

BEHAVIOURAL, EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

UNIT 11

PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON BEHAVIOUR

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Teachers will:

- Identify different psychological perspectives on behaviour and recognise how different perspectives influence the identification of BESD and subsequent interventions
- Know how different psychological perspectives are reflected in school behaviour policies
- Consider the relative strengths and weaknesses of adopting particular psychological perspectives in different situations.

ONLINE RESOURCES

The content and tasks throughout these PDFs are supported by online resources that are designed to facilitate and supplement your training experience.

Links to these are signposted where appropriate. The resources use graphics and interactive elements to:

- Highlight salient points
- Provide at-a-glance content summaries
- Introduce further points of interest
- Offer visual context
- Break down and clearly present the different stages and elements of processes, tasks, practices, and theories

The online resources offer great benefits, both for concurrent use alongside the PDFs, or as post-reading revision and planning aids.

Please note that the resources cannot be used in isolation without referencing the PDFs. Their purpose is to complement and support your training process, rather than lead it.

You should complete any learning or teaching tasks and additional reading detailed in this PDF to make full use of the Advanced training materials for autism; dyslexia; speech, language and communication; emotional, social and behavioural difficulties; moderate learning difficulties.

To find out more about the resources, how they work, and how they can enhance your training, visit the homepage at: www.education.gov.uk/lamb

The first resource for this unit can be found here:

www.education.gov.uk/lamb/besd/psychological-perspective/intro

BRIEFING

Approaches to understanding and managing behaviour have been informed by a number of different psychological perspectives, some of which are based on well-established theories.

Knowledge of these perspectives can contribute to a better-informed response to pupils' behaviour. Specifically, they can contribute to:

- initial identification and assessment of behaviour, and
- the choice of intervention.

It is not necessary to view any one perspective as exclusive as some will be more relevant to individual cases than others, thus enabling a choice of approach according to the context in which the behaviour occurs.

This briefing provides an introductory overview of the range of approaches for understanding and managing behaviour. These are:

- Psychodynamic
- Behaviourist
- Cognitive
- Humanist
- Ecosystemic.

The psychodynamic perspective

This perspective is based on the early work of Sigmund Freud¹ and takes as its main precept, the belief that behaviour is governed by subconscious feelings which arise from early life experiences. It views children's problem behaviour as an outward and visible symptom of internal and invisible conflicts. These conflicts may arise from early trauma or loss or from a troubled relationship with parents or carers. Children do not have the inner resources to be able to process and digest their troubled feelings fully and these may be expressed in inappropriate and difficult behaviour.

“When a child’s too painful or too difficult feelings are left untalked about, they leak out in difficult and challenging behaviour or in neurotic symptoms”.

Sometimes, the source of a painful feeling is buried so deeply under defensive mechanisms that it is very hard to find. Consequently, pupils may not understand why they are behaving in this way.

Psychodynamic assessment is carried out by trained professional, such as psychiatrist or psychoanalytic counsellors, using techniques designed to provide insight into past conflicts. This uses the responses of the pupil to make inferences about underlying and sub-conscious motives for behaviour.

¹ Freud, S (1984) *The Unconscious* in Richards, A *The Pelican Freud Library, Vol. 11. The Theory of Psychoanalysis*. Harmondsworth, Penguin (Original work pub'd 1915).

Interventions based on the results of a psychodynamic assessment:

- Build up pupils' inner resources and sense of security such that they can give up any defensive negative behaviour
- Build supportive relationships, especially with a significant adult
- Enable pupils to talk about their feelings in an appropriate and secure environment e.g. expressing painful feeling through drama, storytelling, play, film scripts or cartoons.

The behaviourist perspective

This perspective is based on the work of psychologists Watson (1930)², Skinner (1953)³ and Thorndike (1932)⁴. The main principle, as expressed in Thorndike's "Law of Effect", is that behaviour that leads to satisfaction is strengthened and behaviour which is ignored or is unsatisfying is weakened. Behaviourist theory claims that all behaviour is learned and can therefore be modified by a system of rewards and punishment.

