



ECIE4012

The Principles of Learning and Teaching

Portfolio

Student Number:
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Blog 1

Demonstrate your understanding of a theory of learning from the following list:
Bruner, Dewey, Skinner, Piaget, Vygotsky, Froebel

What do children and pigeons have in common?

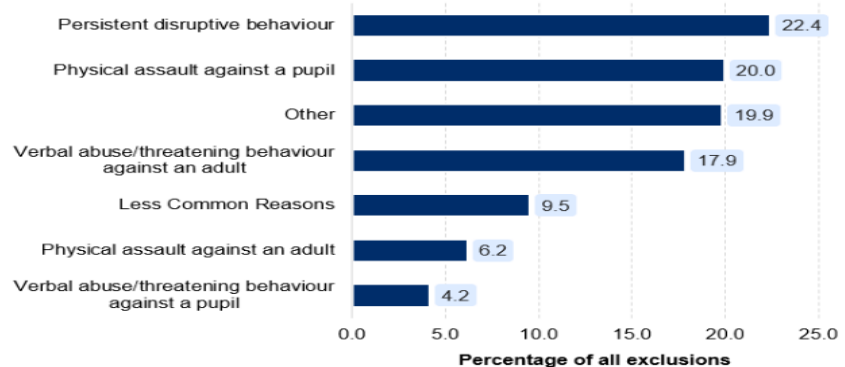


(BEHAVIOUR!)

How do we get children to 'behave' and achieve their best in the classroom? If, like me, you've spent a few (or more) years teaching in a school environment then you will have seen the children who come to school willing and wanting to learn and those who are not quite as keen! These children tend to make their feelings readily known and can often be quite disruptive.

Welsh Government (2022) states that 'persistent disruptive behaviour' was the highest reason for 'fixed-term exclusions of 5 days or less' in 2020-2021.

Chart 5: Percentage of all exclusion lengths by exclusion reason, 2020/21



Source: Pupils' Exclusions Record, Welsh Government

(Welsh Government, 2022)



“So how do we encourage the less inclined to, not only attend school but also, follow school rules and try their best by showing a good attitude to learning?”, I hear you ask!

Well let's take a dive into some theory, everyone loves a good theory, right?

Let's start with Burrhus Frederic Skinner and his theory known as 'Operant Conditioning'; the basis of which he states is built on E.L. Thorndike's earlier 'Law of Effect' theory from 1898 (Skinner, 1965).



(ABA Connect, 2017; BF Skinner Foundation, 2009; Bitly, 2023)

Skinner used pigeons to prove his theory of conditioning worked; using a food hopper and a cage he discovered he could condition the bird's behaviour (Skinner, 1992). From the results of his experiments, he concluded that behaviours could be reinforced through pleasant or unpleasant outcomes or how satisfied or unsatisfied a person was and that 'operants grow strong because they are followed by important consequences in the life of the *individual*' (Skinner, 1965).

In education, this reinforcement theory can also be applied (Bates, 2019). Either in a positive way for good behaviour and effort by giving rewards, such as praise; house points; class reward tokens; extra playtime; golden time; or through celebration assemblies. Or conversely, in a negative way for poor behaviour and effort through sanctions, such as loss of break time; a phone call to parents; removal of privileges (i.e. golden time or prefect duties), or exclusion from school for a set amount of time.



	Something “Bad” (aversive)	Something “Good” (rewarding)
Giving (positive)	Positive Punishment (behavior is weakened)	Positive Reinforcement (behavior is strengthened)
Taking Away (negative)	Negative Reinforcement (behavior is strengthened)	Negative Punishment (behavior is weakened)

(Main, 2022)

However, O'Regan (2006) argues that sanctions only have a short-term effect in response to poor behaviour and therefore this is less valuable than giving rewards for good behaviour, as rewards have a long-term effect on behaviour change.

Therefore, it would be wise to exercise caution when applying sanctions as, for them to be effective, the reason needs to be fully understood by the child (Glazzard *et al.*, 2019).

It is also important to note that Skinner's theory is based on his experiments with animals, it does not consider human free will. For example, children with behavioural needs “often require almost ‘instant’ rewards and sanctions, and working to a reward to be given on a Friday when it is only Monday will have little or no affect” (Glazzard *et al.*, 2019).

