
LCHS4010

Component 1 – Presentation

Erikson's Psychosocial Theory: Supporting Shona in the Early Years

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Focus: psychosocial development • autonomy • confidence • social and emotional wellbeing

Introduction

My role: As an early years practitioner, I need to observe Shona carefully, understand her developmental needs and work with her carers and other professionals to support her wellbeing.

Aim of the presentation: I will use **Erikson's psychosocial theory** to understand Shona's behaviour, identify relevant developmental needs, suggest practical nursery strategies, consider nature and nurture, and evaluate the theory.

Shona's situation: Shona is 3 years old and has recently joined the nursery. She shows anxiety when separated from her carers, has limited verbal communication and finds group play difficult.

These behaviours should be viewed as observations rather than a diagnosis. The nursery should gather information from Shona, her carers and relevant professionals before drawing conclusions.

Overview of Erikson's Psychosocial Theory

- **Eight psychosocial stages:** Erikson proposed that people move through eight stages across the lifespan, with each stage involving a central developmental challenge or conflict (Erikson, 1950).
- **Psychosocial development:** development is influenced by both the individual and their social environment. Relationships, culture and experiences can affect how children resolve developmental challenges.
- **Positive resolution:** successfully negotiating a stage supports psychological strengths, while difficulties can create challenges that may affect later development.
- **Early childhood:** the stages most relevant to Shona are **Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt** and, as she moves beyond age 3, **Initiative vs Guilt**.

Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt: children increasingly want to do things independently, make choices and develop a sense of control. Supportive adults can encourage confidence; excessive criticism or over-control may contribute to shame and doubt (Erikson, 1950; McLeod, 2024).

Key Concepts Applied to Shona

Autonomy

- Shona needs opportunities to make simple choices and attempt tasks herself—for example choosing an activity, selecting a book or helping with tidying.

Shame and doubt

- If adults constantly correct, rush or criticise Shona, she may become less confident about trying things. Encouragement should focus on effort and participation.

Initiative

- As Shona develops, she will increasingly want to initiate play, communication and activities. Adults can support this by following her interests and giving her manageable opportunities to lead.

Social environment

- Erikson's theory highlights the importance of social relationships and the responses Shona receives from adults. A warm and predictable nursery environment can support positive psychosocial development.

At age 3, development is not a rigid timetable. Shona may show characteristics associated with more than one stage, so practitioners should respond to her individual development rather than relying only on age.

Applying Erikson to Shona's Needs

Separation anxiety

- Starting nursery is a major transition. Feeling uncertain may make it harder for Shona to participate independently. Calm routines and supportive adults can help her gradually develop confidence in the new environment.

Limited verbal communication

- Communication difficulties may make it harder for Shona to express choices, needs or feelings. Giving her time, using gestures and visual choices can support autonomy without putting pressure on her to speak.

Difficulty with group play

- Large groups may feel overwhelming. Starting with one-to-one or small-group activities can allow Shona to experience successful participation before increasing the social challenge.

Wellbeing

- Repeated experiences of being listened to, encouraged and included can help Shona develop confidence and a sense that she can influence her environment.

Practical Nursery Strategies

- **Offer controlled choices:** “Would you like the puzzle or the blocks?” This supports autonomy while keeping the choice manageable.
- **Praise effort:** use specific encouragement such as “You tried that yourself” rather than only praising outcomes. This supports confidence.
- **Use predictable routines:** a consistent arrival routine can reduce uncertainty during the transition into nursery.
- **Use visual communication:** pictures, objects and simple gestures can help Shona communicate choices and needs while her verbal communication develops.
- **Build from small-group play:** introduce one familiar peer and a supportive adult before expecting Shona to join a large group.
- **Let Shona lead:** follow her interests and give her small responsibilities, such as choosing a song or helping prepare an activity.

Theory link: these strategies create opportunities for autonomy and initiative while reducing unnecessary experiences of shame, failure or loss of control.

Working with Others: Nature and Nurture

Nature

- Temperament, biological differences and individual patterns of emotional regulation may influence how Shona responds to new situations, communication demands and social interaction.
- Children also develop at different rates. A single behaviour should not automatically be interpreted as a developmental problem.

Nurture

- Caregiving, previous experiences, family circumstances, relationships, nursery routines and opportunities for social interaction can influence development.
- Supportive adults can create experiences that encourage confidence, communication and independence.

Working with professionals

- The key person should work with Shona's carers and the nursery SENCO/appropriate inclusion lead. If concerns about communication or development continue, relevant health or early-years services may be involved according to local procedures.

A balanced approach recognises that Shona's development is shaped by the interaction between individual characteristics and environmental experiences—not by nature or nurture alone.

Evaluation of Erikson's Theory

Strengths

- It is easy to understand and provides a practical way of thinking about confidence, independence and social-emotional development.
- It encourages practitioners to consider how adult responses can either support or undermine a child's developing sense of competence.
- It fits well with child-centred early years practice because it emphasises development within social relationships.

Limitations

- The stages can appear too general because children do not all develop in exactly the same sequence or at exactly the same age.
- Erikson's theory does not provide a detailed explanation of language development or cognitive learning.
- It does not fully explain Shona's separation anxiety; Bowlby's attachment theory may provide a more direct framework for understanding attachment-related distress.

Alternative theory: Bowlby could complement Erikson by focusing specifically on relationships, separation and the secure base, while Erikson provides a broader focus on autonomy and psychosocial development.

Conclusion

Overall judgement: Erikson's psychosocial theory is useful for understanding Shona because she is developing independence, confidence and social participation at an important early-childhood stage.

- The theory supports practical strategies such as offering choices, encouraging effort, creating predictable routines and providing opportunities for Shona to take part at her own pace.
- However, Erikson should not be used alone. Shona's limited communication and separation anxiety require wider consideration of attachment, language, cognition, family circumstances and individual development.

Key takeaway: psychology can help early years practitioners understand children's behaviour and design supportive environments. The most effective practice uses theory alongside observation, partnership with families, safeguarding, inclusion and appropriate professional support.

Suggested closing sentence: "For Shona, the aim is to create a nursery environment where she feels secure enough to communicate, confident enough to try, and supported enough to become increasingly independent."

Reference List – Harvard Style

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