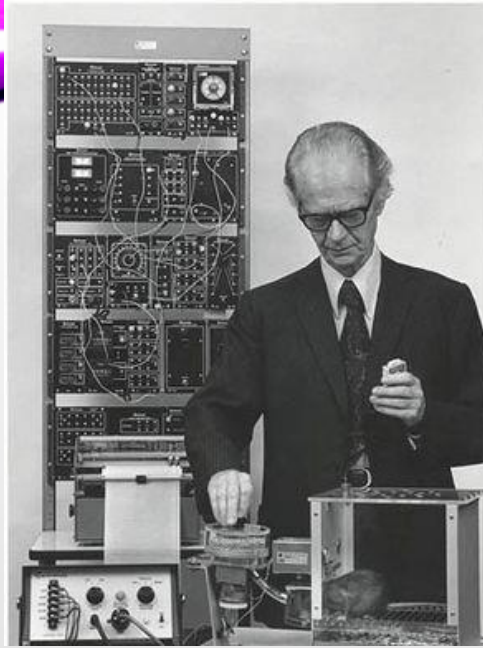




EXPLORING CONSTRUCTIVISM AND BEHAVIOURISM. HOW DO THESE THEORIES HELP IN THE CLASSROOM?

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CONSTRUCTIVISM

2



"Constructivism focuses on what people do with information to develop knowledge" Jordan et al, 2009.p.55



The main contributors to the theory are; Bruner, Piaget and Vygotsky.



There are three categories of constructivism which are applied to education; Trivial, Social and Critical.



Constructivism theory has led to the introduction of Individual educational plans (IEPs) in schools.



Constructivism puts the individual at the centre of learning encouraging the development of problem solving skills and community based learning.

"The principle is that the learners start with a complex problem and work out to discover the basic skills required to solve the problem. This method of learning involves cooperative learning, experimentation, open-ended problems and real-life scenarios in which the learners discover learning on their own through active involvement with concepts and principles." (Bruner et al, 1956)

This theoretical approach applies strongly to the new curriculum for Wales which has been developed by Graham Donaldson. In Donaldson's Successful Futures report, children said "They wanted a greater focus on life skills, personal confidence, basic skills, work skills, career advice and health and well-being." 2015 p.3. The new curriculum emphasises the importance of experiential learning and the gaining of life skills in order for children to become valuable members of society as adults.

Strengths of the approach

- Learners will be able to adapt their prior learning and problem-solving skills to real-life situations.
- The development of IEPs has become an integral tool in the development of children's learning, especially those with additional learning needs.
- This approach helps build positive relationships between teacher, adjusting the historically authoritarian role to a supportive, nurturing role.

Weaknesses of the approach

- "This learning theory is not suited for circumstances where conformity in thinking and actions is required." Nagowah, 2009.
- Can be difficult to measure success or the measuring could be inconsistent between teacher, schools or counties.

BEHAVIOURISM

3



Behaviourism focuses on observable changes. "If no observable changes happen, no learning has occurred." Jordan et al, 2009.p.21



The main contributors to the theory are; Skinner, Pavlov, Thorndike and Watson.



The theory has become infamous for operant and classical conditioning.



Behaviourism theory has led to the development of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) which is widely used with children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD).



Behaviourism views people as organisms acting upon environmental cues. (Gray & MacBlain, 2015.p.47)

Watson, 1957 states "Behaviourism claims that consciousness is neither a definite nor a usable concept." (p.2) Most behaviourists believe that the majority of human behaviour is the result of conditioning. Furthermore, the behaviour is a response to a stimulus. Behaviourists are only interested in observable and measurable results which leaves no room for introspection. (Morris, 1974.p.13.)

This theoretical approach applies strongly to early childhood development. As babies cannot tell us what they are thinking the only way to ascertain development is by visible responses from cues such as peekaboo games. A lot of early research was conducted using animals as the test subjects. This shows the lack of individualism of the approach. However, aspects of behaviourism are still used in schools today as a behaviour management tool.

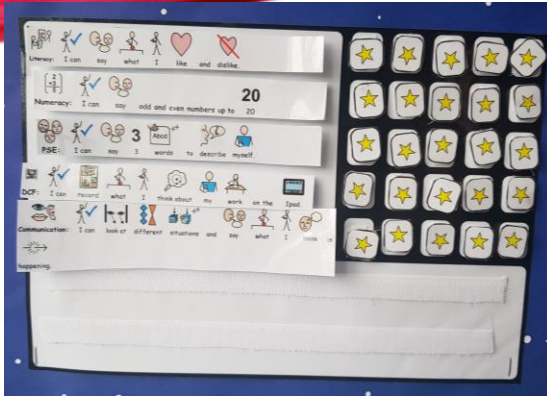
Strengths of the approach

- Measurable scientific results are obtainable.
- Behaviourism promotes rapid learning.
- Using behaviourism can allow for specific and measurable curriculum to be delivered. (Jordan et al, 2009.p.34.)

Weaknesses of the approach

- The approach can be considered as anti-humanistic, not allowing free choice in an individual.
- Due to the early experimentation with animals, there are negative associations with behaviorism.
- Does not consider a person's phenomenology.
- Not all learning is visible, behaviourism does not allow for introspection.