Even so, this theory is still handy to keep in your teacher toolbox of resourcefulness – the key to its effectiveness may just be uncovering each child's unique motivation or fear and then tailoring the reinforcement to the individual, in line with the school rewards system and behaviour policy (Glazzard *et al.*, 2019). After all, we differentiate work to suit the individual, so doing the same for rewards and sanctions “will create a greater feeling of inclusion for all pupils (Glazzard *et al.*, 2019).

Now it's time for you to **reflect** on this wonderful information and ask yourself...

“How can I best use Skinner's Operant Conditioning in my classroom?”



(Adobe, 2023)



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Blog 2

Demonstrate your understanding of a theory of learning from the following list:
Bruner, Dewey, Skinner, Piaget, Vygotsky, Froebel. The theory must be different to Blog 1.

Learning to be Sociable? Or being Sociable to Learn?

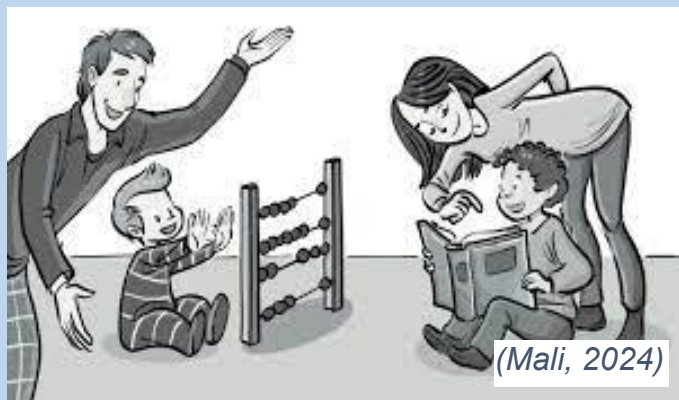


(Cherry, 2022)

My last blog looked at ways of learning behaviour through positive and negative reinforcement. This blog focus' on how children learn from interacting with the world around them and how their environment shapes their learning.

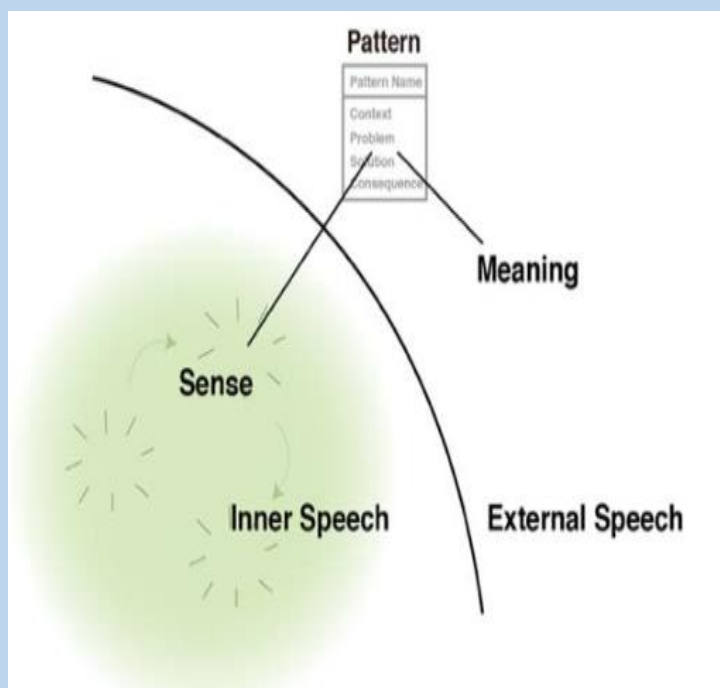
Philosopher Aristotle (384-322BC) argued that humans are sociable animals who naturally want to be with others in a community (Krause, 2019). He also believed that humans needed to learn from the wisdom of others to reach their full potential (Bates, 2019).

Psychologist Lev Vygotsky followed a similar train of thought and studied the way social interaction impacted or enhanced a person's



ability to learn, he “believed that knowledge and thought are constructed through social interaction with family, friends, teachers, and peers” (Bates, 2019). Through his work on cognitive development, Vygotsky indicated that how language develops in children is a result of interactions between both the environment (in a sociocultural context) and the child’s cognitive skills, which evolves naturally through interaction and the rate of this development is unique to the child (Glazzard *et al.*, 2019).

