

Reflect on a key issue in contemporary education, drawing on placement or wider experience and recent relevant literature.

Research question: What strategies are used to manage behaviour?

Introduction

This paper aims to reflect on key issues in primary education that are currently happening in settings. The key issue that this paper focuses on is behaviour management – more specifically, how both appropriate and inappropriate behaviours are managed in a primary school setting. The key issue in this paper has been researched autoethnographically during placement in a primary school using observational and interviewing methods.

This paper has been split into different parts, the first part will discuss theories, policies and current research that others have undertaken on the key issue. The second and third part will outline the time in placement, what happened and what, if any, activities took place, and what methodologies were used to conduct the research and why they were chosen. The fourth section of this paper presents any ethical issues that needed to be considered whilst in placement, while the fifth section will discuss the results of the research. The final part of the paper will link the findings of the research undertaken in placement with current research, theories and policies. There will also be a short conclusion at the end.

Literature Review

Bennett (2017) believes that “Standards of behaviour remain a significant challenge for many schools.” This can also be seen in the fact that the government has mandated that, all schools need to have a recorded behaviour and attendance policy. (Bilbrough CC, 2015) In addition to this, Section 61 of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998 requires “a governing body to ensure that it’s school pursues policies designed to promote positive behaviour.” (Gov.Wales, 2018) this is in addition to providing sanctions and consequences for negative behaviour. A school behaviour policy can shape the ethos of the whole school and makes a statement about how the school values and includes all the people in it. (GOV.Wales, 2018) The essential foundations that create an effective teaching and learning environment that makes all members of the school community thrive and feel safe, secure and respected are positive behaviour and attendance. (GOV.Wales, 2018)

It could be argued that all of the above laws have led to Behaviour management policies being implemented throughout the whole school through the school ethos, the school communities' expectations, school systems, rewards and sanctions and support systems for staff, parents/carers and individual pupils needs. (Bilbrough CC, 2015) However, Nick Burton (2018) a primary school teacher believes that the behaviour management policy has a similar structure that is used in all establishments, but, in its current form he thinks that the policy has no benefit to teachers or children. This is

because children do not need their behaviour to be “managed”, even the children who behave inappropriately do not need their behaviour “managed” but improved. (Burton, 2018) introduce this also

The Welsh Government published a resource handbook titled *Practical Approaches to Behaviour Management in the Classroom* in 2018. This handbook can be used by teachers “as a resource pack that provides ideas and approaches for addressing particular issues or difficulties.” Paraphrase this quote (W.G, 2018)

One of the strategies that the Welsh Government recommends in the handbook is the use of rules, they believe that rules are a way to give children clear expectations on what they can or cannot do and what is considered acceptable behaviour. (W.G, 2018) Rules in school are part of the moral and values education, they are guidelines for actions and evaluating right or wrong, good or bad actions. (Thornberg, 2008) Tom Bennett (2015) states that “most students will be happy to abide by rules that are fair, consistent and proportionate.” Rules must always be reinforced in schools. (W.G, 2018)

According to Johnson, (2017) in recent years, behaviour card systems have come under fire as being ‘shameful, ineffective, demeaning and a waste of time.’ Katie Hurley, (2016) states that using colour cards as a behaviour management strategy can negatively impact on a child and their confidence, resulting in even more issues with their behaviour, this is because the whole class and any visitors into the class can see the card with the child’s name or picture displayed on the wall. she says that these systems can be devastating even though well intentional. (Hurley, 2016) On the other hand, this system can work well for children that need a visual reminder and it could also help to limit the amount of issues that are experienced in the class during the day. (Goodwin, 2018)

There are many theories of behaviour that have been researched through the years. behaviourists believe that any person can be trained to act in a certain way, using the right conditioning, regardless of their background, all behaviours are the result of experience. (Cherry, 2019) There are two types of conditioning – classical and operant conditioning. (W.G, 2018)

Classical conditioning is a straightforward way in which humans can learn. (Rehman, Mahabadi et al, 2020) “Classical conditioning is the process in which an automatic conditioned response is paired with specific stimuli.” (Rehman, Mahabadi et al, 2020) Ivan Pavlov had such an impact on the study of this conditioning and did some of the most thorough work, it is sometimes known as ‘Pavlovian Conditioning’, even though, one year earlier, Edwin Twitmyer published findings of conditioning. (Rehman, Mahabadi et al, 2020) “Classical conditioning emphasises the importance of the environment and supports nurture over nature.” (McLeod, 2018) but, one criticism of classical conditioning is it is not deterministic, the individual has no free will and has no control over the reactions that have been learnt during the conditioning. (McLeod, 2018) By creating a positive classroom environment, teachers are applying classical conditioning.

