

Book Review

Supporting Positive Behaviour in Early Childhood Settings and Primary Schools: Relationships, Reciprocity and Reflection by O'Toole, L., & Hayes, N.

Emily Coleman-Hill | New Zealand Tertiary College

Supporting Positive Behaviour in Early Childhood Settings and Primary Schools makes it clear within the first few pages that this is not a book with quick fixes or how-to guides when it comes to promoting positive behaviour in children. Instead, throughout all 10 chapters, the reader is reminded to be reflective in their practice, further supported by the reflection boxes interspersed throughout each chapter. It is through this regular reflection, O'Toole and Hayes postulate that those within the education sector (and beyond) will develop the skills to establish appropriate responses to behaviour and importantly, have a deeper understanding of the *what* and *why* behind actions taken to support positive behaviour based on theoretical perspectives. For the purpose of this review, the reader is assumed to be an educator, however this book is presented in a way that can be accessible to all looking to understand supporting positive behaviour.

Chapter one begins by deconstructing authority, cautioning the reader to be mindful of creating overly obedient children, citing both the Stanford Prison and the Milgram experiments as warnings of controlling tactics to create unquestioning obedience. The authors remind the reader that the children in their care are just as challenged by positive behaviour development. As children move through educational systems, they have the task of understanding the behavioural expectations of each adult that they spend time with, in addition to considering the expectations from their home and family. Emphasis is put on supporting children to develop an internal sense of positive behaviour instead of focusing on the external motivation of praise or fear of punishment.

In chapter two, the authors make connections between parenting styles and educational practices. Based on Baumrind's extensive research into parenting styles, O'Toole and Hayes identify the '*authoritative approach*' as a pedagogically sound practice in supporting positive behaviour in educational settings. While the word 'authoritative' may present as an issue to readers, the authors explain that "authoritative educators aim for a 'middle ground' that allows for consistent, firm but fair implementation of rules" (p. 22). Through this type of approach, children are provided with an environment that ensures that emotional needs are met, further strengthening the ability to establish positive behaviour expectations based on respect and strong relationships. While the authors make a connection to *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum (Te Whāriki)* (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2017) in chapter five, one can also make the connection here to the principle of empowerment wherein children are taught in a way that protects their mana while also learning to enhance the mana of others through the delicate balance of boundaries and trust.

Book Review

When confronted with challenges, O’Toole and Hayes encourage the reader to look further into the behaviour that a child is demonstrating. After thorough examinations of different theoretical perspectives (Bandura, Bowlby, Freud, Pavlov, and Skinner are just a few names that can be found throughout chapters three - five), the biological factors discussed in chapter six highlight the importance of children’s basic needs first being met if educators hope to support them in developing positive behaviour skills. Importantly, within this chapter, the child’s need for movement and play is examined, bringing Froebel, Piaget, McMillan, Montessori and Vygotsky into the discussion. The considerations of basic needs, movement, play, sensory processing, and temperament are all possible factors that influence behaviour. Through awareness, educators can mitigate these issues and strengthen positive behaviours.

Chapters seven and eight bring bioecological theory and intercultural perspectives into focus. Bronfenbrenner’s Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) framework is discussed as a means to get to know the children, supporting the reader to develop the authentic connection required to follow the authoritative approach to positive behaviour development in a genuine manner. In looking at cultural influences, the connection between educator and child is again important, as the possible tension between home and school cultures impacting on behaviour is discussed. The authors discuss the culture shock that some children experience regularly as they navigate through different home and education settings. By creating spaces that welcome diversity and celebrate the funds of knowledge each child holds, educational settings can establish inclusive pedagogy that allows for positive behaviour development.

To support readers in their journey of combining theoretical perspectives in response to situations, chapter nine looks at the example of bullying through behaviourist, psychodynamic, humanist, biopsychosocial, bioecological, and intercultural lenses. The authors remind the reader that through reflective practices, blind spots, bias, and detection of bullying behaviours can be identified and modified.

Chapter 10 offers a succinct summary of the theoretical perspectives discussed throughout the book. Additionally, O’Toole and Hayes introduce three levels of reflection: surface (focusing on practice, seeing teaching as isolated events); pedagogical (considering theory and applying them in practice); and critical (examining social, ethical, and political affects of professional practice and how they may impact directly or indirectly on children). They also identified the possibility of a fourth level of reflection, the ‘pre-reflective’ level which would most likely be those who are new to the teaching profession and who may need most support with establishing positive behaviour strategies.

O’Toole and Hayes present the reader with a variety of theories and approaches, guiding reflections through intentional questioning while also encouraging independent reflective practices. While they do not promise a quick fix to support positive behaviour, the many theoretical lenses include scenarios that demonstrate the strengths and shortcomings of each perspective, supporting the reader to understand how to use them on a case-by-case basis when supporting children with positive behaviour and developing strong reflective practices along the way.

Book Review

Reference

O'Toole, L., & Hayes, N. (2019). *Supporting Positive Behaviour in Early Childhood Settings and Primary Schools: Relationships, Reciprocity and Reflection*. Routledge.