

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

MSN1083

**EFFECTIVE BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT FOR LEARNERS
WITH DIVERSE NEEDS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

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TOPIC 2

UNDERSTANDING LEARNER BEHAVIORS AND NEEDS

Learning Outcome

By the end of this lecture, students should be able to identify and describe different types of learner behaviors commonly observed in educational settings; explain the possible factors and triggers that influence learner behavior; examine the relationship between special educational needs and behavioral responses; distinguish between the observable behavior and its possible underlying function; and propose appropriate, supportive, and inclusive responses to learner behaviors based on individual needs and classroom contexts.

What Do We Mean by “Behavior”?

- **Behavior** refers to observable actions or responses demonstrated by an individual in interaction with people and the environment.
- Behavior may include:
 - ☐ Actions
 - ☐ Verbal responses
 - ☐ Social interactions
 - ☐ Emotional expressions
 - ☐ Avoidance or withdrawal
 - ☐ Repetitive actions
 - ☐ Responses to instructions or demands

Important

Behavior occurs within a **context**. Understanding the context helps us understand the learner.

Looking Beyond the Behavior

- Teachers often see the **observable behavior** first.
- For example:

☐ **Observable behavior**

Learner puts their head on the desk and refuses to complete a worksheet.

Possible underlying factors

- ☐ Task is too difficult
- ☐ Learner does not understand the instructions
- ☐ Fear of failure
- ☐ Sensory overload
- ☐ Fatigue
- ☐ Difficulty communicating
- ☐ Seeking attention or assistance
- ☐ Previous negative experience

Ask “What might this behavior be communicating?” rather than only “How do I stop this behavior?”

Types of Learner Behaviors

➤ Learner behaviors may be broadly considered as:

1. Adaptive/positive behaviors

- ☐ Following routines
- ☐ Asking for help
- ☐ Cooperating with peers
- ☐ Self-regulation
- ☐ Appropriate communication

2. Externalizing behaviors

- ☐ Shouting
- ☐ Hitting
- ☐ Throwing objects
- ☐ Leaving the classroom
- ☐ Disrupting activities

3. Internalizing behaviors

- ☐ Withdrawal
- ☐ Anxiety
- ☐ Avoidance
- ☐ Silence
- ☐ Social isolation

4. Repetitive/self-stimulatory behaviors

- ☐ Rocking
- ☐ Hand movements
- ☐ Repeating words or phrases
- ☐ Repetitive manipulation of objects

Externalizing Behaviors

- Externalizing behaviors are usually more noticeable because they affect the surrounding environment.
- Examples:
 - ☐ Aggression toward others
 - ☐ Tantrums or emotional outbursts
 - ☐ Interrupting
 - ☐ Refusing instructions
 - ☐ Throwing classroom materials
 - ☐ Running away from activities
 - ☐ Excessive calling out

Important consideration

A highly visible behavior is not automatically more serious than a less visible behavior.

Internalizing Behaviors

- Internalizing behaviors may be less noticeable but can significantly affect learning and wellbeing.
- Examples:
 - ☐ Excessive worry
 - ☐ Withdrawal from peers
 - ☐ Avoiding classroom participation
 - ☐ Fear of answering questions
 - ☐ Appearing unusually quiet
 - ☐ Avoiding eye contact
 - ☐ Frequent expressions of helplessness

Teachers should avoid assuming

“Quiet = coping well.”

A learner may be experiencing significant difficulty without disrupting the classroom.

Small-Group Activity _10 minutes

➤ Consider the following learner:

During group activities, Amir rarely speaks. He looks down when classmates ask him questions and sometimes asks to go to the toilet when the teacher announces group work.

Discuss:

1. What behaviors can you **observe**?
2. Which statements would be **interpretations rather than observations**?
3. What might be contributing to Amir's behavior?
4. What additional information would you need before reaching a conclusion?

Learning point: Separate **what we observe** from **what we assume**.

What Are Behavioral Triggers?

- A **behavioral trigger** is an event, situation, demand, environmental condition, or internal experience that occurs before a behavioral response and may increase the likelihood of that response.
- Triggers may involve:
 - ☐ People
 - ☐ Tasks
 - ☐ Instructions
 - ☐ Changes in routine
 - ☐ Noise
 - ☐ Crowded environments
 - ☐ Social interactions
 - ☐ Physical discomfort
 - ☐ Emotional experiences

Identifying triggers helps teachers move from **reactive management** toward **proactive support**.

Common Behavioral Triggers

➤ Academic triggers

- ☐ Difficult tasks
- ☐ Unclear instructions
- ☐ Excessive workload
- ☐ Fear of making mistakes

➤ Environmental triggers

- ☐ Noise
- ☐ Bright lighting
- ☐ Crowded spaces
- ☐ Uncomfortable seating

Common Behavioral Triggers

➤ Social triggers

- ☐ Peer conflict
- ☐ Teasing
- ☐ Unfamiliar people
- ☐ Group activities

➤ Emotional/individual triggers

- ☐ Anxiety
- ☐ Frustration
- ☐ Fatigue
- ☐ Hunger
- ☐ Communication difficulties

The ABC Model

- A useful approach to understanding behavior is the **ABC model**.

A – Antecedent

What happened **before** the behavior?