He also believed that thought processes developed separately from communication and the ability to internalise language occur in the latter stages of a child's cognitive development. This is significant, as it implies that children who have difficulties with speech and language may struggle to make sense of information or mentally process instructions (Glazzard *et al.*, 2019).

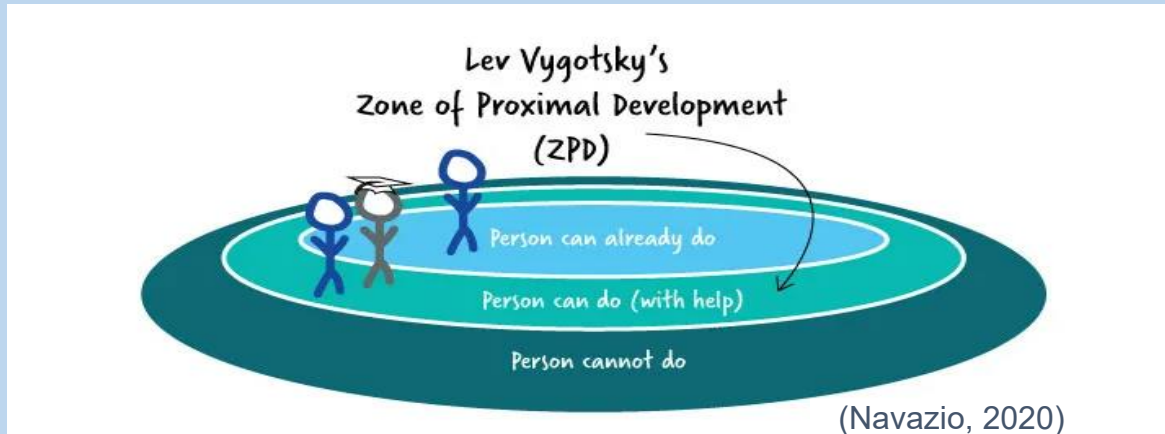


(Iba and Burgoyne, 2019)

I see this often within the school environment; for example, some children with a developmental language disorder in their early years can also become severely dyslexic. There have been studies into better identification and screening for these conditions, to provide better support for children who are struggling to achieve the expected outcomes in literacy (Komesidou *et al.*, 2022).

This is interesting as Vygotsky also argued that a child’s ability to achieve could be increased via help and guidance from someone else – which is known as ‘scaffolding’. This technique can be used to increase a child’s potential from their current ability. Vygotsky called this the [Zone of Proximal Development \(ZPD\)](#) where a child’s level of competence improves through social interaction with a ‘More Knowledgeable Other’ (MKO) who supports them through more challenging learning (Fani and Ghaemi, 2011; Sprouts, 2020b).

In a school environment, the MKO (who could be the teacher, learning support assistant or even a peer) supports the child to step outside of their comfort zone without risking complete failure, this social interaction means that they will achieve and understand more than they would if left on their own (Bates, 2019)



Vygotsky's is arguably one of the most influential constructivists, along with Jean Piaget with whom he shares some similarities in theories; however, there is one distinct difference in their beliefs! Piaget believed that children learn through an internal "[autonomous process](#)" rather than Vygotsky's "[heteronomous individual](#)" that learns from the external social environment (Lourenço, 2012; Merriam-Webster, 2024).

Unfortunately, Vygotsky died at a young age which left much of his work unfinished; even so what he did achieve, along with Piaget's work, has been the basis for theorists Michael Shayer and Phillip Adey's concept of 'cognitive acceleration', where the teacher sets up the learning task and then becomes a passive mediator who only intervenes to guide the pupils towards their outcome (Bates, 2019). Studies of this approach showed that it had a positive impact on learning in mathematics and science (Seleznyov *et al.*, 2022).

So again, it's time for **reflection** and to ask yourself...

"How does the social and cultural environment in your school benefit learners?"



