

SJIE4006 – Principles of Learning and Teaching

In this assignment we are going to discuss three strategies and theories which are used to help and support children with their learning in school as well as look at how we currently use these strategies in our own settings to support the delivery of effective teaching in the classroom.

So how do children learn? According to L Burnham (2006):

There are several theories put forward by educationalists and psychologists about how children learn and are influenced as they develop. The two main ideas which we are going to look at are about how children's learning takes place are behaviourist theory and constructivist theory. By looking at these theories we can focus on different aspects of children's learning and consider how best to support them in school.

Learning theories.com (2019) defines behaviourism as:

A worldview that assumes a learner is essentially passive, responding to environmental stimuli. The learner starts off as a clean slate and behaviour is shaped through positive reinforcement or negative reinforcement. Both positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement increase the probability that the antecedent behaviour will happen again. In contrast, punishment (both positive and negative) decreases the likelihood that the antecedent behaviour will happen again. Positive indicates the application of a stimulus; Negative indicates the withholding of a stimulus. Learning is therefore defined as a change in behaviour in the learner. Lots of (early) behaviourist work was done with animals (e.g. Skinner's rats) and generalised to humans.

According to Mcloed (2017), behaviourism is a psychological approach which emphasises scientific methods of investigation through the approach of observing a stimulus response to behaviour and that all behaviours are learned through interaction to the environment.

Behaviourist theorist B.F Skinner (1940) suggests that children's behaviour can be shaped by consequences using positive reinforcement and punishment. Skinners

theory which is based on a study used on rats learned that behaviour followed by a pleasant consequence is likely to be repeated and behaviour followed by an unpleasant consequence is less likely to be repeated. Operant behaviour and operant conditioning which is Skinner's most widely acclaimed work focuses based on both positive and negative reinforcement and that behaviour is affected by its consequences and it is an immediate reaction to a familiar stimulus.

Today, many parents (and even school systems and other childhood authorities) are inclined to provide positive reinforcement to encourage good behaviour, reserving negative reinforcement techniques only as a last resort (kidsdevelopment.com, 2019).

I will refer to my setting as School A. In School A's behaviour policy (2019) we recognise and reward children who go over and above and follow our school rule's. There are a few ways in which we do this. Class dojo's which are individual points that children earn for good behaviour e.g. being respectful and doing good work. Star of the week which is award given in assembly for children who have stood out and have been recognised by their teacher as well as stickers, to name but a few. Teachers and staff are also encouraged to promote positive behaviour by using positive language when talking to the children and paying first attention to best behaviour which should encourage this behaviour to be repeated.

School A's behaviour policy states "you get more of the behaviour you notice most".

However, it is important to remember that following rules and expectations in school can prove difficult to some children especially those with additional learning needs (ALN) or children who have social and emotional difficulties and may find school hard. It is important to recognise when these children are behaving and encourage this by showing lots of praise and try to reward when possible to promote inclusion within the school and to remember that all children regardless of ability are included.

This is echoed by kidsdevelopment.com (2019) which states that behaviourism only provides a partial account of human behaviour, that which can be objectively viewed. Important factors like emotions, expectations, higher-level motivation are not considered or explained. Accepting a behaviourist explanation could prevent further research from other perspective that could uncover important factors.

“Properly used, positive reinforcement is extremely powerful”. B.F Skinner, (brainyquote.com, 2019)

Compared to behaviourism, constructivism is said to be a leaning approach which suggests that children must use their own understanding of the world in which they live, and that past experiences and cultural factors influence their learning and new information is constructed from the children's prior knowledge.

Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) who developed the social constructivist theory suggests that the learner's social world is fundamental and supports the emphasis on social interaction as a tool for learning. He goes on to suggest that the role of other people such as adults, siblings and other children are essential for children's learning. Vygotsky also states that the tools of culture shape the thinking of the child. Symbolic tools such as language, art and music and objects such as pens and computers play an important part of children's learning. Vygotsky developed a theory called the zone of proximal development (ZPD) which is defined as:

"The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Fredrickson et al (2015) further suggests that Vygotsky saw the difference between the zone of actual development (ZAD) which is what children learn by themselves and the level they can reach with adult help as an operational definition of the zone of proximal development (ZPD).

In School A this is very much the focus in how the children learn in school. With the support and guidance from teachers and teaching assistants, children are encouraged and challenged in their learning. We use tools and objects to help the children in their learning pen's, computers, maps etc. Children are encouraged to discover new information when learning stemming from their prior knowledge of what they already know. There are different groups for different abilities as not all children are the same, so their learning is differentiated depending on ability and teachers and adults and children are certainly essential in developing a child's learning in the classroom.

Palmer, S (2019) describes one of Vygotsky's comparisons to how children learn. "The development of abilities leads to a flowering of children's personalities. They begin to plan and organise their own activities, openly express their point of view, provide non-standard solutions for problems, interact freely with other people and, most importantly, believe in themselves and their own abilities".

