

## **Discuss a range of factors that influence children's behaviour (both positively and negatively) in a learning environment**

This assignment will examine a range of factors that can influence children's behaviour (both positively and adversely) in an educational setting. It will illustrate a comprehension of the behaviourist, systemic, and cognitive elements that could influence children, alongside interventions and policies implemented to facilitate the modification of undesirable behaviours.

All behaviour constitutes communication. Klein (1946, cited Wright, 2009, p. 4) posited that children unconsciously endeavour to construct a reality that reflects their internal experiences. He suggested when children do not process their enduring experiences, they may externalise these feelings onto others to avoid confronting their own emotions. Gray and Woods (2022) assert that behaviour results from unfulfilled social, emotional, and mental health requirements. However, Rogers (2009) demonstrates although behaviour is acquired and conditioned; it is not static and can be altered. Children exhibiting enhanced wellbeing typically demonstrate improved behaviour, so enriched environments with secure attachments may positively influence children (Jones *et.al*, 2024).

Skinner's operant conditioning theory posits that positive reinforcement, including rewards and praise, promotes desirable behaviour, whereas adverse reinforcement, such as consequences and punishments, deters undesirable behaviour (Bates, 2019). Numerous governmental and educational policies concerning behaviour prioritise control, discipline,

rules, and punishments, with a particular emphasis on the outward and observable conduct of students (Jones *et.al*, 2024). Nevertheless, certain studies indicate that the implementation of punishments yields only temporary behavioural changes, as practitioners often overlook the child's communicative intent (Wright, 2009). A child's predominant emotion in class may stem from perceiving the work as excessively challenging or harbouring a fear of failing owing to previous criticism, which may lead to undesirable behaviours. An educator may respond to these behaviours with punishments, such as detentions or demerits, which may elicit secondary behaviours such as anger and frustration in the student (Garton, 2020). The Welsh Government (2010) recommends employing incentives, like stickers, certificates, and positive reinforcement, to motivate pupils and promote appropriate decision-making in the educational environment. Bandura's cognitive social theory posits that students are motivated to emulate others based on their observations of reinforcement or punishment (Chaplain, 2017). While some researchers assert that positive praise can enhance students' self-esteem, others contend that praise may serve as an external evaluation of approval, perhaps leading certain students with negative self-concepts to internalise the praise in a contrary manner. Lafferty from Highscope UK (cited Dowling, 2015, p.25) posits that excessive praise and rewards may devalue, advocating for educators to employ encouragement to inspire students, fostering an intrinsic motivation to learn and exhibit appropriate behaviour. Fostering mutual respect and expressing appreciation may improve a student's self-concept, which some academics assert is fundamental to behaviour (Ellis and Tod, 2018). Numerous educational institutions incorporate the Government's SEAL programme into their curriculum, which draws from the humanist perspectives of Rogers and Maslow. This framework posits

that human personality can be transformed by improving students' interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and self-image, all of which are foundational to positive behaviour (Wright, 2009).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory posits that a child's environment profoundly impacts their development and behaviour, fostering a balance between nature and nurture, with their environments, communities, and caretakers contributing to this process (Bates, 2019). Dysfunctional home environments can result in children encountering violence owing to parental employment strain, divorce, mental health, and deteriorating quality of life. This fosters insecure attachments and authoritarian parenting, resulting in children adopting maladaptive coping mechanisms and emulating aggressive behaviours in educational settings, which culminates in impaired trust and emotional desensitisation (Boyd and Bee, 2014). Panksepp (2012) delineates seven emotional brain systems, indicating that children subjected to violence, insecure relationships, and insufficient play exhibit overactive RAGE, FEAR, and GRIEF systems, with an underactive CARE and SEEKING system (Panksepp and Biven, 2012). This may result in defiance, hostility, and a deficiency in motivation, joy, and pro-social abilities. In contrast, children who experience love, warmth, and solid attachments cultivate safety, a sense of belonging, healthy interactions, and enhanced self-regulation skills (Jones *et.al*, 2024). Children often exhibit maladaptive behaviours as self-defence mechanisms to endure adverse environments (TISUK, 2024). Estyn (2006) posits that eighty percent of classroom disruptions arise from insufficient organisation, preparation, and instruction. Lessons that are excessively difficult or simplistic, failing to align with students' needs and interests, may result in disengagement, boredom, and diminished motivation, leading to

negative behaviours (Garton, 2020). Numerous studies underscore the significance of educators cultivating enriched settings characterised by strong relationships, and nurture interventions, demonstrating empathy towards students without judgement, and exemplifying optimal skills within a co-regulation framework. This method aids learners in self-regulation, promoting well-being and positive behaviours (Chaplain, 2017; Murphy, 2005). Researchers propose that these methods stimulate the release of oxytocin and dopamine in the brain, promoting wellbeing and the development of the frontal cortex, which is essential for impulse control (TIS, 2024). These approaches are grounded in the UNCRC and endorsed by the Welsh Government in their Professional Teaching standards (2011).

