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Psychological Perspectives and Intervention Strategies for Educating Children with Emotional and Behaviour Difficulties

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Abstract:

The paper reviews literature on the psychological perspectives on educating children with emotional and behaviour difficulties in inclusive schools. Of special interest are useful intervention strategies that could be put into practice by basic and secondary school teachers, working on their own, in support or collaboration with other members of staff to help children with special educational needs with focus on children with emotional and behaviour difficulties. The review excludes the reported strategies of psychiatric treatment and certain special school strategies. However, it covers the definition of emotional and behavioural difficulties, causes of emotional and behaviour difficulties, the characteristics of emotional and behaviour/disorder, the theoretical perspectives and the useful intervention strategies that teachers and special education teachers can employ to help these children. The rationale for the review of the literature is that children with emotional and behaviour difficulties (EBD) are found everywhere in the world and dealing with these children can be an area of special challenge for teachers, parents and special educators because they exhibit a variety of destructive and antisocial behaviours which need to be addressed to enable them benefit from education.

Keywords: Psychological, perspectives, intervention, children, emotional and behaviour difficulties

1. Introduction

The literature review concentrates on identifying different psychological perspectives on behaviour and discuss how different perspectives influence the identification of behavioural, emotional and social development. In order to understand emotional and behaviour difficulties the paper reviews the definitions of emotional and behaviour difficulties, the characteristics of emotional and behaviour difficulties, causes of emotional and behavioural difficulties/disorder and behaviour management interventions.

1.1. Definition and Characteristics of Emotional and Behaviour Difficulties/Disorders

There are various definitions for emotional and behaviour disorders. One such definition is proposed by the Council for Children with Behaviour Disorders (CCBD) and as quoted by Forness & Knitzer (1992). The definition consists some elements which includes the following:

Emotional or behaviour is a term which means a disability characterized by behavioural or emotional responses in school programme so different from appropriate age, culture or ethnic norms that they adversely affect education performance. These educational programmes include academic, social, vocational, or personal skills. Such a disability is more than a temporary expected response to stressful events in the environment, is consistently exhibited in two different settings at least one of which in school-related, and is unresponsive to direct intervention applied in the general educational setting, the child's condition is such that general education intervention would be sufficient.

Emotional or behaviour disorder can exist with other disabilities. This means that a child can have multiple disabilities in addition to emotional or behaviour disorder. Some children have disabilities which co-exist with other disabilities.

This category may include children or youth with schizophrenic disorder, affecting disorders, anxiety disorders, or other sustained disorders of conduct or adjustment. This adversely affect educational performance of these children.

Hallaham and Kaufman (1994) pointed out that this proposed change in the definition of behavioural and emotional disorders is desirable for several reasons, including the following: It recognizes that the category include children with both emotional and behaviour disorders. It also recognizes that emotional and behavioural disorders may exist separately or may interact in the life of a child. It again identifies the significance of cultural and ethnic diversity in defining behavioural or emotional disorders. U.S Federal Definition of EBD (Wikipedia, 2013) states that:

A child exhibiting one of more of the following characteristics to a marked degree for a long duration of time that adversely affects their education:

- Difficulty to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
- Difficulty to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
- Inappropriate types of behaviour (acting out against self or others) or feeling (expresses the need to harm self or others, low self-worth, etc.) under normal circumstances.
- A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.

- A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

The term includes schizophrenia, and does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance.

For the purpose of this paper, I have focused on the use of the definition of emotional and behaviour difficulties (EBD) given in the British Government's Code of Practice in UK for identifying and assessing children with special educational needs (Circular 9/94, DfE, 1994). As suggested in the document 'EBD' is a board label that groups a range of specific difficulties:

- Age-inappropriate behaviour or behaviour which seems otherwise socially inappropriate or strange;
- Behaviour which interferes with a child's own learning or the learning of their peers (e.g. persistent calling out in class, refusal to work, annoyance of peers);
- Signs of emotional turbulence (such as unusual tearfulness, and withdrawal from social situations); and
- Difficulties in forming and maintaining relationships (for example, isolation from peers, aggressiveness to peer and adult).