The behaviourist movement, which originated in America early in the last century, evolved in part as a reaction to the Freudian school in Vienna. Anxious to present the new science of psychology as a scientific method, they claimed that the study of behaviour requires a scientific approach based on objectivity and experimentation. The introspective methods (i.e. hypothesising about what is going on inside someone's head, as used by the Freudian school) were considered to be unscientific. Instead, emphasis was placed on observable and measurable behaviour, rather than a search for causes hidden in an individual's past.

Behavioural assessment in school involves the systematic observation and recording of the antecedent conditions and consequences that surround particular behaviours.

This is then recorded on observation checklists (ABC⁵ – antecedent, behaviour, consequences) to form an initial assessment. This can also be used as a baseline from which post-intervention behaviour can be assessed.

The aim of this systematic approach is to avoid:

- Intuitive judgements about the frequency of a particular behaviour, and
- Inaccurate evaluation of improvements in behaviour based on perceptions that may be biased.

Behavioural interventions or behaviour modification programmes aim to change behaviour patterns by offering positive reinforcements for appropriate behaviours and negative consequences for inappropriate behaviours.

Rewards may be:

² Watson, J. B. (1930). *Behaviorism* (revised edition). University of Chicago Press.

³ Skinner, B.F. (1953). *Science and Human Behavior*. New York: Macmillan.

⁴ Thorndike, E. L. (1932). *The Fundamentals of Learning*. New York, NY, US: Teachers College Bureau of Publications.

⁵ for an explanation of the ABC approach see BESD, TDA Self-study Task 9, Activity 3

- Informal (e.g. acknowledgement or praise) or
- Formal (e.g. behavioural contracts which establish clear targets leading to stickers, tokens, points etc. leading to larger rewards).

The Cognitive perspective

This perspective suggests that individual cognitive processes, such as reasoning, understanding and interpretation of events influence behaviour most. The cognitive approach goes some way to addressing the question 'Why does the same stimulus produces different responses in different people?'

The main cognitive influences on behaviour are considered to be pupils':

- View of themselves
- Understanding of their behaviour and how this affects other people
- Views of who is responsible for the behaviour
- Goals - what are they trying to achieve?

A cognitive approach maintains that problem behaviour may develop when pupils misperceive and misconstrue a situation, so that they respond in a way that seems appropriate and rational to them, but inappropriate to other people who see the situation differently. Behaviour can be changed if attitudes, expectations and beliefs are understood and adapted.

A cognitive perspective differs from a psychodynamic perspective, because it does not refer to unconscious processes; rather it refers to conscious awareness and thinking and reasoning about the current situation. It is also unlike a behavioural perspective in that it refers to non-observable cognitive events which cannot easily be measured.

Cognitive assessment in schools is likely to be through the use of self-monitoring logs and self-reports or interviews so that pupils can describe the thoughts that are associated with a particular behaviour. The aim is to understand behaviours from the pupils' point of view.

The aim of cognitive interventions in school is to clarify and challenge misperceptions, attributions and attitudes and to give pupils some control of their behaviour. For example an intervention such as an Anger Management programme aims to give the pupil more control over his behaviour by helping him to understand the triggers which lead to angry outbursts and to recognise alternative responses which are more socially acceptable⁶.

Much of the work on teaching Emotional Literacy in schools is aimed at pupils developing a better understanding of their own behaviour and how it affects others.

The Humanist perspective

This developed from the work of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers⁷. In 1957 and 1958, at the invitation of Maslow and Rogers, two meetings were held in Detroit

