

Children's Behaviour

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The exercise of observing and assessing children formalises the link between theory and practice.

A great deal of observing a child today is focussed on what's wrong with the child, and how we can intervene to help that particular child.

Early childhood specialist Carolyn Seefeldt agrees, 'observing is probably the oldest, most frequently used and most rewarding method of assessing children, their growth, development and learning.' (A practical guide to child observation, Christine Hobart)

It is important to know how to observe in order to collect the necessary data in the most useful, accurate and efficient way.

The value of carefully planned observation and assessment cannot be over emphasised.

Observing children helps the observer to get a true picture of the particular child's development, any potential triggers and any incidents that may occur.

Observation also reduces the possibility of children being unfairly labelled, which can create its own set of problems.

In order for any observation to have any value, it is important that the observer is as objective as possible and that several observations take place. This is to ensure that the observation is fair and accurate. (B Tec Early Years Yvonne Nolan)

One particular observation technique commonly used to observe children is sociograms.

These are used either to indicate one particular child's social relationships within a group, or to look at friendship patterns of all the children within a group.

Sometimes this highlights the unpopularity of a particular child and may motivate the placement setting to help the particular child to establish meaningful relationships.

There are various advantages of using this particular observation technique,

- . Can show quite clearly which children are most popular within a group
- . Would indicate which children might need help in establishing relationships
- . May make a placement more sensitive to changes within the social structure of a group.

Along with advantages are disadvantages,

- . Relationships within the groups may change from day to day
- . Too much could be read into the data

Overall the observation technique of sociograms can be a useful way of identifying popular children and those needing help to form relationships. Although this technique must be treated with caution as it can be misleading.

(A practical guide to child observations, Christine Hobart)

There are various external and personal factors that can affect the behaviour of young children.

Environmental factors link with poverty and nutrition, as a child living in a poor environment usually means that they are poverty stricken.

A poor quality of life can cause poor physical and emotional health.

This applies because the bad environment around the child, may be damp causing mould and other household problems, that can lead to ill-health, for example, respiratory problems i.e., asthma.

Emotional health problems may arise caused by worries and anxieties from their surrounding lifestyle.

Poor housing is usually in high-populated areas, which may mean there is a higher risk of crime in the surrounding area, which can cause further stress for both the child and parents.

The effects of a low income may mean that the child is receiving a poor nutritional intake.

Nutritious food and drink are essential for a child's well-being and most importantly growth and development.

Every child should have a balanced diet, which provides energy and nourishment.

‘If a child has a balanced diet from a young age, it reduces the risk of ill health, such as anaemia and dental decay.

Also healthy eating keeps our immune systems in check

So our bodies can fight infection and ill-ness’

(Infection control guidance for nurseries pg12).

In the past children from poor run-down environments were expected to achieve much less in regards of their educational development.

Research shows that children from a poor environment are more likely to follow their parents into a trade rather than taking up further education, regardless of their mental ability.

The government argue that social background shouldn't be an excuse for poor educational achievement.

There is a huge divide between children's ability levels. Curriculum now starts at the age of three at nursery to try to help children develop more equally.

All of this pressure may be putting strain on the parent's, and so deeper problems may arise such as stress, violence and depression.

This can cause a great impact on a child's life physically, emotionally and socially.

Also if the parents of a child are unstable, the child may feel or even become neglected.

The parents of a child are the biggest influence of their life, and also have an important impact on their future health, well being and overall life.

There are various strategies for managing unwanted behaviour. There are times when children will show unwanted behaviour, although if practitioners are working to promote positive behaviour, unwanted behaviour should be relatively rare.

In any placement setting the carer should always remain calm, and consider the approach before hand.

Some of the best strategies are non-confrontational because negatively dealing with children's behaviour by, for example, 'telling them off' can damage their self-esteem and create further problems.

Within any early years placement there are various ideal ways of managing unwanted behaviour such as,

- . Remove any aggressive cues i.e. toy guns
- . Explain to the child why they are in the wrong
- . Be firm and stick to the rules and policies
- . Don't give a continually disruptive child your attention
- . Punish a child, but not aggressively i.e. sit them in the corner

(Psychology and behaviour of the science of the mind, Richard D.Gross)

Pavlov developed one of the most important learning theories. He suggested that learning is best achieved through association. Pavlov believed that we associate one action with another to produce a desired effect.

For example, when a baby's cheek is touched the baby will turn its head in the direction of the touch. If the baby's cheek is touched again while the mother talks to the baby, the baby will turn its head in the direction of the sound and the touch. But if the mother speaks to the baby without touching its cheek the baby will still look in the direction of the mother's voice.

Therefore the baby has been **CONDITIONED** to associate the mother's voice with turning its head to face the sound.

Bandura developed another learning theory. Albert Bandura is most famous for the Bobo doll experiment.

In this experiment, he had children witness a model aggressively attacking a plastic clown called the Bobo doll.

These children watched a video where someone aggressively hit a doll and hurled it down, sat on it and punched it repeatedly, kicked it across the room, and bombarded it with balls.

After the video, the children were placed in a room with attractive toys, but they could not touch them. The process of retention had occurred.

Therefore, the children became angry and frustrated. Then the children were led to another room where there were identical toys used in the Bobo video.

The motivation phase was in occurrence.

Bandura and many other researchers found that 88% of the children imitated the aggressive behaviour.

Bandura overall believed that children learn through observing and imitating another a (model) for example, a parent or a carer in a nursery.

(B Tec early Years Yvonne Nolan)

Piaget believed that children develop a mental structure or (schema). He believed that interacting with the world, and learning through discovery construct a child's understanding of reality.

Piaget believed that there were four distinct stages of cognitive development,

. Sensory-motor (0-2 yrs) – a practical period of learning, here children are egocentric.

. Pre-operational (2-6yrs) – here thinking is pre-logical, for example, judging an action by its outcome.

Concrete-operational (6-11yrs) – thinking becomes more rationale.

Formal-operational (11 yrs+) – thinking becomes more abstract.

Piaget used his own children to make detailed observations, which gradually developed a theory of learning.

His theory is sometimes referred to as a constructivist approach, as he believed that children built their thoughts according to their experiences of the world.

Piaget used the term 'schema' to describe a child's thoughts.

He felt that this was an ongoing process, which helped children to adapt and grow.

Although Piaget is one of the most well known theorists, his research methods have been criticised.

Piaget used clinical interviews as his research method; this method was open to bias, as the type of data Piaget collected is qualitative, but very informative.

It was said that Piaget underestimated children's level of thinking.

He suggested that the cognitive development of children was linked to maturation, and that children could not be 'fast tracked' through these stages.

However some research suggests that children can learn different tasks by giving them the experiences and opportunities, e.g. Bruner felt that 5 and 6 year olds could be taught to conserve, although training isn't fully effective.

(B Tec early Years Yvonne Nolan)

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