The difficulties give rise to four main groups of behaviour in class associated with EBD.

- Off-task behaviour (such as fiddling with pencils and equipment, wandering around the classroom and not engaging with the work set by the teacher);
- Disruptive behaviour (such as calling out in class, interfering with others' possessions, or talking to others and disturbing their work);
- Aggressive behaviour (including arguing, fighting or name-calling); and
- Social difficulties (including inappropriate attempts to engage with peers, refusal to engage with peers or adults. (Code of Practice in UK, Circular 9/94, DfE, 1994).

There are both similarities and differences in two definitions listed above. The definitions are similar in the sense that both of them state the causes of EBD could be linked to both psychological and social factors. The definitions recognize emotional and behavioural disorder as a learning disability because it interferes with the child's own learning. Again, the two definitions indicate the characteristics of the EBD.

The difference between the two definition are that, the Council for children with Behaviour Disorder (CCBD) laid emphasis on the culture, ethnicity or norms, but the British Government's Code of Practice for identifying and assessing children with special educational needs- Circular 9/94, DfE, (1994) downplayed the importance of the ecosystem theory. Circular elaborates the characteristics of EBD more than the CCBD's definition in that it states the characteristics of EBD and its categories to help professionals recognize easily the behaviour described as EBD, so that they can plan an appropriate intervention.

1.2. Causes of Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties/Disorders

Human behaviour is so complex that it is almost impossible to isolate a simple cause- and- effect relationship for emotional or behavioural disturbances. An analysis of the causes of emotional and behavioural disorders indicates that these behaviours can be linked to both psychological and social factors. Visser & Rayner (1999) identified four main factors, which are organic disorder, psychological problems, mental health problems and delinquency. Zarkowska & Clement (1994) also indicated that the causes of emotional and behavioural problems are biological, social, emotional and cognitive factors. To them biological factors can increase the likelihood of a person developing a behavioural problem. Such factors include organic brain dysfunction, epilepsy, hearing, and visual difficulties, and certain temperamental characteristics such as a high intensity of emotional responding and poor adaptability to new situations. One could not agree more with this claim because on the aspect of social factors, for example, people who receive poor quality care, or who are rejected by society and their caregivers or by their peers, are more likely to develop behavioural and emotional problems. This confirms the fact that the social causes of emotional and behavioural problems are generally known to be change of roles in the home, school and society, unfavourable relations in the home, societal expectations, difficulty in adjustment to members of opposite sex, religious conflicts, school failures, vocational problems such as problems experienced in most of the developing countries, and some other factors.

From the above explanations one can deduce, therefore, that physical and environmental factors can be causes of heightened emotionality. Smith (1998) supported this by stating that some physical or environmental factors may increase the likelihood of a problem developing. Brown & Chazam (1989) also agreed to this assertion and state that, poor physical conditions may reduce a child's resistance to stress, and thus be a factor in emotional upset.

The effect of family structure and relationships on children's behaviour has been well discussed by many authors. Smith (1998) listing some of the causes, stated that the predisposition and precipitating causes of emotional disturbance might include the interaction of genetics, disease, injury, family relationships, community forces, school influences, and many factors. Rutter et al. (1970) indicated that behaviour problems in middle childhood tend to significantly associate with an excess of social and family background problems, for example marital problems, ill health of the parent, which include physical or mental, or single parenting. Galloway (1985) stated that the school's own policies and practices are seen as important factors in aggravating, if not creating, many behaviour problems presented by its pupils, and these policies and practices are perceived as largely determined by pressures from society. Bowman (1981) also echoed that the perceptions of, and responses to pupils' emotional and behavioural difficulties depend to considerable extent on political and economic constraints on family life, educational policy and professional theories and practices.

