing children to be more independent, make their own decisions and encouraging them to take responsibility will allow them to have a feeling of self-ownerships and pride. Glasser stated that this way of classroom management would create a safe environment and build on children's self-esteem (Behavior Management, 2017).

Whole class and school strategies need to be implanted in every school in order to support and help children who are challenged by internal and external factors within the learning environment. Empathy, listening and communication are key in succeeding to helping any vulnerable or emotional child. Safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments with adults they can trust such as teachers or learning support assistants will repair harm. Schools need to form ways of offering support for individual students and improve relationships not only with the child but with his/her family too. Following and researching theorist's advice what will work for one child may not work for another, exploring all options and avenues are crucial. Although the author agrees with much of Skinners theory, the author believes that rewarding children all the time regardless of their behavior by reinforcing positive reinforcement doesn’t always have an affect as many children will come to expect a prize or reward and will take that for granted eventually. To a degree depending on the individuals circumstances the author agrees with Glasser that children need to take responsibility for their actions and learn from their mistakes. Unfortunately, children will always be challenged by internal and external factors. The government needs to take better action and help the children living in poverty as they may never get their basic needs met. Fortunately, many internal factors are still being researched and the author is hopeful in years to come there will be more advice, help and support for the children and their families that are challenged by these factors.

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