

Exploring behaviours and interventions in the learning environment

To manage a learning environment effectively, educators must move beyond reactive management and towards a holistic understanding of the factors that influence child development. The **Education Endowment Foundation (2019)** emphasises that pupil behaviour has multiple influences, some of which teachers can manage directly, but many of which require a deep understanding of a pupil's individual context to inform effective responses

Many factors influence behaviours in a learning environment, whether they are positive or negative. These factors include Biological and developmental, environmental, social and the learning environment.

Some key factors are;

- The Education setting
- Child development
- Family Setting
- Cultural and social background
- SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)
- ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences)

If we look at what the factors entail, we can then see how and why certain behaviours are developed based on the influences around the children.

Education setting- The quality of education and peer relationships can have a massive impact on the outcome of a child's behaviour. For example, if a child has positive interactions with teachers, peers and a supportive classroom setting, they are most likely to foster impactful social and emotional development. Negative peer and teacher interactions can cause a breakdown in learning and social exclusion that can develop into anxiety and bad behaviours.

Child Development- Emotional well-being, sleep and hunger all factor into a child's development. They have a crucial role in shaping a child's behaviour.

The most common would be hunger, which can cause frustration. While a lack of sleep can cause irritability and stress.

Family Environment- A strong, stable family environment full of positive nurture provides a strong foundation for healthy development. If a family household has a negative environment, with parental conflict and mental health issues. This can cause a very unstable and toxic environment that can lead to negative behaviours. The environment out of the school gates heavily dictates the behaviour within them. **Bronfenbrenner's (1979)** Ecological systems theory posits that a child is in the centre of multiple layers of influence, from the immediate family to broader societal structures. If a child's "microsystem" is unstable due to socio-economic hardship, their capacity for self-regulation in school is diminished.

Cultural and Social background- Different cultures can influence how children behave as they have varying norms and expectations for behaviour. **Gay (2010)** Observes that in many cultures, avoiding eye contact is a sign of respect toward authority, yet in a western classroom, a teacher may erroneously cite this as a sign of guilt or disrespect. Without a culturally responsive lens, interventions may inadvertently punish students for their cultural identity. Cultural expectations significantly influence behavioural expression. **Delpit (2006)** highlights the "Culture of Power" in schools, noting that the classroom norms often reflect middle-class, western values. This can lead to "cultural dissonance" for students from collectivist or non-western backgrounds.

SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)- Children and young people with SEND often display behaviours of sensory needs, challenges with emotional regulation and communication difficulties and differences. These can include heightened anxiety, withdrawal, fidgeting, difficulty following and understanding instructions, avoidance, shouting and leaving the classroom setting. These behaviours are made apparent mostly when the classroom environment is a negative influence on the learner. Such as poor lighting, noise levels, complicated tasks and unclear expectations. To create a supportive learning environment for these children, you need to establish a safe environment, reduce possible triggers, and build trust.

ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences)- Children who have experienced trauma show behaviours with trauma responses not deliberate choices. Behaviours can include emotional outbursts, difficulty to trust, mood changes, withdrawal and be hypervigilant. When triggers are set off, these pupils usually use the Fight or Flight response. **Van der kolk (2014)** Explains that children who have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) often exist in a state of hypervigilance. Their “Fight or Flight” response is easily triggered, meaning that what a teacher perceives as “defiance” may be a survival mechanism rooted in the brain’s amygdala.

Understanding these factors will help all educators to develop and create a supportive learning environment that can develop positive learning experiences and outcomes for all children in education settings.

Theoretical Perspectives on Behaviour

To understand interventions, we must understand the theories underpinning them.

Behaviourism: Rooted in the work of **Skinner (1953)**, this theory suggests that behaviour is shaped by its consequences. Operant conditioning; using rewards to reinforce positive behaviour and sanctions to discourage negative behaviour, remains the bedrock of many school behaviour policies.

Humanism: In contrast, humanistic theories like **Maslow (1943)** argue that behaviour is driven by a hierarchy of needs. If a student does not feel safe or a sense of belonging, they cannot reach the stage of “self-actualisation” or effective learning.