Palmer, S (2019) also discovered- that in his last lecture, Play and the Psychological Development of the Child, Vygotsky emphasised the importance of play during the early years: "Play also creates the zone of proximal development of the child. In play, the child is always behaving beyond his age, above his usual everyday behaviour; in play he is, as it were, a head above himself.

This is also encouraged in school as children learn through play. School A as well as all schools in Wales follow the Foundation phase Curriculum framework which was introduced in September 2010 and is the statutory framework in Wales for children between the ages of all three to seven year olds in Wales and according to Gov.uk (2019) states that:

Children learn through first-hand experiential activities with the serious business of 'play' providing the vehicle. Through their play, children practise and consolidate their learning, play with ideas, experiment, take risks, solve problems, and make decisions individually, in small and in large groups. First-hand experiences allow children to develop an understanding of themselves and the world in which they live.

"A child's greatest achievements are possible in play, achievements that tomorrow will become her basic level of real action".

L. Vygotsky, (brainyquote.com).

Like Vygotsky, American philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952) agreed that it was important for children to become better learners if they were active in their own learning and placed greater emphasis on the social context of learning. However, Dewey argued that rather than the child being a passive recipient of knowledge, as was presumed by many educators of the time, children were better served if they took an active part in the process of their own learning. These ideas were groundbreaking at that time and his ideas were revolutionary. Dewey believed in

progressive education which is a type of education which focuses on the act of doing and that humans learn better with a hands-on approach; this was known as pragmatism. Pragmatists believe that reality should be experienced, and Dewey believed that students must interact with their environment to adapt and learn, and that students and teachers learn together. The role of a teacher would be not an instructor but a facilitator in the learning process giving students the opportunities to discover for themselves and to develop as active and independent learners. Dewey also said that the rights of children to make decisions and choices in their learning was essential. (Biography.com, 2017).

“Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.”

J Dewey, (brainyquote.com)

In School A pupil voice is very important and even though the teacher still follows the current curriculum; the children play an active part in planning their lessons and discuss what they would like to learn. Even though it's not following Dewey's theories completely, it certainly is an important part of our learning in school.

On reflection, after researching theorists Skinner, Vygotsky and Dewey, there are parts of their theories that are certainly used in school today to help and support children with their teaching and learning. Even though these theories were developed a long time ago, they are still being used. We have certainly progressed however from Skinner's behaviourist theory which doesn't take into account that each child is different and that all children can be shaped in how they learn from Vygotsky's theory that a child's social element and background can play a part in their learning and that adults are an essential part of a child's learning to Dewey's thinking that all children are different and that the learning and thinking should come from them and that children and teachers learn together. All very different ideas to think about when supporting children in their teaching and learning.

REFERENCES

- **McLoed, S.A (2018, FEB 05). B F Skinner. Available at:**
[HTTP://WWW.SIMPLYPSYCOLOGY.ORG/B F SKINNER.HTML](HTTP://WWW.SIMPLYPSYCOLOGY.ORG/B_F_SKINNER.HTML)
(ACCESSED 30 Oct 2019)
- **Burnham. L, Jones. H (2002). *The Teaching Assistant's Handbook*.4th Ed. Oxford:Heinemann**
- **David L, "Behaviorism," in *Learning Theories*, January 31, 2007. Available at: <https://www.learning-theories.com/behaviorism.html>. (Accessed 1 Nov 2019)**
- **Available at:**
<HTTPS://WWW.KIDSDEVELOPMENT.CO.UK/BFSKINNERBEHAVIORALTHEORYHTML>. (Accessed 1 Nov 2019)
- **Available at:**
https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/b_f_skinner_676462
(Accessed: 2 Nov 2019)
- **School A (2019). Behaviour policy**

- McLeod, S. A. (2019). What Is the zone of proximal development? . Simply Psychology. Available at: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/Zone-of-Proximal-Development.html> (Accessed: 1 Nov 2019)
- Palmer, S. (2019). Key learning, Vygotsky in action in the early years. Available at: <http://www.keytolearning.com/viva-vygotsky-freedom-of-thought/> (Accessed: 2 Nov 2019)
- Available at: <https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/lev-vygotsky-quotes> (Accessed: 2 Nov 2019)
- Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/foundation-phase-framework> (Accessed: 21 Oct 2019)
- Dewey, J. (2011) *Democracy and Education*. Milton Keynes: Simon and Brown.
- Available at: https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/john_dewey_154060 (Accessed: 4 Nov 2019)
- Frederickson, N. and Cline, T. (2015). *Special educational needs, inclusion and diversity*. 3rd ed. England: Open University press, p343
- Available at: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=john+dewey+theory+of+education (Accessed 1 Nov 2019)