

With the use of examples, discuss the value of transactional models for explaining the development of behaviour and emotional difficulties in childhood.

Behaviour and emotional difficulties in childhood has and continues to be of interest to developmental psychologists; in an attempt to explain why and how non-normative development occurs. This essay aims to evaluate how transactional models can help explain a range of childhood developmental difficulties. Firstly, the main characteristics of transactional models will be outlined before discussing their value in helping to explain the development of a range of behaviour and emotional difficulties, illustrated through the use of examples. The essay will conclude by summing up the usefulness of transactional models in understanding developmental difficulties.

Transactional models are complex and multidimensional, involving continual interactions to and from the child and external environmental factors, such as family, peers and the social context. Sameroff and Chandler (1975) were instrumental in implementing transactional models alongside childhood development; normative and non-normative (as cited in George, Oates and Wood, 2006). The predominant trait of transactional models are that they enable the child and the environment to be intertwined, both evolving and developing over time; one does not exist without the influence of the other, and each plays a role in determining the outcomes and behaviour of the other.

Children with behaviour and/or emotional difficulties follow a non-normative pattern of development at that period of time. Transactional models are useful in that they allow for an intervention process to happen through remediation, redefinition or re-education; thereby behaviour and emotional difficulties can either be prevented or improved. For example through re-educating parents in the 'cultural code', teaching parents to parent by giving them strategies as to best prepare their child for the wider context of the world, behavioural and emotional difficulties can be avoided. Programmes have been particularly useful in identifying those children that could be at high risk of developing behavioural and/or emotional difficulties due to their environments by stepping in to attempt prevention, for example supporting teenage parents with little education and economic resources in learning how to raise a child using practical strategies (George et al., 2006). An inexperienced mum lacking in confidence, for example, may become stressed and anxious, which in turn will affect the baby perhaps making him/her more irritable, which may make the mother depressed, avoiding or shouting at the baby, which will have a negative effect on the child's behaviour and emotions and so on and so on. By re-educating this mother, supplying her with practical coping strategies and a social support network non-normative development could be prevented.

Redefinition, another intervention strategy, can be used within a transactional model to help children with Down's Syndrome, for example. Redefinition can allow parents and teachers to implement their existing regulatory systems, applying an effective cultural code, with an aim to guide children towards normative development, albeit at a much slower rate. Alternatively, redefinition intervention can be implemented for example on crying babies suffering from colic by tweaking a normal regulatory system by trying new skills such as adapting the positioning of the baby. A crying baby, if appropriate environmental factors and adjustments are applied and responses given, is not a determinant of an emotional dysfunctional adult. The transactions between the child and the caregiver and interventions implemented are crucial to the developmental outcomes (George et al., 2006) and can

therefore, depending on external factors, determine whether positive or negative outcomes are developed.

Remediation as an intervention strategy is suitable for some behaviour and emotional difficulties, such as hyperactive children, but not others, such as blind children. The aim of remediation is to help children with difficulties fit more in to a normal behavioural developmental pattern, through medication and/or therapy; thereby without intervening with the cultural code (George et al., 2006). Diagnosed hyperactive children (ADHD), for example, are sometimes treated with the Ritalin medication to help calm their behaviour and better fit the expected norms of home and school. Another example of remediation, where the transactional model becomes particularly apparent, is Johnston's et al. (2000) study which investigated the links between children's behaviour and their mothers' perceptions of their medicated and unmedicated behaviour. Findings illustrated that mothers saw their children's positive and negative behaviours differently according to whether they were medicated or unmedicated, for instance being less negative towards difficult behaviour when their child was on medication (as cited in Woodhead, Rhodes and Oates, 2005). It is therefore evident that the medication influenced the children's behaviour but in addition the mothers' responses to the behaviour. Therefore perhaps the transactional model does not account for the bias and/or possible inaccuracies of a mother's personal perception and attributions of her child's behaviour.