1.3. Manifestations of Behaviour Disorders

There are various manifestations of behaviour disorders and these include the following:

- Problems in basic academic skills and educational achievement. Most children in this category have difficulty in academic performance. According to Kupper (2013), emotional disturbances can affect many different aspects central to child's learning, including (but not limited to): concentration, stamina, handling time pressures and multiple tasks, interacting with others, responding to feedback, responding to change, and remaining calm under stress.
- The children have environmental struggles such as aggression and/or self-injurious behaviour such as fighting, bullying, violating rules, overactive, impulsive, stealing, truancy, and other socially maladjusted behaviours.
- These children have a lot worrying and most of the time personal conflicts which may include anxiety disorders.
- These children have a lot of shortfalls socially; children are unpopular among their peers and are left out by their peers.
- The children have difficulty in accepting responsibility. They will refute anything they have done wrong even if you have proof of their wrong doing. These children are found of blaming others for their irresponsible actions.

1.4. Psychological Perspectives on Behaviour and Intervention Strategies

There are a number of psychological models available to guide practice in working with children with emotional and behavioural problems. The four most widely used models for intervention according to Stakes & Hornby (2000) are the behaviourist approach; the cognitive or cognitive-behavioural perspective; the ecosystem perspective and the psychodynamic/humanistic approach. Ayers et al. (1995) also explained that the first three as listed above may be helpful for working with children with behavioural problems in the classroom. This review concentrates on the behaviourist, cognitive, ecosystemic/ecological, psychodynamic and humanistic perspectives.

1.5. The Behaviourist Perspective

The behaviourist perspective is based on learning theory. This perspective is based on the work of psychologists Watson (1930), Skinner (1953) and Thorndike (1932). 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. It is based on the principle that behavioural and emotional problems occur through inappropriate learning, and that a child with problems can be assisted through relearning techniques. Behavioural models use principles of reinforcement and punishment to reduce maladaptive or inappropriate behaviours and increase adaptive behaviours (Davis & Florian, 2004).

The approach to employ to help the child to acquire the appropriate responses through relearning techniques is sub-divided into two theories - Classical and operant conditioning theories by Russian Physiologist Ivan P. Pavlov and B. F Skinner respectively. Although the intention is not to discuss the classical conditioning experiments, it is perhaps important to summarize Pavlov's and Skinner's major ideas and this is done in the paragraph that follows.

To Pavlov, the capacity to learn depends on the type of nervous system and the repetitions of the activity under reinforcement. For learning to occur, one must have some drive that motivates for action. Transfer of learning is explained as generalization of stimulus. Operant conditioning, which began with Skinner (1904) of Harvard University, dwells on shaping as the most important mechanism used in operant conditioning. It refers to the judicious use of selective reinforcement to bring certain desirable changes in the behaviour of an organism. Skinner noted that there are three important principles which are involved in the process of successful shaping of behaviour, and these are generalization, habit repetition and chaining which must be linked to the succeeding segment. As noted by Stakes and Hornby (2000), "in such approach a child will learn acceptable behaviour through the use of rewards, their pattern and timing. Effective techniques include time out, response costs, contracts, progress charts and token economies" (p.39). This approach is sometimes called behaviour modification. It is particularly effective for the treatment of externalizing disorders and for developing social and basic living skills.

1.5.1. Intervention

According to Chauhan (1990), the main tool of the behavioural perspective in the classroom is functional analysis of observable behaviour. Observations should be set around four features: the frequency of the inappropriate behaviour, the intervals between behaviours, its duration and its latency (the length of time before a pupil performs a particular behaviour). These would help teachers to design an appropriate way of dealing with each difficulty. Walker & Shea (1995) described the following four procedures for applying behaviour modification by teachers in the classroom:

- Observe and clarify the behaviour to be changed
- Select and present potent reinforcers at the appropriate time
- Design and impose, with consistency, and intervention technique based on the principles of reinforcement.
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention (p.43, emphasis added).

The Walker & Shea (1995) procedure gives clear steps that parents and teachers could follow to help children to learn appropriate behaviours. Educators need to observe and understand the behaviour before they make any attempt to help the child to improve on that behaviour.