⁶ See *Unit 13: Understanding and Managing Anger*

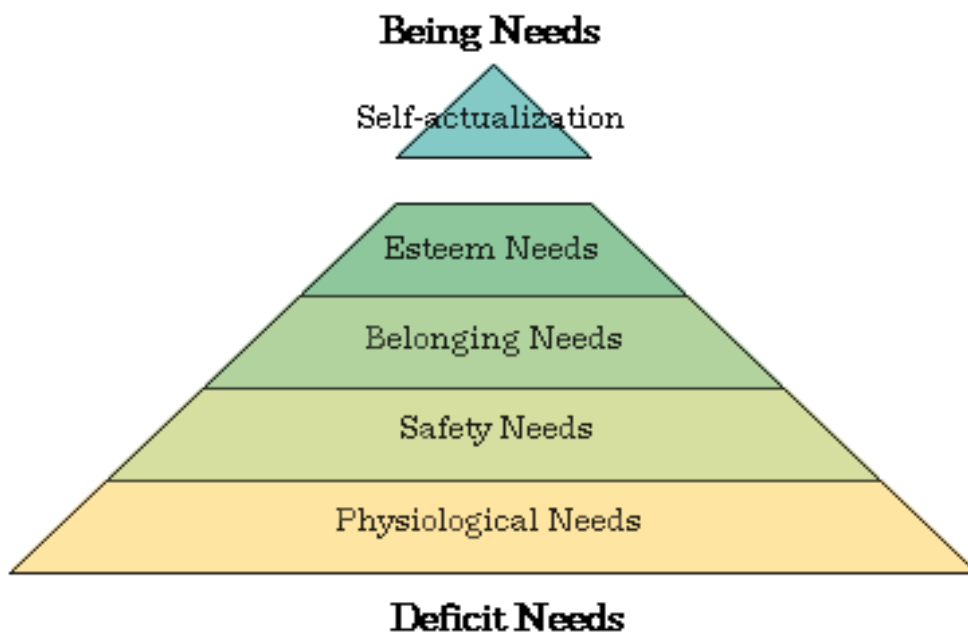
⁷ Rogers, C. (1974) *On becoming a person*, London: Constable.

among psychologists, who were interested in founding a professional association dedicated to a more humanistic vision. Maslow and his colleagues came to refer to their movement as 'third force psychology', the first two forces being psychoanalysis and behaviourism. The third force is based on philosophies of existentialism and humanism

Behaviourists recognise only one motivation for behaviour (i.e. to maximise those experiences that result in positive reinforcement). 'Humanists', however, take into account other very important drivers, which they consider to be essential for human development. These are the need:

- To belong to a social group
- To think well of oneself
- For personal growth.

In his diagrammatic pyramid of the hierarchy of human needs (below), Abraham Maslow places the most basic needs - physiological needs such as hunger and thirst and safety needs - at the bottom of the pyramid. Next come the need to belong and the need to think well of oneself. At the top is self-actualisation, which is interpreted as the need to fulfil oneself (i.e. to become all that one is capable of becoming).



From Maslow's perspective, the drive to learn is intrinsic and the purpose of learning is to bring about self-actualisation. An individual is ready to act in relation to a level of need only when the previous levels of need have been met. For many pupils, especially those with BESD, the need to belong to a group and the need to think well of oneself are needs that may not have been met at home or in their school careers. According to Maslow, therefore, for these pupils, the drive to self-actualisation is unlikely to be recognised.

Humanist interventions in schools focus on addressing the hierarchy of need and developing self-esteem and a sense of belonging. Interventions, such as counselling, involve working with pupils to help them learn alternative ways of perceiving and interpreting themselves and their world which will enable them to be less dependent on those around them for a sense of worth and consequently more resilient to troubling factors in their lives.

“We should recognise that the misbehaving child is only trying to find his place: he is acting on the faulty logic that his behaviour will give him the social acceptance he desires”⁸.

The Ecosystemic perspective

This perspective is based on the idea of an ecosystem, in which even quite small changes in any part of the ecosystem, will bring about related changes elsewhere. The theoretical origins of the Ecosystemic perspective of human behaviour rest in the work of Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968)⁹. Molnar and Lindquist (1989)¹⁰ have applied the model to schools and classrooms.

An ecosystemic approach offers new ways of conceptualising behavioural problems in schools and is based on the view that human behaviour is developed and maintained through interactional processes.

Key features of the ecosystemic approach to behaviour are that:

- problem behaviour does not originate from within the individual, who displays it, but is a product of social interaction
- the cause of any instance of problem behaviour is part of a cyclical chain of actions and reactions between participants.

Behaviour problems are, thus, the product of interactions between teachers, pupils and families or between pupils themselves, and these interactions occur in certain contexts. Teachers, pupils and families can become locked into a pattern of negative circular interaction leading to deteriorating behaviour. Behavioural change can, therefore, occur only through focusing on the context as well as the individuals.

Ecosystemic assessment requires teachers to examine their interpretations of their interactions with pupils, other teachers and parents. The focus is on interpretation

and attribution at a particular time and in a particular context (e.g. in a peer group, in the classroom, in the playground or at home).