Transactional models can be considered in relation to the example of infant difficult temperaments possibly developing into later behavioural difficulties. For instance, Henry et al., (1996) explains how The Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study found associations between infant temperaments and violent offences (as cited in Woodhead et al., 2005). The transactional model could help to explain this link by viewing a difficult temperament as a risk factor to future developmental difficulties. For example if the child with the difficult temperament continues to interact with and develop within a series of inappropriate environments, such as parents' divorce, strained relationships, he/she is likely to develop behaviour and/or emotional difficulties later on. As Chess and Thomas (1984) explain a child's temperament together with his/her motivations and opportunities will determine future development (as cited in Woodhead et al., 2005). However, transactional models are not this simple and static and as Gallagher (2002) states development is reciprocal between the child and the environment; a series of transactions between the two is necessary to gain a full picture of how difficulties evolve (as cited in Woodhead et al., 2005). Studies such as those carried out by Vaughn et al. (1987) involve a child's temperament being measured and predicted before he/she is born by looking at the mother's personality and parenting attitudes (as cited in Oates and Stevenson, 2005). In addition, Bates and Bales (1988) found associations between a mother's own perceptions of her infant's behaviour and her prediction of later developmental difficulties (as cited in Oates and Stevenson, 2005). Using this example, the transactional model is useful in highlighting how the interplay between mother and infant, negative maternal perceptions of infant temperament, could in fact trigger developmental difficulties as the mother's actions towards her child would be affected by her opinion of her child's temperament.

The transactional model could be applied to help understand the effects of postnatal depression on a baby's development of a difficult temperament. For example, an irritable baby can be hard for depressed mothers to cope with, particularly when there are additional pressures such as a low income or lack of a support network. A depressed mother's response to an irritable baby is likely to be different to that of a happy mother who is coping well with

parenthood and life in general (Media Kit Part 2 Video Band 4, 2006). Another example is Michelle, the mother of Renee is finding it hard to cope with the difficult temperament of her crying baby. Therapy is implemented as an intervention strategy to help Michelle to improve the situation and give her the tools to do so. Through discussions the therapy revealed Michelle's lack of self-confidence, her dislike for the criticism she received about her parenting skills and her unplanned pregnancy and the time she was taking to adjust to being a mother (Media Kit Part 2 Video Band 3, 2006). The transactional model is useful in identifying any or all of these external environmental factors as an influence on Renee's behaviour and temperament. A baby is an 'active agent' in creating his/her own social environment; particular behaviours from babies evoke certain parental behaviours which in turn affect the baby by the nature of their responses (Study Guide 2, 2006). Therefore the mutual transactions between mother and child are equally significant to development and could have positive or negative outcomes, depending on the nature of the interactions, the style of parenting and the responses to them.

Attachment, an emotional difficulty, is often wrongly associated as being the child's issue. However, it is about the mutual relationship between the caregiver and the child. For example, Karen the mother has issues about her daughter Marni's reliance on her who finds it difficult to cope when the mother's attention is not focused on her. Due to the mother's anxiety intervention is put in place and strategies such as a transactional object is implemented to help Marni adjust and become attached to something other than her mother (Media Kit Part 2 Video Band 3, 2006). A reflection of Karen's own history, her relationship with her own mother and the role her partner now plays in family life also could be interwoven into the transactional model to help explain issues of Marni's insecure attachment. Attachments formed may affect the child's self-perception and also his/her perception of the caregiver, which in turn reflecting on the value of the transactional model, could help understand a child's social and emotional behaviour. An important factor of the transactional model is that there is no direction of causality and it is more concerned with the mutual interaction between the mother and the child; both contributing to development.

Using the examples given, the research suggests that transactional models can be mostly extremely useful in helping to explain the development of behaviour and emotional difficulties in childhood. Such advantages of the model include its incorporation of intervention strategies to aim to improve, and in some cases eliminate, developmental difficulties. In addition, the transactional model is multi-faceted and not a simple cause and effect sequence; thereby continual feedback between the child and their environmental factors promotes a more in depth understanding of the developmental processes of a child over time. However, there seems to be an over-emphasis on the research conducted surrounding behaviour and emotional difficulties, such as insecure attachment and difficult temperaments, which focuses primarily on the mother and the child's relationship rather than other environmental factors such as the paternal influence, economic circumstances, discord between parents or the social context. In addition, research thrusting the mother and child to the core of the model perhaps ironically defeats the purpose of the transactional model by failing to treat other environmental factors as having a mutual and equal influence on a child's normative or non-normative development.

In conclusion, the transactional model does have its strengths and weaknesses in helping to explain behaviour and emotional difficulties but it cannot cover every eventuality and contributing factor and can therefore only be useful in promoting understanding about developmental difficulties through the environmental influences it actually considers. The

transactional approach may always be of value but research continues to be evolving in this area and the model may not have been examined and implemented yet alongside particular developmental difficulties. The flexible nature of the transactional approach, however, enables the potential consideration of any environmental influence in the future which could help explain not only the well-researched and more common behaviour and emotional difficulties but also much wider and more unusual developmental difficulties.

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