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are prevalent in children subjected to maltreatment, poverty, familial dysfunction, and mental health disorders (Asmundson and Afifi, 2019). Such events can modify brain development, particularly affecting pleasure and reward centres, and impair the prefrontal cortex's function in impulse regulation, resulting in irrational behaviour (Bellis *et.al*, 2017). Karen Horney's neurotic hypothesis posits that children require safety and satisfaction; the absence of these elements may result in neurotic behaviours, anxiety, and diminished stress tolerance (PHILO-notes, 2022). Numerous children build defence mechanisms to shield themselves from catastrophic events, often projecting these onto others in an attempt to alleviate their own distress. In circumstances when students perceive physical or emotional threats, they may activate the fight, flight, or freeze response (Ellis and Tod, 2018). Under high stress, the systematic nervous system triggers a hyperarousal state, resulting in rage, hypervigilance, and irrational responses, or a hypoarousal state, leading

to withdrawal, overwhelm, or shutdown in a student (Lewis, 2021). Children displaying irrational behaviours are more susceptible to school exclusion as a means to alter their conduct. Nonetheless, such consequences may frequently exacerbate the students' negative self-concept, promote feelings of rejection, and reduce the potential for relational connection (Wright, 2009). Public Health Wales (2019) emphasises the Government's national policy to prevent Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and establish a basis for sustained well-being, with various educational institutions adopting a trauma-informed approach. In these settings, educators are directed to develop therapeutic and secure relationships by utilising strategies such as PACE (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity, and empathy) to promote positive thinking, communication, and involvement, therefore facilitating self-expression among individuals. Co-regulation may facilitate the development of distress tolerance, self-regulation skills, brain growth and new interpretations that promote self-concept, ultimately enhancing behaviour (TISUK, 2024). Chaplain (2017) emphasises the significance of relational dynamics in behaviour management. Trauma-informed Schools UK (2024) further assert that a just seven-minute dialogue with an emotionally available adult can serve as an effective intervention.

Behaviour management fundamentally relies on the execution of behaviour policies in educational environments, which can mitigate disruptive behaviours and foster positive behaviours (Chaplain, 2017). The Elton Report (1989, cited Ellis and Tod, 2018) advocated for a comprehensive whole-school approach to behaviour and punishment. The report recommended a conscientious equilibrium between punishment and rewards, emphasising the significance of relationships

and personal and social education The Steer Report (2005, cited Ellis and Todd, 2018) underscored that the quality of student behaviour depended on effective classroom management, behavioural strategies, pupil support systems, collaboration with families and other organisations, rewards and sanctions, and a consistent approach to behaviour (Ellis and Todd, 2018). Both papers may have impacted numerous school behaviour, teaching, and learning policies to foster effective practices and behaviour management. Behavioural expectations may differ across home and school environments. For example, a student's expectation at home may be to advocate for themselves and hit back during conflict or excel academically to be the best (Dowling, 2015). Thereby, to maintain consistency, several schools establish behavioural contracts between the school and home, delineating rules, expectations, and values to facilitate co-regulation and the enhancement of behaviour in both environments (Welsh Gov, 2024). Assisting parents and engaging with them compassionately can alter their self-concepts and perceptions of a school, hence cultivating positive links between home and school may be central to promoting positive behaviours as a whole (Estyn, 2006).

In conclusion, various literatures provide evidence that children's behaviour can be influenced both positively and negatively by multiple models from cognitive, systemic, and cognitive perspectives. Research mostly indicates the necessity of examining a child's underlying issues rather than merely their observable behaviour, since this understanding enhances the formulation of positive strategies and interventions (Ellis and Todd, 2018). Attuning to a child's behavioural communication and empathetically addressing their needs, aspirations, desires, and

conflicts, while upholding equitable and consistent boundaries, may enhance the efficacy of behaviour management (Greenwood, 2020).

Moreover, the establishment of stimulating classroom environments and the integration of engaging curricula, alongside the modelling and instruction of social, emotional, and coping skills—such as mindfulness, yoga, sensory breaks, and positive interventions—may contribute to the enhancement of positive behaviours (Murphy, 2005; Schutte, and Malouff, 2014). Research suggests it is crucial to acknowledge and commend the execution of positive behaviour as well as a student's efforts, through reinforcement. Surprising students and reframing negative behaviour by addressing the behaviour rather than the individual may cultivate connection, thereby reinforcing the student's perception of the world and their responses to it (Chaplain, 2017). According to Rogers (2009), conduct is not static and may be acquired, with all stakeholders sharing a collective role in promoting behavioural influence, as illustrated by the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child" (Reupert *et al.*, 2022).

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