Positive behaviour and the learning environment
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This session will take a minimum of one hour

Objectives

• To consider what is meant by the learning environment
• To identify key factors in the environment which help to promote behaviour for learning
• To evaluate the impact of the physical environment on behaviour for learning

Resources

• OHTs 1.1–1.7
• Handout 1.1
• One set of question cards, made from resource sheet 1, per pair of participants
• Photographs of different classroom environments

Session outline

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Introduction

Introduce the aims of the session by showing OHT 1.1.

OHT 1.1

Aims of the session
- To consider what is meant by the learning environment
- To identify key factors in the environment which help to promote behaviour for learning
- To evaluate the impact of the physical environment on behaviour for learning

Explain that the first half of the session will look very broadly at a number of factors in the child's environment that might promote the kind of behaviour we want to see - behaviour that supports learning.

The second part of the session will focus on one aspect of the environment – the physical environment of the classroom.

You may want to use this session if school self-evaluation, using the Primary National Strategy Initial review or In-depth audits (1732-2005CD0-EN), has shown that relevant aspects of school ethos and organisational factors or teaching and learning are areas which the school wants to address.

Schools using the materials Excellence and Enjoyment: social and emotional aspects of learning (DfES 0110-2005) will be able to make links between this session and the work that children undertake in Theme 1 New beginnings.

Ask participants for their ideas of what is meant by the learning environment. If answers tend to focus only on the physical environment of the school and classroom, make the point that we can and should also think of the environment more widely to include factors that we often call ‘ethos’ or ‘climate’.

OHT 1.2

Factors that make up the learning environment
- Physical
- Relationships
- Structures and expectations
- Language and communication
OHT 1.2 sets out these factors. You might want to expand on them as follows:

**Physical:**
The layout of the school and classroom, its facilities and the resources children use.

**Relationships:**
How people in the school behave towards each other, care about and look after one another.

**Structures and expectations:**
Expectations we hold about children’s behaviour, and the school and classroom rules and routines.

**Language and communication:**
The way that relationships, structures and expectations are manifested through verbal and non-verbal communication in the school.

**Influencing the environment**

Introduce this section by explaining that there may be different perceptions and beliefs among staff in the school about how far they can influence children’s behaviour for learning, given the significance in children’s lives of environmental factors that are likely to be outside the control of the school.

Use OHT 1.3 to make the point that the environment can be viewed from a number of angles - from the whole of the society that we live in through to the community, family, school and classroom, and even the table grouping that the individual child experiences on a minute-by-minute basis in school. For the child who is sitting in class, how they feel when surrounded by their peers at the table is as much part of their environment as are the wider factors of school, family and community.
Ask the group to close their eyes and think of a child they know who often does not behave in school in ways that help learning. Ask them to think first about the outer ring of the slide – the factors in society and the community that form part of that child’s total environment. Can they identify factors there that influence the child’s behaviour?

Then ask them to move in mentally to the next ring – family – and think of the factors in that environment that may be making a difference to the child’s behaviour.

Do the same for ‘school’ and ‘classroom’.

Finally, ask the group to think about the last ring – the table where the child usually sits – and any factors in that micro-environment that are important influences on learning behaviour.

Take comments: in which rings did the group feel that the major environmental influences on the child occur?

Go on to use activity 1.1 to draw out the point that, although teachers and other school staff may not always be able to influence the wider environment of society, community and family, they can make a significant difference to children’s behaviour for learning through the parts of the child’s environment that are under their control. They can also help children to understand that they are able to make choices about their behaviour: there may be one set of expectations in the community or family but it is possible to choose different ways of behaving in school, which conform to expectations in that environment.

**Activity 1.1: Influences on behaviour** *(10 minutes)*

Ask participants to work in pairs. They should think back to their own schooldays (or, if they prefer, to their own children’s experiences of school), identify something about an adult in the school that made a positive difference to them as learners, and describe it to their partner, using the questions on cards made from resource sheet 1 as a prompt.

Take feedback, drawing out key points, for example:

- Teachers and other adults in school are very important people in children’s lives.
- Teachers may not always appreciate the influence they have.
- Teachers may say or do small things that they themselves hardly notice, but which can have a significant and lasting impact on the children with whom they work.
Exploring how the environment can promote behaviour for learning

15 minutes

Activity 1.2: Exploring where we would like to be (10 minutes)

This activity is intended to help participants develop an image of a classroom environment they would truly aspire to.

Ask participants to relax. They need to make sure that they are comfortable. Show OHT 1.4, covering up the questions.

OHT 1.4

Creating the environment in the classroom

Imagine that, while you have been away from school, a miracle has taken place and the perfect classroom environment has been created. You are unaware that this has happened until you enter the classroom.

- What do you see?
- How is the classroom arranged?
- How are the children reacting?
- How do you feel?