(Adobe, 2023)



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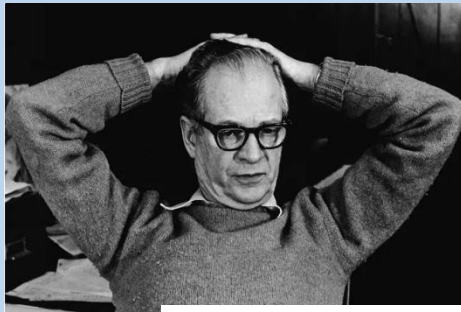
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Blog 3

Identify, discuss, and evaluate the theoretical approaches to learning linked to your theories from Blogs 1 and 2.

Theoretically speaking, which is the best approach to learning?



(Cherry, 2023; Sprouts, 2020)

B.F. Skinner

Learning?

Vs



(Cherry, 2023; Rodriguez, 2014)

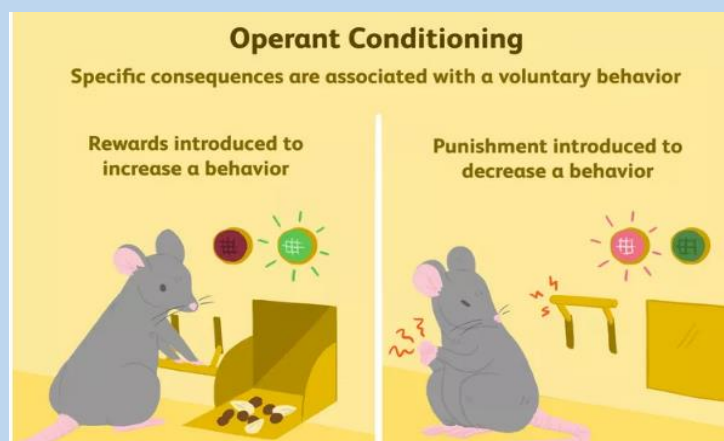
L. Vygotsky

So, in the previous blogs we have delved into the theories of Skinner and Vygotsky, both of whom have had a significant impact on the way educational establishments are run today... but how do they enhance learning? Is one better than the other?

Let's take a look...

Skinner was a behaviourist; his theoretical focus was on manipulating behaviour through positive or negative reinforcement (Bates, 2019). Whereas Vygotsky, being a constructivist, homed in on cognitive development through sociocultural interaction (Bates, 2019). Both however, show that a child's development is heavily influenced through social and/or environmental factors. For either of their theories to be effective there must be some form of interaction from external forces.

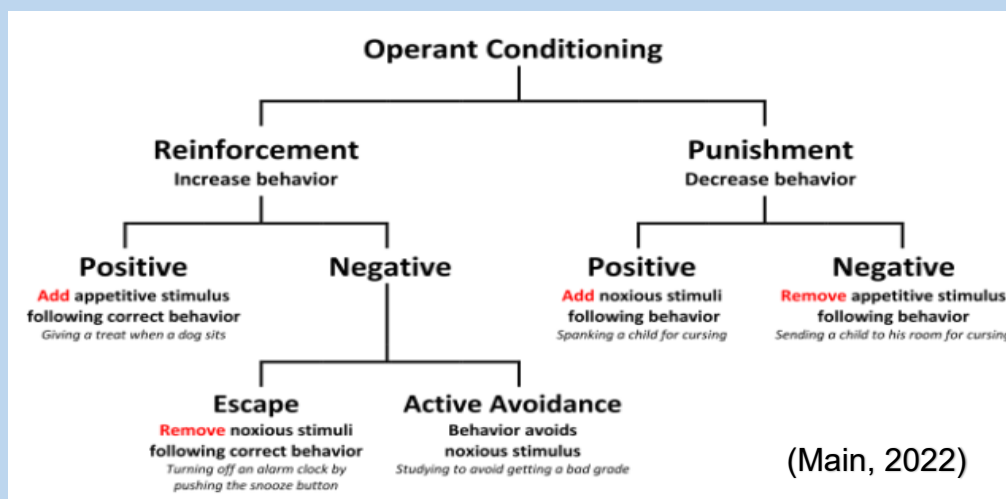
The behaviourist view is that adults give children knowledge in stages in "bite-sized chunks", so children therefore become a "product of the environment in which he or she grows up" (Pound, 2011). Skinner believed that learning is developed using consequences of actions and/or inaction.