1.6. The Cognitive Perspective

According to Zarkowska and Clements (1994), a relatively recent approach to helping people overcome behavioural and emotional difficulties is one that focuses on people's interpretations of events. According to the cognitive perspective, people's thoughts and interpretations will influence their mood. Negative thoughts will lower mood, while positive thoughts will raise a person's mood and consequent motivations. Cognitive behavioural therapies focus on how thought processes can sometimes influence the relationship between external stimuli and target behaviours. They aim to encourage the development of functional ways of thinking by challenging and changing dysfunctional ways of thinking (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011). Therefore, cognitive therapists assume that by assessing a person's unhelpful thoughts and interpretations of events, he can be helped to develop more useful ways of thinking and to develop better analytical and problem-solving strategies.

The cognitive perspective of behaviour management is based on three key principles. First, changes in behaviour can be initiated. Second, these changes can be monitored. Third, changes in the behaviour are related to changes in cognition. The cognitive perspective calls for assessment of a child's learning processes and how they affect behaviour. Through undertaking such an assessment and an analysis of what has been observed, changes in behaviour can be brought about. The assessment can be taken using a variety of techniques including self-reporting, observation, interview, and the use of published behaviour-rating scales. Gestalt theory of Kohler, field theory of Kurt Lewin and E.C Tolman's theory of learning are the contributors to this theory.

1.6.1. Intervention

The aim of cognitive interventions in school is to clarify and challenge misperceptions, attributions and attitudes and to give pupils some control of their behaviours. 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 recognize alternative responses which are more socially acceptable (Department of Education, UK, 2011). Much of the work on teaching Emotional Literacy in schools is aimed at pupil developing a better understanding of their own behaviours and how it affects others.

1.7. The Humanistic Perspective

The Humanistic approach is one which helps people to overcome emotional and behavioural difficulties. It focuses on the inner life or subjective experience of the individual. The Humanistic approach emphasizes self-direction, self-fulfillment, self-evaluation, and free choice of educational activities and goals, but the theoretical underpinnings of humanistic models are hard to identify. This developed from the work of Abraham Maslow & Carl Rogers (1974). While behaviourists recognize only one motivation for behaviour (i.e. to maximize those experiences that result in positive reinforcement), 'humanists' 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 Abraham Maslow's diagrammatic pyramid of the hierarchy of human needs, his perspective was that 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 emotional behaviour and Social difficulties, 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 recognized.

1.7.1. Intervention

Humanist interventions in schools focus on addressing the hierarchy of need and developing self-esteem and a sense of belonging. Interventions, such as counselling which will involve working with pupils to help them learn alternative ways of perceiving and interpreting themselves and their world 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. As Dreikurs (1998) indicated that we should recognize that the misbehaving child is only trying to find his place: he is acting on the faulty logic that this behaviour will give him the social acceptance he desires.

A teacher who devises education based on a humanistic model will be more a resource and catalyst for learning than a director of activities. (Department of Education, UK, 2011). According to 'humanistic' perspectives, people are viewed, as motivated by a desire for personal growth and self-fulfillment. When difficulties arise, these desires are temporarily halted' (Zarkowska & Clements, 1994, p.7). During this time people may need help to get them back on the road to self-fulfillment. This can be facilitated by relationships with a significant other, who shows warmth, respect and unconditional regard for the person. I think parents, care takers, teachers and relatives to some extent can play this role.

1.8. The Psychodynamic Perspective

The Psychodynamic is based on the early work of Sigmund Freud (1984), cited by Philips (2011) and takes as its main percept, 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 from a troubled relationship with parent 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.

1.8.1. Intervention

Psychodynamic therapies involve establishing therapeutic relationships which enable the individual to reveal and explore analytically the life experiences which have influenced the development of dysfunctional ways of thinking and behaving (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011). Psychodynamic assessment is carried out by trained professionals, such as psychiatrist or psychoanalytic counsellors, using techniques designed to provide insight into past conflicts. This uses responses of the pupil to make inferences about underlying and sub-conscious motives for behaviour.