B – Behavior

What exactly did the learner **do**?



C – Consequence

What happened **immediately after** the behavior?

Example

Teacher gives difficult worksheet



Learner tears worksheet



Teacher removes worksheet

This pattern can help teachers investigate what may be maintaining a behavior.

ACTIVITY

Scenario

The teacher asks Mei to read a paragraph aloud. Mei pushes the book away, shouts “No!” and begins crying. The teacher tells Mei she can sit quietly while another student reads.

Identify:

- **A – Antecedent:** What occurred immediately before?
- **B – Behavior:** What did Mei actually do?
- **C – Consequence:** What happened immediately afterwards?

Then discuss:

What might the behavior be helping Mei obtain or avoid?

Understanding the Function of Behavior

- Behavior may serve a particular **function** for a learner.
- Common functions can include:

Attention

Obtaining interaction from adults or peers.

Escape/Avoidance

Getting away from difficult, unpleasant, or overwhelming situations.

Access to Tangibles/Activities

Obtaining a preferred item or activity.

Sensory/Automatic Reinforcement

Meeting a sensory or internal regulatory need.

Understanding function allows educators to ask:

“What need is being met through this behavior, and can we teach a more appropriate way of meeting that need?”

Special Educational Needs and Behavior

- Learners with special educational needs may experience differences in:
 - ☐ Communication
 - ☐ Attention
 - ☐ Sensory processing
 - ☐ Emotional regulation
 - ☐ Executive functioning
 - ☐ Social interaction
 - ☐ Cognitive processing
 - ☐ Academic skills
 - ☐ Adaptive functioning
- These differences may influence how learners **respond to classroom demands and environments.**
- Therefore, behavior should not automatically be interpreted as deliberate non-compliance.

How Different Needs May Influence Behavior

➤ **Autism Spectrum Disorder**

- ☐ Difficulty with unexpected changes
- ☐ Sensory sensitivities
- ☐ Communication differences
- ☐ Preference for predictable routines

➤ **ADHD**

- ☐ Difficulty sustaining attention
- ☐ Impulsivity
- ☐ High activity levels
- ☐ Executive functioning difficulties

How Different Needs May Influence Behavior

➤ Specific Learning Difficulties

- ☐ Task avoidance
- ☐ Frustration
- ☐ Reduced confidence
- ☐ Anxiety around literacy/numeracy tasks

➤ Intellectual Disability

- ☐ Difficulty understanding complex instructions
- ☐ Slower processing
- ☐ Need for repetition and structured support

Important

These are possible patterns, **not assumptions about every learner with a particular diagnosis.**

ACTIVITY

Behavior

“A learner repeatedly leaves their seat during a lesson.”

Each group develops **three different explanations** for the same behavior.

Consider:

ADHD-related attention/regulation needs

- ☐ Task difficulty
- ☐ Sensory needs
- ☐ Seeking teacher attention
- ☐ Need for movement
- ☐ Anxiety
- ☐ Unclear instructions

Then suggest **one appropriate teacher response** for each explanation.

Key lesson
Same behavior ≠ same cause.

Behavior as Communication

➤ Some learners may have difficulty communicating:

- ☐ “I don't understand.”
- ☐ “This is too difficult.”
- ☐ “I need a break.”
- ☐ “This environment is overwhelming.”
- ☐ “I need help.”
- ☐ “I don't know what happens next.”
- ☐ “I am frustrated.”

Behavior can sometimes become an alternative form of communication.

Teachers should therefore consider:

Behavior → Possible message → Underlying need → Appropriate support

From Punishment to Positive Support

➤ Instead of asking only

“How do I stop this behavior?”

➤ Educators can ask:

- ☐ What happened before it?
- ☐ When does it usually occur?
- ☐ When does it *not* occur?
- ☐ What might the learner be communicating?
- ☐ Is the task appropriate for the learner's ability?
- ☐ Are sensory or environmental factors involved?
- ☐ What skill could we teach instead?
- ☐ What classroom adjustment could reduce the trigger?

The goal is not to excuse unsafe behavior but to **understand it sufficiently to respond effectively.**

Key Takeaways

Understanding Learner Behaviors and Needs

Behavior is observable



Behavior occurs within a context



Triggers may influence behavioral responses



Special educational needs can influence how learners experience classroom demands



Behavior may serve a function or communicate a need



Teachers collect information before making conclusions



Understanding the need supports more appropriate intervention

Reflection

“Instead of asking, ‘What is wrong with this learner?’ ask, ‘What is this behavior telling me about what this learner needs?’”

International Case Study

China

- Chinese schools traditionally emphasise discipline, respect for teachers, and collective responsibility.
- Increasingly, inclusive schools are incorporating:
 - ❑ Positive Behaviour Support
 - ❑ Individualised Education Plans
 - ❑ Social-emotional learning
 - ❑ Inclusive teaching practices

Discuss how educational reforms in China are gradually balancing traditional classroom expectations with more inclusive approaches to supporting diverse learners.

Group Activity

Behaviour Detective

Each group receives one classroom scenario.

Analyse:

Observable behaviour

Possible function

Environmental triggers

Teacher response

Inclusive strategies

Present your findings in five minutes

THANK YOU