Social Cognitive Theory: **Bandura (1977)** emphasised the importance of observational learning. Students model their behaviour based on the adults around them, placing a high premium on the teacher’s own emotional regulation.

Intervention Strategies; from reactive to proactive

Effective interventions are divided typically into Universal and Targeted strategies. While the Universal strategies are in place for all students. Targeted strategies are in place for students with specific needs. Effective classroom management, according to the **EEF (2019)**, should prioritise proactive strategies such as 'meeting and greeting' pupils at the door and maintaining a 5:1 ratio of positive-to-negative interactions to foster a supportive learning environment.

The architecture of Routine (Proactive)

Bennett (2020) argues that the most effective intervention is the "Architecture of routine." By explicitly teaching students how to enter a room, sharpen a pencil, or transition between tasks, the teacher reduces "cognitive load" (**Sweller, 1988**). When students know exactly what is expected of them, anxiety decreases and the opportunities for low-level disruption are minimised. This is a proactive intervention that benefits all students. Particularly those with SEND who thrive on predictability.

Relational and restorative Practices (Targeted)

When disruption occurs, the intervention chosen can either inflame or de-escalate the situation. **Dix (2017)** advocates for "visible consistency" and relational depth. Restorative practice moves away from "what rule did you break and how will I punish you" toward "what happened, who was affected, and how can we make it right?" This approach, supported by **Blood and Thorsborne (2005)**, fosters empathy and long-term self-regulation rather than temporary compliance through fear.

However, Critics like **Bennett (2020)** warn that restorative justice should not be a "soft option." It requires a foundation of high expectations and clear boundaries to be effective. For students in crisis, **Gottman (1997)** suggests "Emotional coaching" helping the student label their emotion ("I can see your feeling frustrated") before discussing the behaviour. This validates the

student's internal experience, making them more receptive to the eventual correction.

“A core recommendation of the **EEF (2019)** report is that every pupil should have a supportive relationship with a member of school staff, as these bonds significantly impact pupil motivation and academic attainment”.

In conclusion, if you foster positive behaviours in the learning environment, that can help educators look beyond surface level behaviours and actions and help them understand and develop ways to consider the complex interplay of developmental, familial, cultural and contextual factors shaping each child. Effective behaviour management is not about one size fits all. It is about understanding the root causes of behaviour and responding compassionately and proactively. If we draw from Theoretical perspectives, from behaviourism we focus on reinforcement, from Humanism's we emphasis on unmet needs, to social cognitive theory's modelling. Educators will then be able to tailor interventions that address both universal and targeted needs. Universal strategies that include clear routines and positive reinforcement can create a supportive and predictable foundation for all learners. For targeted intervention, restorative and emotional coaching help address specific challenges with high expectations and empathy. Overall if the learner's education setting is one where pupils are seen, feel safe and supported, that enables them to thrive academically and personally. You will then have created a positive learning environment for all learners.

Reference List

Bandura, A. (1977) Social learning theory. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Bennett, T. (2020) Running the room: The teacher's guide to behaviour. Woodridge: John Catt educational.

Blood, P. and Thorsborne, M. (2005) 'The challenge of culture change: Embedding restorative practice in schools. Proceedings of the sixth international conference on conferencing, circles and other restorative practices.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) The ecology of Human Development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard university press.

Delpit, L. D. (2006) Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom. New York: The New Press.

Dix, P. (2017) When the adults change, everything changes: Seismic shifts in school behaviour. Bancyfelin: Independent thinking press.

Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (2019) Improving behaviour in schools: Guidance report. Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk> (Accessed: 24 May 2024).

Gay, G. (2010) Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research and Practice. 2nd edn. New York: Teachers College press.

Gottman, J. (1997) The Heart of parenting: How to raise an emotionally intelligent child. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Maslow, A. H. (1943) 'A theory of human motivation'.
Psychological Review 50(4), pp. 370-396.

Skinner, B. F. (1953) Science and human behaviour. New York:
Macmillan.

Sweller, J. (1988) 'Cognitive load during problem solving: Effects on
learning'. Cognitive Science, 12(2), pp. 257-285.

Vand der Kolk, B. (2014) The body keeps the score: Mind, Brain
and Body in the Transformation of Trauma. London: Penguin Books.