Slowly read out the script on the slide. After you have finished reading, indicate to participants that you will now allow them a minute to develop and explore the image they have in their minds of this class and classroom. After this time, reveal the questions on the slide - these should help the participants become more specific about the situation they have developed in their minds.

At this point, ask participants to share their responses to these questions with a partner.

After 5 minutes, identify the technique that participants have just used as a solution-focused technique (visualising ‘preferred futures’) which can help problem-solving. Stress that this technique is designed to help people - children or adults - to examine a situation from another perspective and, by looking at where they might like to be, start to develop ways of getting to that point. It is a useful technique when working with colleagues on behaviour and attendance issues, or when working with children who are experiencing difficulties with their behaviour and attendance. (Note: You may want to make reference here to the Primary Strategy continuing professional development (CPD) session Focusing on solutions (1733-2005PD5-EN) which explores a range of solution-focused techniques in more depth.)
Next, indicate that it will be useful if the class that participants have just imagined is kept in their minds and referred to as you progress through this session.

Note: If you have time, you might want to extend this activity. You could give participants large sheets of paper and coloured pens, and ask them to work in groups of two or three to design their perfect classroom. Having thought about the physical environment in this way, they can then focus on the broader issues of ethos and climate, using the ‘miracle’ question. Ask the group to imagine themselves in the classroom they have designed, and think about:

- what they would see, hear and feel;
- what the children would be doing;
- what they themselves would be doing.

Use Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, on OHT 1.5, to help the group think about the ideal classroom environment. If participants are not familiar with the concept of a hierarchy of needs, you may want to expand on it, particularly stressing that children are not able to operate at the higher levels of the triangle (for example, self-actualisation and learning) if their basic needs are not met.
An ideal classroom environment will be one that meets both basic and higher-level needs. Ask participants, as you talk, to refer back to their imagined class and note whether the aspects you describe featured in their mental picture.

• **Physiological/survival needs**
  I’m not too hot or too cold.
  I’m not hungry or tired.
  I can see and hear.
  I’m not squashed.
  I have water to drink when I’m thirsty.
  I can go to the toilet when I need to.

• **Safety needs**
  I’m not going to be hurt, bullied or harassed here.
  Someone is making sure I am safe.
  I can tell people about any worries I have.

• **Love, affection and belonging**
  I feel cared for in this classroom.
  I belong here.
My name is on my coat peg and my work is on the wall.
I have somewhere to keep my possessions.
My race and culture are reflected in this classroom.
I am taught how to work in groups and I work in different groups so I know all the children in my class and they know me.
I feel people listen to me.
I help to make my classroom a good place to be.
I help to make the rules and I can suggest changes we need in our class to make things better.

• **Self-esteem**

Ask the group at this point what a child might say about a classroom environment which promoted high self-esteem. Write up what they say on a flipchart. You might want to provide sentence stems for the group to complete, for example:

I can see...
My teacher...
We always...
I feel...

Ideas the group might come up with might include displays of work, the way adults provide specific praise, or the language adults use to correct misbehaviour.

• **Self-actualisation**

I am able to explore ideas, learn new things, be creative, develop my talents and stretch myself.

Ask the group for their ideas on the kinds of classrooms where the children feel able to ‘self-actualise’ in the way Maslow describes. What would teachers be doing in such classrooms?

Summarise the features of a classroom environment that meets children’s needs, using **OHT 1.6**.
Draw out links between the inappropriate behaviour children may show and failure to meet their basic needs. Invite participants, in pairs or small groups, to quickly make a list of inappropriate behaviour they see in their classrooms. They should then consider, for each of these types of behaviour, which of Maslow’s basic needs might not be met. Start the activity off with one or two examples from the list below:

- Children who squabble because they are working in cramped conditions (physical needs not met).
- Children who are on edge throughout a lesson, afraid that they will be put on the spot, or humiliated or teased because they are not able to respond correctly to classroom questions and tasks (safety needs not met).
- Children who withdraw or become aggressive because they feel that no-one likes or cares for them (need to belong not met).
- Children who ‘clown’ as a way of maintaining self-esteem among peers (need to feel valued not met).

Take feedback. Suggest that where a child is not behaving appropriately it can be useful to check whether the classroom environment (physical, relationships, structures and expectations, language and communications) is meeting their basic needs and, if not, what simple steps might be taken to correct this.

Explain that the areas of relationships, structures and expectations, language and communication are covered in other Primary Strategy CPD sessions available to participants.

For the remainder of this session, however, you will address the **physical environment.**
Evaluating the physical environment 15 minutes

Activity 1.3: Evaluating the physical environment (15 minutes)

Ask participants to work in small groups of three.

Supply each group with photographs of different classroom environments.

Note: The photographs can be downloaded and printed from the website www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/banda, or from the CD-Rom that accompanies these professional development materials.

Using the questions on OHT 1.7 as prompts, ask participants to evaluate each of the classrooms in the photographs in terms of positive environmental factors that will promote good behaviour and regular attendance. It may be useful to give participants a copy of handout 1.1 to place alongside the photographs, so that they can make links to children’s basic needs as they discuss each classroom.