A positive classroom environment will help children to overcome any fear and anxiety and will learn to stay calm and relaxed. (Cherry, 2019)

Operant conditioning is “a process by which human and animals learn to behave in such a way as to obtain rewards and avoid punishments.” (Staddon, Niv, 2008) The term ‘operant conditioning’ came from the behaviourist theorist B.F. Skinner. (David, 2015) He was considered one of the most influential of American Psychologists. His idea was that “behaviour is determined by the consequences, be they reinforcements or punishments, which makes it more or less likely that the behaviour will occur again.” (Berger, 2005) This means when someone is rewarded for a behaviour, they are more likely to repeat the behaviour whereas if they are punished for a behaviour, that behaviour will not be repeated. (Renata, 2020) Operant conditioning is the easiest natural way to learn. (Regoli, 2017)

Positive reinforcement techniques in a classroom are useful as teachers can use many types of rewards to reinforce behaviour. (Renata, 2020) Rewards can include celebration assemblies, reward trips for students with good behaviour and attendance (Tokensfor, n.d) and stickers.

Placement Activity

To conduct my research, I was placed in an English medium primary school with English being the dominant language. The school has 239 pupils, with one-year group in each class from nursery to year six. I am familiar with the school, staff and pupils as I completed my level 3 college placement there and worked there as a supply learning support assistant. While on placement, I spent Monday to Thursday mornings in the year six classroom, a class of 24 pupils with one teacher and no learning support assistant in the classroom. Monday to Thursday afternoons were then spent in the year three classroom, this was a class of 26 pupils with one teacher, a full-time learning support assistant and a part time learning support assistant that comes in every afternoon to do reading with the children. Every Friday of placement was spent in the year 5 classroom, a class of 22 pupils with one teacher who is also the deputy head.

During my time in the year 6 classroom I supported a group of children that required more support than the other children in the classroom as they were in the low-level group. When I was in the year 3 classroom I was considered an extra pair of hands in a very busy classroom and spent my time walking around the classroom giving support to children if and when it was needed, this was also the same in the year 5 classroom on Fridays, although, because the teacher was also the deputy head they were needed in other parts of the school for various reasons and when this happened it was up to me to supervise the class.

Each Key Stage 2 classroom has an “area of learning zone” these zones are Maths, Language, discovery, creative and digital, each of these zones have challenges that children are to complete over the course of the week, the challenges are changed every

week and are all set to link in with the theme of the term. Each challenge has a difficulty level to support the different level groups in the classroom.

A typical daytime in a key stage 2 classroom is whole class Math in the morning after registration and assembly. After playtime the children have a language session before dinner and the afternoons are focused on the challenges in the areas of learning zones. For both math and language in the mornings, the teacher will explain and go through the work that needs to be completed before the pupils complete on their own, with support if needed and in the afternoons the children have the choice of which challenges they wish to complete that day.

As my research is on behaviour management strategies it is worth noting that the school I was placed in used a green, yellow and red card system in the classrooms and they also have a “values” curriculum to follow. Children earn these values during the week to receive a certificate in the “values” assembly on a Friday morning. The school also has a clear behaviour policy.

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Methodologies

During placement, I conducted my research using the qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is research that explores, it is used to understand motivations, opinions and reasons that may be underlying. (DeFranzo, 2011) “Qualitative data collection methods vary using structured or semi-structured techniques.” (DeFranzo, 2011) The two methodologies that were chosen to conduct my research were structured observations and a structured interview. The reason for choosing two different methods of research is because, according to P.V. Young cited in Choudhury (n.d.) “the full answers cannot be collected by observation alone.” this means, as suggested by others, that observation should be used along with other methods to supplement them.

Observations - One of the reasons for choosing observations as a method for my research is because it is considered by Smit, Onwuegbuzie (2018) as “one of the oldest and most fundamental research method approaches.” Observations research collect data using the senses, especially the looking and listening senses. (McKechie, 2008 cited in Smit, Onwuegbuzie, 2018) Adler and Adler (1994) cited in Smit, Onwuegbuzie (2018) believes that, in the social and behavioural sciences, observations are “the fundamental base of all research.”

In a structured observation “the researcher decides in advance precisely what kind of behaviour is relevant to the study and can be realistically and ethically observed.” (Alzheimer Europe, 2009) With this in mind, before going into placement I had completed an action plan of the different times during the school day that I would complete my observations. Although observations include noting everything that happened, it can also include noting that a specific behaviour did not happen during the observation. (Alzheimer Europe, 2009)

The strengths I found for choosing observations as a research method were, I could decide when and where the observations could take place, there was also no limits on time, I could take as much time as was needed to complete the observation and repeat the observation if needed.