(Cherry, 2023)

His concept of [Operant Conditioning](#) (OC) can be used to encourage learning and acceptable behaviour (Sprouts, 2020a). This has four elements:

- ✚ Positive reinforcement – rewarding wanted behaviours and as a result increasing the frequency that these desired behaviours occur.
- ✚ Negative reinforcement – removing an unpleasant stimulus and as a result allowing the desired behaviour to continue.
- ✚ Positive punishment – giving an aversive stimulus to discourage undesired behaviour,
- ✚ Negative punishment – removing a pleasant stimulus or something that is valued, which results in deterring undesirable behaviour.



Vygotsky on the other hand emphasised the need for assistance and the ability to internalise thought processes. The constructivist's view being that knowledge is created through life experience and children are "curious" and "seeking" (Pound, 2011). His concept of [Zone of Proximal Development](#) (ZPD) was an area that existed between the level a child can achieve through problem-solving independently and the level that could potentially be reached if the child were to work collaboratively with an adult or peers to problem-solve with their guidance (Rodriguez, 2014).

The main elements of ZPD:

- ✚ A more knowledgeable other (MKO) – someone who can provide guidance to the learner.
- ✚ Scaffolding – activities that are supported by a MKO.
- ✚ Learners develop their abilities through social interactions.



“LEARNING IS MORE THAN THE ACQUISITION OF THE ABILITY TO THINK; IT IS THE ACQUISITION OF MANY SPECIALIZED ABILITIES FOR THINKING ABOUT A VARIETY OF THINGS.”

(Vygotsky, 1978)

In my opinion, neither theory is more beneficial than the other, as they both have value in their own way, and even though these two theoretical approaches may seem vastly different, they both have something specifically in common...

RESILIENCE!

Both behavioural and sociocultural theories are very useful in building resilience to lifelong learning, as they both require children to become used to adapting to change (Pasqualotto, Löhr and Stoltz, 2015). This is a valuable tool as the world in which we live is constantly changing and therefore children need to be able to have the skills to overcome adversities throughout their lifetime (Pasqualotto, Löhr and Stoltz, 2015).

Schools play an important role in ensuring pupils are equipped to cope in the big wide world, the new [Curriculum for Wales](#) highlights this with its four core purposes:

- ✚ “Ambitious, capable learner... who are ready to learn throughout their lives;
- ✚ Enterprising, creative contributors... who are ready to play a full part in life and work;
- ✚ Ethical, informed citizens... who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world;
- ✚ Healthy, confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as members of society” (Addysg Cymru/Education Wales, 2022; Welsh Government, 2022).

OK, we now know that both theories promote a resilient learner but do Skinner’s and Vygotsky’s theories work in harmony with each other in a classroom environment or do they cause a conflict of interest; when trying to keep order in the class as well as maximise a child’s full potential?



(Education Development Trust, 2022)



Well, the two can complement each other and are often used together in a school's pedagogy; for example, peer tutoring shows a ZPD approach whereas a reward system shows an OC approach, and these can work quite harmoniously together in a classroom environment.

However, this can become trickier to balance when you factor in disruptive behaviour due to a specific learning difficulty such as Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) or Dyslexia (Komesidou *et al.*, 2022) or children with other neurodivergent behaviours such as Autism (Edgar, 2023).

Students with a history of non-compliance in a classroom can benefit, academically and behaviourally, from a constructivist and behaviourist integrated approach but only once they are comfortable with the expectations from themselves and as a group in the classroom, this can then lead to positive behaviour being shown more frequently (Freitas, 2003).

So, although these children can be more challenging to teach, it is still clearly possible to use both Skinner and Vygotsky's theories together in practice; however, it will be even more important to consider the child's individual needs, as well as the task and setting (Ebo, 2018).

Oh look, here we are again... **reflection** time!

What are your thoughts on these theoretical approaches to learning?



