

Social learning – Bandura

Theorist(s)

Key aspects of the approach or theory relating to children's development and behaviour

Application of the approach for childcare practitioners and educators in schools and settings

Bandura

Key Words:

- **Observation**
- **Imitation**
- **Modelling**
- **Role models**

Bandura's social learning theory explains how children are often observing, modelling and imitating the behaviours, attitudes, and emotional reactions of peers and adults. Social learning theory looks at how both cognitive factors and the environment influence human learning and behaviour. Bandura believes learning has three parts: observation, imitation and modelling. For effective learning to happen, Bandura believed that the learning process must incorporate the following principles:

- **Attention** – learning is negatively impacted if the learner is not engaged or is distracted.
- **Retention** – information is stored and can be recalled at a future point.
- **Reproduction** – the child practices what they have learnt.
- **Motivation** – the child is motivated to repeat the behaviours based on the reaction when they imitate a behaviour.

Bandura believed that behaviourism could not account for all types of learning and developed a theory that was a combination of behavioural theory (where behaviour is the result of conditioning) and cognitive theory (which depends on memory and attention). Bandura added a social element to behaviourist concepts such as conditioning and reinforcement and believed that new information and behaviours are developed through watching others. Through the Bobo Doll experiment, Bandura showed that children will copy violent behaviour once they have observed it. This is learned behaviour.

Bandura believed that children observing reinforcement or punishment in others could be as effective as their own experiences. This means that if a child observes another child being given a reward for a certain behaviour, they will try to imitate that behaviour to gain a reward for themselves. In the setting or school, social learning theory emphasises the importance of practitioners and teachers acting as positive role models as children will imitate and learn behaviours from others. Teachers will model positive relationships with colleagues and children so that children will copy this behaviour. They will also model good manners and be kind, respectful and helpful to others. The Bobo Doll experiment demonstrates how negative behaviour will also be copied. Children are surrounded by many role models, such as parents, peers and teachers at school. These models provide examples of behaviour which are often observed and imitated by children. Children can also sometimes imitate the behaviour of famous people such as athletes, film actors and pop stars.