Another strength I found completing observations was the fact that all my results were natural and honest, this is because the classes that were being observed were not aware that they were being observed. People will often behave in a different way to usual if they know that they are being observed. (Powell, Steele, 1996) If this was the case and the classes knew that they were being observed by myself my results may not have been as accurate and honest as they were with them unknowing.

Some of the weaknesses and limitations I found while completing my observations was when I had to change the day I had chosen to observe to another day, this was because of the weather, for example, if one of my chosen observations were for an outside activity and the weather was awful and raining then the classes would not go outside and I would not be able to complete that observation on that day.

Another weakness I found was not being able to complete the observation as the teacher needed my assistance in the classroom, this would make it difficult for me to sit in the back of the classroom and observe the whole class. This weakness was particularly difficult in the year 5 class as the teacher was also the deputy head and was called out often to other parts of the school which left me alone to supervise the class.

Due to my research being on behaviour management strategies on both appropriate and inappropriate behaviours, a limitation while observing may have been based on my own biased ideas of what I believe is right and wrong. (Choudhury, n.d) Although all observations were recorded on what was seen and heard during the observations, there were no opinions or ideas from myself.

One last limitation I found while observing was not being able to observe what I had wanted to research. This may have been because these events that I wanted to observe may have taken place in my absence or may not have occurred while I was observing. (Choudhury, n.d) for example, one behaviour management strategy that happened while I was indirectly observing and did not record was, the headteacher had told a child that often behaves inappropriately in the classroom that if they were well behaved that morning they would be able to have lunch in the headteachers office. While speaking to the headteacher about this, they said that the children would often do this, and it was a strategy that worked well.

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Structured Interview.

Before going to placement, I had constructed an interview of eight questions, this was done so I knew what I wanted to ask and cover in the interview and it was also to make sure that my questions were ethically correct to ask. I completed two interviews while in placement, one with the headteacher of the school and the second with a class teacher.

This means that I was able to compare the similarities and differences in the answers from two different perspectives.

This semi-structured approach to interviewing would allow the person being interviewed to speak freely as they wish but also at the same time allowing me to make sure that certain issues were covered. (Alzheimer Europe, 2009) I had chosen to do a semi-structured interview as part of my research as I had decided beforehand to interview more than one person in my placement, this way all the people that were interviewed would be asked the same questions but would also give me the opportunity to ask any additional questions to further expand or clarify an answer or issue. (Research Methodology, 2019)

Interviews, according to Research Methodology (2019) are defined as a technique that involves "intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program or situation."

One of the strengths of conducting an interview is I was able to get honest opinions and accurate answers with the participants own words used as much as possible, although some of the answers from the headteacher may have been biased.

The interview was conducted using open-ended detailed questions that would then give the participant the opportunity to provide a detailed response to the question given. Open ended questions also allow the participants to explain what they think or feel using their own words.

There were many difficulties to face with conducting an interview during my placement. One of these weaknesses was finding the time to complete the interview as it was time consuming and both the teacher and headteacher had very busy days with their own commitments.

Another weakness with completing the interview that I faced was the difficulty to pay attention to the conversation and the participants answers and to record at the same time what was said in their own words. This could have been overcome by using a recording device to record the interview and then writing up what was said later.

The last limitation I found while conducting the interview is the flow of conversation, As I was taking notes and recording answers the flow of conversation was stopped as the participant stopped speaking so that I was able to write.

Ethical Issues

Before taking part in any research at my placement, I had to consider any ethical issues that may have arisen, this is because "children form a vulnerable group, and their rights need to be protected." (MacLeod-Brudenell, 2004) and "in order for research to result in benefit and minimise the risk of harm, it must be conducted ethically. (UWTSD, 2019)

To ensure that ethical issues could be avoided as much as possible while in placement, I completed the university's ethics form that had to be approved before placement could

commence. While completing the forms I followed guidance from the BERA guidelines and the UWTSD Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice.

The ethics form included details such as what was being researched, what methods were used to conduct the research and who the participants would be? One section of the ethics form is to identify beforehand any possible ethical issues or risks to participants, the researcher or the university that may occur and how these issues or risks can be mitigated.

The risk to the participant could be that the methods used to research could be considered time consuming and create anxiety in the participant about finding time to complete the interviews, this issue is resolved by advising and reminding the participant that they may withdraw from the research at any time if they wish, the issue for the researcher could be physical harm from a participant or emotional distress while observing, this issue can be resolved by following the placement policies and procedures and speaking to lecturer or student support. The issue that the university could be that as the researcher is working on behalf of the university, if anything happens that should not, it may look bad on the university.

Before conducting any research, it is important to obtain consent from the placement and participants. This is to ensure that the participant voluntarily agrees to take part in the research and agrees about what research needs to be done and how it will be conducted. (Oxford University, n.d.) The participant should also be made aware that, although the research and data collected will be kept confidential, some information will need to be discreetly shared with university lectures (MacLeod-Brudenell, 2004) and, in some instances, an external examiner. Before each interview, both the class teacher and the headteacher had to sign a consent form to make sure that they understood what research would take place and that they agreed to this happening.