(Adobe, 2023)



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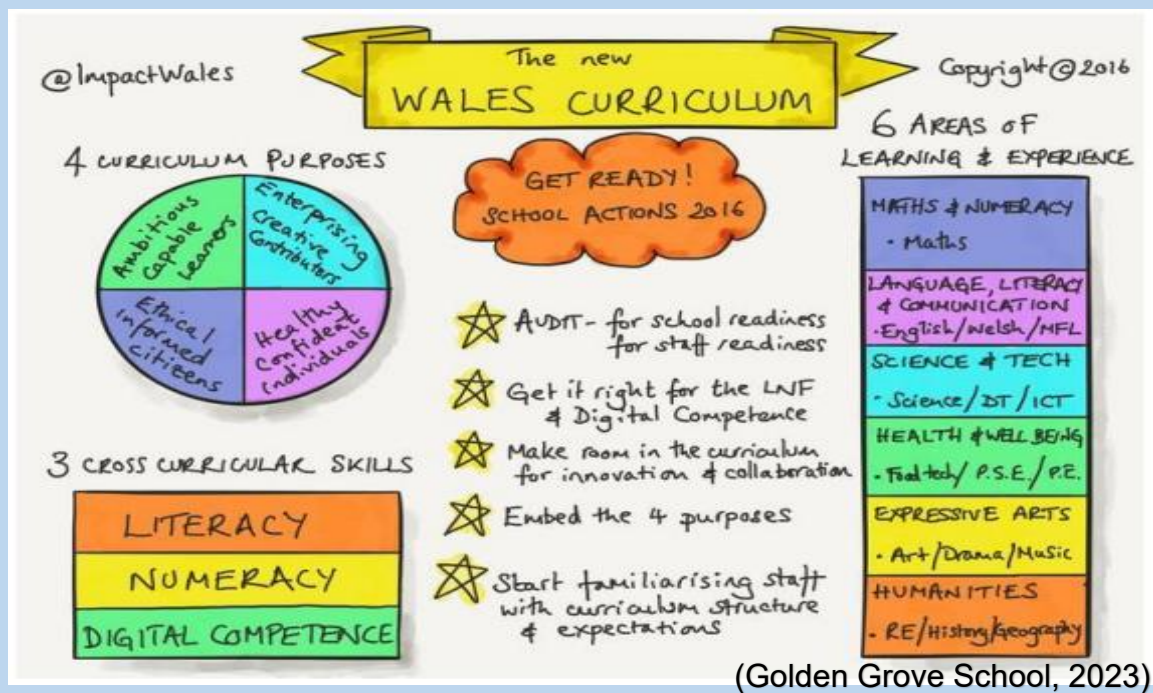
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Blog 4

Draw on experiences from your own setting to identify resources and strategies used to support effective teaching and learning, linking back to your chosen theories in Blogs 1 & 2

Supporting effective teaching and learning?



It starts with a plan!

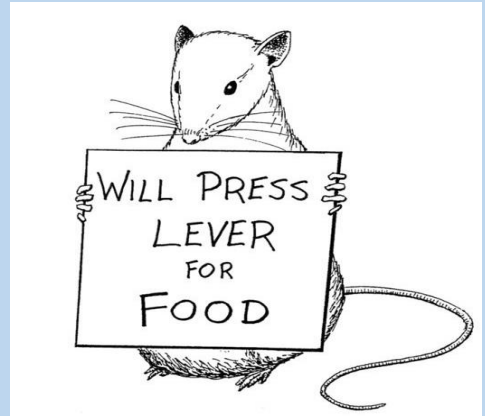
As mentioned in my previous blog, the new [Curriculum for Wales](#) is extremely focused on providing high quality teaching and learning through **four core purposes** to ensure children can participate in a meaningful journey of learning (Addysg Cymru/Education Wales, 2022). This form of resilient learning is an essential skill for our children today and for future generations, as the landscape of the world is fast paced and ever evolving (Welsh Government, 2022).



(Golden Grove School, 2023)

“How pupils learn is as important as what they learn”
(Golden Grove School, 2023).

Two of the most influential learning theories are [Skinner’s Operant Conditioning](#) (OC) and [Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development](#) (ZPD), both of which have a part to play in delivering a robust and well-rounded approach to inclusive education (Rodriguez, 2014; Sprouts, 2020).



(Swanson, 2021)

Let’s explore this further...

