
Behavioral Differences In Primary School Children

A study of children's behaviour and related behavioural theories is a crucial component in not only training primary teachers but also allow them to execute their future duties in an effective way. A sound knowledge in behaviour management provides better tools necessary for teachers and educators manage classroom behaviour. Duchesne and McMaugh (2018) define behaviour as actions that are observable and measurable, they further say that children's experience in their family and culture influences their behaviour, which is known as socio-cultural construct. Teachers are required to understand the cultural and family background of their students as this will help in responding to their behavioural demands. Therefore, behaviour cannot be formed without the influence of the sociocultural environment that an individual is exposed to (Doherty & Hughes, 2009). This fact explains the reason why people from different parts of the world manifest significant differences in behaviour. Therefore, behaviour, as is the case with many other aspects of human life, is a sociocultural construct. The essay will first explore the ecological theory and cognitive theory in brief and analyse two common different behaviours displayed in primary classrooms in the light of the chosen behavioural theories. Towards the end, the paper explores the risks and competencies associated with the different types of behaviours.

Bronfenbrenner's model of ecological systems theory provides a logical foundation that assists with understanding the complex process of children's behaviour through the society and the environment they operate with (Porter & MacMullin, 2006). As explained in the Bronfrenbenner's concentric circles of diagram, (Doherty & Hughes, 2009, p. 394) the child is in the middle and the closest inner circle is the microsystem which contains the child's immediate social system such as family, grand parents and siblings. The next level is mesosystem, where the child develops their own development system through social interactions at school, with family and friend's families. The ecosystem level is the next level which consists of family's network of neighbours this includes family friends, and friend's families, that is, it can influence the child's behaviour by direct involvement. The outermost layer is the macrosystem which reflects the wider community and cultural influences.

Cognitive theory approach explains and focuses on the development of a child's behaviour in early 1950s. Contemporary cognitive theory derived from the studies of Jean Piaget has compared the human mind to a computer (Lenroot, 2020). Furthermore, Lenroot explains the construction of mental models (schemas) similar to the data processing system in computers. According to the Cognitive theory, there are four stages of childhood development, children move through these different stages of intellectual development, there are behaviours that are expected at certain stages. According to Berk (2003), the four stages of cognitive development are sensorimotor (birth to 18-24 months), preoperational (18-24 months to 7years), concrete operational (ages 7-11) and formal operational (adolescence to adulthood).

Scenario 1- Daniel was in grade two and a highly active student. He was a capable student, but he was often short-tempered, throwing tantrums in the class and often swears at his classmates. His teacher would receive complaints regularly about his aggressive nature while playing and doing group activities. Daniel's behaviour pattern was consistent with 'disruptive behaviour' as classified by the DET.

Examining Daniel's scenario through the lenses of the ecological Systems theory, his family and the friends are the main part of his immediate environment that has the most influence on his behaviour. It is possible that Daniel has been exposed to an environment where his parents fight and verbally abuse one another using swear words. Daniel has not been exposed to wider society, he assumes that using aggression and swearing is an acceptable way to deal with disputes, which he has learnt from his home environment. Daniel's swearing may be allowed and not corrected by his parents. However, in the classroom environment this behaviour would be perceived as negative and not acceptable. According to Raising Children (2016) when parents are consistent in their own behaviour and behaviour towards their children, they (children) are more likely to the standard of their parents. Further analysing the microsystem, it is possible that his disruptive behaviour may be influenced not only by his parents, but maybe friends or neighbours due to their direct involvement with the family (Doherty & Hughes 2009).

With further analysis of Daniel's development through the lenses of Cognitive theory, it is apparent that his behaviour is consistent with disruptive behaviour in the preoperational stage of development. His tantrums and use of foul language are consequences of the negative behaviour he has been exposed to, it is evident that Daniel's different behavioural patterns were formed at the early development stage, known as the preoperational stage. As stated by Piaget, each child goes through the stages in the same order, the child's development progress is determined by biological maturation and their interaction with the environment. (McLeod S. 2018).

Scenario 2- Roshini was in grade one and a shy student, she did not volunteer to contribute to class discussions. She withdrew from group play and chose to sit under cover area at the playground and watch others play. During 'show and tell' activity in the classroom, she spoke a very few words very softly and her teacher had to encourage her to speak up. According to the classification of Victorian department of education, Roshini was displaying withdrawn behaviour characteristics. (DET).

In order to analyse Roshani's shy and withdrawn behaviour through the lens of ecological systems theory, her environment at home including her parents, friends and the ethnic group she belongs needs to be examined carefully to find the reason behind her behaviour. Research studies conducted by a group of health professionals show that one of the major factors affecting childhood shyness is cultural background and parents (Raising Children 2016). In many Asian cultures' shyness is seen as a positive behaviour. Within her microsystem (immediate environment) her parents may have been overprotective and do not allow her to play and socialise with other children in her environment. The major reason for childhood shyness is culturally constructed and has developed shyness due to the interactions with their parents. Roshini might overgrow this difficulty, when she is growing with her age and start to expose to the mesosystem and the ecosystem around her.

Analysing the scenario through the lenses of Cognitive theory, perhaps throughout her sensorimotor stage to preoperational stage Roshini has witnessed 'patriarchy' environment at home, in many family units, female parties don't get the same opportunity to express their ideas equally, mothers and the other females may play subordinate roles at home. (Martin 2008). Children are known as egocentric at these stages, understandably they perceive the world as they do. When the children see the behavioural patterns at home, they assume this is normal and may perceive the outer world as similar or same. Naturally in the preoperational stage children are egocentric, shyness in childhood has been identified as a symptom of fear or lack

of confidence and the range in intensity can range from mild to extreme (Powell & Tod, 2004).

Each child is unique and develops at their own pace and therefore, there is not standard tool to measure children's behaviour (Simatwa, 2010). However, there has been general behaviour guidelines classified by the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) which are used as the standard guidelines. According to education.vic.gov.au (2020), challenging behaviour (generally) accepted as when children's behaviour interferes with their own safety or that of others in the learning process. The four main behavioural patterns identified as challenging behaviours include withdrawn behaviour, disruptive behaviour, violent behaviour, and inappropriate social behaviour (DET). When Students in a primary learning environment display such behaviours which, in turn, affect their education process. The consequences may unintentionally reinforce positive or negative behaviours in the learning environment (Antony & Swinson, 2017). For example, student A sees the teacher excuse student B for not submitting homework because student B claims to have lost the book; and so, student A proceeds to use a similar excuse.

In most primary learning environments mild behaviour differences are expected, which may have short term impact within the classroom environment. According to Martin and Swinson (2008) most children show at least one of these challenging behaviour patterns and that might be a sign of healthy development. However, research studies show that the children with behavioural differences face challenges and risks related to individual differences in lack of academic competency and poor social skills. Challenging behaviour will lead to isolation from the others, this may cause low self-esteem, lack of communication skills, difficulty working collaboratively with others and falling behind academically etc (Porter 2008).

It is apparent that both behavioural theories reviewed support the view that behaviour is culturally and socially constructed. While no set of standards or policies are set to measure children's behaviour, general guidelines set by the DET are followed by the educational settings. The application of behavioural theories to teaching practices and learning has become significantly important to teachers and other professionals working with children. Teachers should be aware of the behavioural guidelines and should be able to identify the intensity of the behaviour patterns of their students to provide a positive learning environment for their students.