HOW IS CONSTRUCTIVISM USED IN THE CLASSROOM?



Individual Education Plans

Every pupil in my setting (School A) is given 5 individual targets to work on each term. They are linked to numeracy, literacy, communication, PSE and DCF. They must be observed to complete the target 5 times in order for them to move up the scale to the next target level. This is intrinsically linked to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is when a child works through concepts with cooperation from an adult. Pupils are supported by an adult, through a variety of tasks to achieve their targets. Vygotsky viewed tests and exams as an inadequate way to measure children's understanding of concepts, instead he favoured that the capabilities of learners should be measured by how they work through concepts when supported by an adult (Twomey-Fosnot, 1996, p.19.)



Rich Tasks

A rich task is "is one that actively engages students in constructing their own understanding, challenging their assumptions, and reflecting on their mathematics" (Read, 2010, p.47). In school A teachers create a rich task every term which coincides with the termly topic. This provides an enriched experiential learning experience for pupils. Pupils are presented with a problem and are given mini tasks to acquire and consolidate the skills needed to solve the problem. Rich tasks are often started with the classroom and staff being immersed in the theme. This kind of task links directly to Vygotsky's theories of scaffolding and Bruner's views of what education should be for children. Bruner believed that children brought "dynamic qualities" (Brown, 1977, p.74) to tasks, that should be encouraged.



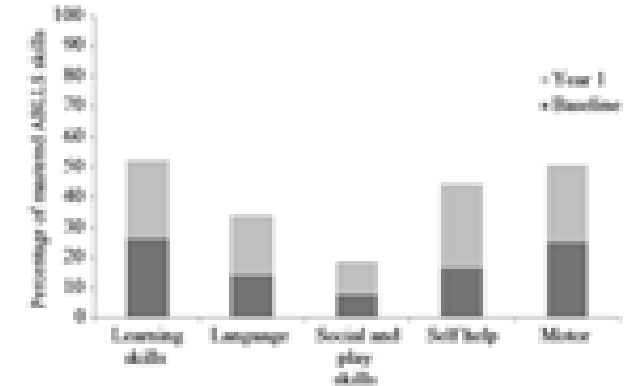
Forest School

School A has implemented a forest school approach through its key stages. All children have the opportunity to take part in forest school. Forest schools create an opportunity for the children to lead their own learning with the teacher being the facilitator. The sessions are child-centred and give the children an opportunity to play which is vital to their development. The children can work together to build dens, create outdoor art and even solve maths problems using natural objects. "Collaborative working on tasks which generate controversy, Piaget believed, enriches the child's communication skills and fosters intellectual development." (Gray and MacBlain, 2015, p.84.) Teachers can ask open-ended questions about the observations the children have made from the changes around them.

HOW IS BEHAVIOURISM USED IN THE CLASSROOM?⁵



Figure 1: Percentage of mastered ABLIS skills for the group at baseline and year 1



Read, Write INC

Skinner believed that all language is learned by reward (Pound, 2006, p.43) Although not entirely true, operant conditioning can lead to motivation in learning languages. Read, Write Inc sessions are run 3 days a week, children are grouped according to ability. The lessons are set out the same in each session. The children anticipate cues, give their response and are rewarded with a celebration for giving the correct response. Chanting the sounds and repetition also consolidate their learning. The celebration rewards are affective, the children have been observed to provide more answers, so they get more rewards.

Penny Reward System

In School A several classes use a penny reward system. Each child can earn up to 5 pennies a day which at the end of the week they can exchange for a prize. This system is based on rewarding good behaviour but in school A, where every child has ALN, it can also sometimes be a trigger for undesired behaviours. Not all systems work for all children. Several studies have revealed that children with ADHD in particular, work better with small immediate rewards rather than larger delayed rewards (Rapport et al. 1986; Sonuga-Barke et al. 1992; Luman, 2012). In school A they can receive a penny for good sitting, listening, being a good friend or good speaking. Each reward given is based on the child's abilities.

Applied Behaviour Analysis

In School A, which is an ALN school, several staff are qualified to deliver ABA. They are predominantly placed within the early years department. The table above shows the improvement of skills after 1 year of receiving early intensive behaviour intervention. "EIBI is based on the scientific principles of learning and behaviour, which state that behaviour is learnt through interaction between the individual and the environment. Three components are necessary for learning to occur. Firstly, a stimulus must cue the child's response (antecedent); secondly, the child responds (behaviour); and thirdly, there is a consequence that will increase (reinforce) or decrease (punish) the future frequency of that behaviour." (Foran, 2015, p.36)

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Boy doing rich task page 4 available at <https://www.bing.com/images/search?view=detailV2&id=32AC2A593A3E2E191247A2C1C4C16FBCBC0E1DE2&thid=OIP.LaiYDwffnqQMufbv-0umbwAAAA&mediarurl=https%3A%2F%2Fi.pinimg.com%2F200x150%2F2f%2F0a%2F59%2F2f0a597e0ab8d72fe3875a8f809d4701.jpg&exph=150&expw=200&q=rich+tasks&selectedindex=293&ajaxhist=0&vt=0&eim=1,2,6>