After an appropriate time take comments and feedback on each of the settings. You may need to prompt participants to consider the following points.

- Is the room welcoming?
- How is the furniture arranged?
- What is on the walls?
- How much space is there in the classroom?
- Does the room look comfortable?
- Can I see how the children are valued?
If you have time, it would also be useful to lead a discussion about how participants manage ‘carpet time’ in their classrooms, having them sketch different arrangements on flipchart paper, and drawing out issues about meeting children’s basic needs in this context. You are likely to explore good practice ideas such as:

- considering carefully how long children need to sit on the carpet, and for what purpose;
- having a seating plan, such as a rainbow, or adding a bench at the back and/or sides of the carpet for some children to sit on;
- identifying a particular spot (with a carpet tile or special cushion) for a child who needs space around them or the security of a fixed routine;
- having children who need most attention sit near the teacher but in their line of sight rather than right at the teacher’s feet.

**Conclusion**

**10 minutes**

Summarise the session aims, using OHT 1.1.

Emphasise that:

- children’s learning is affected by their total environment - from society as a whole through to local community, family, school, classroom and table grouping;
- while some aspects of this environment are outside the teacher’s control, aspects that the school can influence are often very important;
- the school and classroom environment should meet children’s basic physical needs, their need to feel safe and secure, their need to feel personally valued and cared for, and their need for self-esteem and self-actualisation;
- the physical setting, the quality of relationships in school, the lesson structures and classroom expectations, the language and communication used, all offer routes into designing school and classroom environments that will meet these needs.

Ask participants to talk briefly in pairs and, remembering the ‘miracle’ classroom they thought about earlier, identify one small change they could make in their own classroom, tomorrow, which would take them one step further towards that ideal.

Suggest that they jot down the change they plan to make and be ready to report back on the outcomes in a future session.
If you are using this session in school with all staff, identify with the group some tasks or activities which will help everyone to apply the learning from the session to their own situation or classroom. Some suggested ideas are given below. Make time, when you next meet to focus as a staff on promoting positive behaviour, for people to talk about the activities they undertook, and what they learned.

- Identify a partner in school with whom you will work. Implement the change in the classroom environment that you planned in the session, and note any effects. Discuss these with your partner.

- Work with a partner, each of you thinking of a child who is not behaving appropriately in class or school. Use **handout 1.1** to discuss whether the classroom or school environment is meeting the child's basic needs. Identify a small step you might take to change an aspect of the environment (physical, relationships, structures and expectations or language and communication) so as better to meet those needs. Make the change. Monitor the effects on the child. Talk with your partner about what you learned.

- As a whole staff group choose one of the ‘layers’ in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs on **handout 1.1**: for example, providing stimulation or challenge and opportunities to use diverse talents, or making children feel individually valued. Set up a systematic process for observing in each other’s classrooms, noticing and providing feedback on factors in the classroom environment which are effective in your chosen layer. Collate the good ideas that come from these observations. The next time you meet as a staff group to focus on promoting positive behaviour, discuss how the school could establish consistent approaches in this layer, building on the examples of effective practice you have gathered. What might need to happen to ensure greater consistency? Who will do what, and when? Who will take responsibility for monitoring and evaluation?
Aims of the session

• To consider what is meant by the learning environment

• To identify key factors in the environment which help to promote behaviour for learning

• To evaluate the impact of the physical environment on behaviour for learning
Factors that make up the learning environment

- Physical
- Relationships
- Structures and expectations
- Language and communication
The child's environment

- Wider community
- School
- Classroom
- Table
- Family
- Society
Creating the environment in the classroom

Imagine that, while you have been away from school, a miracle has taken place and the perfect classroom environment has been created. You are unaware that this has happened until you enter the classroom.

- What do you see?
- How is the classroom arranged?
- How are the children reacting?
- How do you feel?
Maslow’s hierarchy of needs

- Physiological or survival needs
- Safety
- Love, affection and belonging
- Self-esteem
- Self-actualisation
Maslow’s hierarchy of needs

- Provides stimulation, challenge and opportunities to use diverse talents
- Makes children feel individually valued
- Promotes ownership and belonging; promotes social interaction; makes children feel known and cared about as individuals
- Makes children feel safe and secure
- Meets physical needs
The physical environment

- Would I like to work in this classroom? Why?
- Would children like to work in this classroom? Why?
- What is it about this classroom that might promote positive behaviour for learning, and regular attendance?
Maslow’s hierarchy of needs

- Provides stimulation, challenge and opportunities to use diverse talents
- Makes children feel individually valued
- Promotes ownership and belonging; promotes social interaction; makes children feel known and cared about as individuals
- Makes children feel safe and secure
- Meets physical needs
What was it about the adult that made the difference to you?

What did the adult do or say?

What was the difference they made to you?

How did this affect your learning?