⁸ Dreikurs, R. et al. 1998. *Maintaining Sanity in the Classroom* (2nd ed.) Philadelphia: Taylor and Francis

⁹ Bertalanffy, L.von (1968) *General Systems Theory: Foundation, Development, Applications*. New York: Braziller

¹⁰ Molnar, A. & Lindquist, B. (1989) *Changing problem behaviour in schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Ecosystemic interventions in school focus on the idea that there are different, equally valid, interpretations of the same behaviour or situation. Teachers and pupils need to look for a positive interpretation in order to 'reframe' the behaviour and so break out of the negative cyclical chain of actions and reactions between participants. The aim of 'reframing' is for both teacher and pupils to view the problem behaviour in a new and more positive light. This might involve describing the behaviour in neutral and observable terms, identifying positive contributions that the pupil makes and creating a new positive perspective which the pupil can act on.

See online resource:

www.education.gov.uk/lamb/besd/psychological-perspective/perspectives

Psychological perspectives in schools

Frederickson and Cline¹¹ report the percentages of each type of strategy recommended by educational psychologists in one local authority in one school term:

- Behavioural strategies were most frequently used
- The use of behavioural strategies was reported about three times more often in primary than secondary schools
- Counselling and other cognitive interventions were more frequently implemented in secondary schools than in primary.

See online resource:

www.education.gov.uk/lamb/besd/psychological-perspective/perspectives-schools-data

TASKS

1. Listening to staff talking about pupils you may identify the different perspectives on behaviour which influence their comments. Can you identify the perspectives that the teachers might be adopting in the following comments by matching them to perspectives described in the previous section?
 - *Michael's behaviour improves when he is given a smiley face for sitting quietly.*
 - *Maria's aggressive outbursts seem to occur mostly in the playground after lunch break.*
 - *Toby is withdrawn and emotionally insecure, he has had a difficult relationship with his father.*
 - *Lucy is now able to talk about the reasons she feels angry and to identify the triggers which make her lose her temper in class.*
2. It is not necessary to view any one perspective as exclusive as some perspectives will be more relevant to individual cases than others, thus

¹¹ Frederickson & Cline (2009) *Special Educational Needs and Diversity*. Maidenhead: Open University Press

enabling a choice of approach according to the context in which the behaviour occurs.

Use the table below to list of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the various psychological perspectives and think about the type of situations, dealing with pupils with BESD, in which you might decide to adopt an approach based on that perspective.

Perspective	Strengths	...think of a situation in which you would find this approach helpful	Weaknesses	...think of a situation in which this approach would not be helpful
Psycho-dynamic				
Behavioural				
Cognitive				
Humanist				
Ecosystemic				

--	--	--	--	--

3. Read your school behaviour policy and identify the perspectives that inform the strategy. Is it dominated by one perspective or does it reflect a range of perspectives?
4. Talk to a colleague about a pupil with BESD with whom he or she requires support. Identify the main perspective or perspectives that your colleague is taking on the pupil's behaviour. What kinds of interventions might you suggest?

REFERENCES

Ayers et al. (2001) *Perspectives on Behaviour: A practical guide for effective interventions for teachers* (2nd ed) London: David Fulton

Bertalanffy, L.von (1968) *General Systems Theory: Foundation, Development, Applications*. New York: Braziller

Dreikurs, R. Et al (1998) *Maintaining Sanity in the Classroom (2nd ed)* Philadelphia: Taylor and Francis

Frederickson & Cline (2009) *Special Educational Needs and Diversity*. Maidenhead: Open University Press

Freud, S (1984) *The Unconscious* in Richards, A *The Pelican Freud Library, Vol. 11. The Theory of Psychoanalysis*. Harmondsworth, Penguin (Original work pub'd 1915).

Molnar, A. & Lindquist, B. (1989) *Changing problem behaviour in schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Rogers, C. (1974) *On becoming a person*, London: Constable.

Skinner, B.F. (1953). *Science and Human Behavior*. New York: Macmillan.

Thorndike, E. L. (1932). *The Fundamentals of Learning*. New York, NY, US: Teachers College Bureau of Publications.

Watson, J. B. (1930). *Behaviorism* (revised edition). University of Chicago Press.