1.9. The Ecosystemic Perspective/ the Ecological Approach

The Ecosystemic Perspective, also known as the Ecological Approach 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) Molnar & Lindquist (1989) have applied the model to schools and classrooms. The ecosystemic theory was developed extensively by Bronfenbrenner (1994). An ecosystemic approach offers new ways of conceptualizing behavioural problems in schools and is based on the view that human behaviour is developed and maintained through interactional processes.

The great thing about the Ecological Perspective is that, unlike Behaviourism, it systematically examines the role of multiple levels of the environment (not just the immediate environment) on human development (not just behaviour), and it also acknowledges that individuals are active within these contexts. It takes all of the wonderful attributes of, say, Cognitive Theory, Information Processing Theory, Socio-cultural Theory, and more, it keeps the core assumptions of these theories, and at the same time it takes a serious look at the active, developing person within a context that is also dynamic and changing. 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 behavior is part of a cyclical chain of actions and reactions between participants (See online resource: www.education.gov.uk/lamb/besd/psychological-perspective/perspectives).

Ecosystemic theory is a very important theory because it helps to understand people and an individual. As Phelan (2004), indicated that the usefulness of ecosystemic theory, like other viewpoints, is that we often try to understand people in isolation from the factors that create both reinforcement for behaviour and patterns of interaction. Phelan (2004), argued further that when educators begin to think more systematically, we see all manner of relationships and dynamics which have been relatively invisible.

1.9.1. Intervention

The Ecosystemic theorist see behaviour problems as 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).

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.

Bronfenbrenner gives some useful suggestions about the way educators can use ecosystem information which includes the points of interaction between elements in one's system which can be the most effective places to focus the change efforts. The connecting link between family and school or school and peers is a more useful focus than trying to work in isolation with discrete segment of a microsystem- for example, with an individual in isolation. The reviewer thinks that this is where the problems lies. For example, how will an African teacher who has no Western or European teaching experience help a child with emotional and behaviour difficulties who has just moved from Europe to Africa or vice versa? How do we blend the two ecosystems where cultures are completely different? A child who is having emotional problems and has been removed from the southern part of Ghana to the Northern part of Ghana would create problems for teachers who may make effort to help using ecosystemic perspective.

As Phelan (2004) argued, think about the wisdom of trying to influence the relationship or the interaction between people rather than trying to change the fundamental beliefs or ingrained behaviour of an individual. Systematic interventions allow the Child and Youth Care practitioner to be a coach or facilitator for a youth or family, rather than someone trying to control and influence beliefs about self and world. Educators can only help this child by constructing a new artificial ecosystem around the child. It is my belief that this would help the emotional and behaviour disorders child to functions more effectively.

2. Conclusion

There are various perspectives and intervention strategies in helping Children with emotional and behaviour difficulties. The behaviourist believe there should be functional analysis of behaviours that are exhibited and observed. This will be very helpful in designing educational programme that will be helpful for these children.

The cognitive perspective looks at people's thoughts and interpretations. To the cognitivist positive thoughts can positively influence the mood of these children, while negative thought will lower the mood of these children. Therefore, there is the need to assess the unhelpful thought of children with emotional and behaviour difficulties so that they can be helped to develop important ways of thinking. In helping these children, educators need to explain and challenge certain misunderstandings and attitudes of these children so that these children can have some control of their behaviours. Hierarchy of need is an area focused on by 'humanist'. One of the key factors of the children with emotional and behaviour difficulties is that such children appear to have low self-esteem (Colwell & O'Connor, 2003). Therefore, these children need quality of interaction to boost their self-esteem. This quality of interaction should come from the educators who are always in touch with these children.

The Psychodynamic view children's problem behaviour as an external and observable symptom of internal and invisible conflicts. According to Psychodynamic, the conflicts arise based on troubled relationship. These children need trained educators to help them because they do not have the internal resources to be able to process and understand the disturbed feelings they are experiencing.

An ecosystemic approach helps conceptualise behavioural problems in schools. The approach examines the role of multiple levels of the environment. The ecosystemic approach is about a sect of social systems. This theory really complements all of the other perspectives reviewed. According to ecosystemic approach, the behaviour management should focus on the way children perceive their world and the understanding of their total interaction of their environment they find themselves.

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