When conducting research in a placement it is important to maintain anonymity, this means not including any names in the research, this includes the name of the children or the name of the placement, this is because "the identity of those observed and the setting in which the observation takes place may be recognised by people reading your notes." (MacLeod-Brudenell, 2004)

When conducting the interview with the class teacher they confided in me that the answer they were giving may not be agreed with by the headteacher, this caused an ethical dilemma for myself as if the headteacher had asked to see the class teachers answers there may have been conflict and tensions.

Another ethical issue I found while in placement was tensions between the staff, policies and practice, this was because the headteacher had created some of the behaviour management strategies and thought they were working well but the teachers thought that as the headteacher was not in the classrooms everyday she was not aware of if they were effectively working.

When writing about my research and findings I have to be aware of how I report and word certain aspects, this is in case the headteacher asks to see my research which they are allowed to do, they may not agree with what I have found in my research and this could cause an ethical dilemma, although having to be truthful when reporting my research I need to take care to word my findings in a way that is ethical.

Results

While in placement, I found many behaviour management strategies for both appropriate and inappropriate behaviours. Some of these strategies worked very well when applied consistently and some needed improvement to work well.

Both interviews with the class teacher and the headteacher produced some answers that were very similar while some answers were very different. The headteachers answers were very in depth and explained a lot while the class teachers' answers were very short and to the point. An example of similar answers from both interviews is the question "what are the strategies to manage inappropriate behaviours?" The class teacher responded with yellow and red cards are used to manage inappropriate behaviour while the headteacher had the same answer but expanded by saying that the children had been a part of identifying the strategies and sanctions. The questions "Why do you think that these strategies are effective/ineffective in managing behaviour?" gave different answers from the two interviews. The class teacher believes that the values only work well for the younger children as they try their best to earn them, but the older children do not respond in the same way, while the headteachers answer for the same question was they work well because all staff and children have an ownership of the strategies as they have been part of the process of creating them.

While observing children I found that the green/yellow/red card system was not an effective behaviour management strategy as it was not consistent in what was supposed to happen and when. The behaviour policy of the school states that all children start on a green card and if they are given a yellow card, they have the opportunity to revert back to green, but, if they are still on yellow at the end of the lesson they should miss the nearest break time. A red card, as stated in the behaviour policy, should be given if the yellow card behaviour continues and the child should be sent to the deputy head or the headteacher. During observations I observed that children were receiving yellow cards but not losing any of their break time, even though they were not reverting back to green cards. Although when children received a red card, they were sent to the deputy head or headteacher.

Every Friday morning the school has a "values assembly" and the children can receive certificates for achieving all seven values during the week. I had the opportunity to observe both assemblies. The children, during the week are supposed to earn the values and have their name put on an A4 sheet of each individual value. During my time in placement I observed that this did not always happen. On a Friday morning the class teacher would decide themselves who would receive a certificate that week even if they

had not earned all values. Each week there was a high number of pupils in each classroom that had certificates. This strategy has shown that it is not consistent, and the children knew to expect a certificate.

One of the classrooms I had been placed in to do my observations, I had been in when I was at the school previously. This meant I already knew the children and knew, to a certain extent, what to expect in my observations. The headteacher had informed me previously that the class was a particularly difficult class and there were a lot of children in the class with background factors to consider. During my observations I found that the children that usually displayed appropriate behaviour when I was in the school previously were now showing inappropriate behaviours.

One strategy that was positive and seen to be working and effective was raising hand above head and counting down to quieten a restless noisy classroom. This behaviour was observed many times with immediate effect each time.

One of the results I found while completing the observations was, the children respond better when there is a figure of authority (the teacher) in the classroom. In all my observations I found that while the teacher was in the classroom the children would carry on with their work quietly but as soon as the teacher left the room, they would be up on their feet, walking around the classroom and shouting and talking to each other, then, as soon as the teacher returned to the classroom they would sit back in their seats and resume work. This happened in all the three classrooms I observed in.

Discussion

The placement I was in to do my research has used many of the theories and research I found in the literature review section. They use operant conditioning by having the values assembly every Friday and by rewarding the children at the end of every half term with a treat that the school council decide. The placement uses a green, yellow and red card system, that, when used consistently can be effective. When the class teacher is in the room operant conditioning is being applied as the children are calm and relaxed.

Conclusion

I have learnt from placement and from further reading that not all behaviour management strategies are a 'one size fits all' and schools need to find techniques that work for them. There is also more research around behaviour evolving all the time and there is always room for improvement.

Word Count 4,349

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