Skinner’s OC theory looked at the interactions of behavioural responses and the environmental stimuli; emphasising how reinforcement can be used as a valuable tool to shape behaviour and enhance learning (Bates, 2019). From my own experience, I know that some examples of this in a school environment are:

- ✚ **School rules, behaviour contracts and classroom management** – these create a predictable and structured learning environment; this is important as it sets clear expectations and outlines the consequences if these are not met. This also creates a safe environment for optimal learning (Golden Grove School, 2023).
- ✚ **Positive reinforcement** – using rewards systems, such as: stickers; certificates; house points; tokens; virtual rewards ([ClassDojo](#)); prizes/small rewards and celebration assemblies etc. These can be used as a motivational tool and to encourage repetition of desired behaviours (ClassDojo Inc, 2023; Golden Grove School, 2023) .
- ✚ **Repetition** – certain drills by staff in the classroom are often seen to keep order and gain attention in the classroom; for example, clapping a beat and expecting the class to clap back; specific phrases such as ‘hocus pocus’ and children responding with ‘everybody focus’; holding a hand up and quietly waiting for the children to do the same. In addition to this [Read, Write Inc](#) phonics flashcards; online educational software (e.g. [Big Maths](#)); maths worksheets and weekly spelling tests are all utilised to enhance a child’s ability to retrieve knowledge (Ruth Miskin Literacy Ltd, 2022; Big Maths, 2018).



In contrast, *Vygotsky's ZPD theory* was a constructivist theory that emphasised the role of social interactions and scaffolding from a "more knowledgeable other" (Bates, 2019).



Futuristic Playground, 2013)

Within schools I have experienced the following strategies and resources:

- ✚ **Collaborating with peers** – allowing children to work together, share their ideas and support one another to problem solve activities has been proven to be very effective way to facilitate learning through social interaction and expand their understanding beyond their individual capabilities (Golden Grove School, 2023).
- ✚ **Scaffolding** – instructional strategies such as group work with a teacher or learning support assistant and resources (e.g. visual timetables); guided online programs (e.g. [Lexia](#)) and regular pit-stops during lessons that contain a new topic to check understanding, all help children overcome challenging concepts in a risk-free way (Lexia, 2024; Golden Grove School, 2023). In turn, this helps build their confidence and allows them to progress further than they would independently (Grigg, 2022).
- ✚ **Differentiation of work** – addresses barriers to learning and allows inclusivity for all children (Grigg, 2022; Golden Grove School, 2023).
- ✚ **Relevant projects and group work** – real world contexts that require children to apply their knowledge and skills, while encouraging them to take ownership of their learning by provide opportunities for feedback and reflection; as well as deepening their understanding and critical thinking through topic discussions; pupil voice, independent/small group activities; science experiments and outdoor learning (Golden Grove School, 2023).



However, for both theories to be effective the resources and strategies must be used consistently, especially for those with special educational needs, as lack of structure and consistency can cause boredom and foster unwanted behaviours (Ebo, 2018).

Likewise, poor planning and preparation can cause children to disengage from learning (Ebo, 2018). Which means ensuring that lessons are widely divergent, and the school environment is one that children feel comfortable being in, as “all pupils should find learning challenging but within their grasp” (Grigg, 2022).

Another area to be mindful of is the fairness of reward systems; for example, when using a point system such as ClassDojo, it is important to be clear of its purpose and set clear guidelines on how it will be used; so that it doesn't create a “competitive atmosphere” leaving children who are not earning as many points with feelings of embarrassment, frustration, anger or shame, “the consequences of these negative feelings can influence students performance and consequently learning” and “might enforce negative behaviour” (Brown and Marouf, 2021).

So, in a nutshell, integrating the theories of behaviourism and constructivism into a school's practice can work well, as long there is good **planning and preparation** to ensure an **inclusive** environment for **all** children.

Click [here](#) for an example of a good teaching and learning policy that incorporates the new Curriculum for Wales; it highlights the importance of high aspirations, clear expectations and collaborative working (Golden Grove School, 2023).

Of course, this is the moment you have been waiting for... **reflection** time!!

What resources and strategies do you use to support teaching and learning?

Are they effective??



(Adobe, 2023)

Blog 4: Reference list

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