

# ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS IN CHILD BEHAVIOURS IN AN EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTING

Roger A. Baxter

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Australia

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## DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

(Signed) \_\_\_\_\_

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the issue of environmental influences on the manifestation of unwanted child behaviours (UCBs) in early childhood services. Specifically it examines the evidence for UCBs that result from the interface of physical, social, structural, and cultural components of the environment of a child care centre with the psychological habitats of individual children over the full day of their attendances. The identified unwanted behaviours are used as starting points to analyse children's behaviour streams for indication of environmental influences in the production of UCBs and to establish common patterns of influence across different children.

To facilitate a systematic investigation of the complex child:environment relationships in a child care centre, a conceptual framework was developed to describe time-space locations of settings and situations, the basic components of environmental influence, the child's psychological habitat, UCBs, and the contextualisation of child behaviours *in situ*. The framework was utilised to review literature associated with components of both the child's psychological habitat and the environment of a child care centre, implement an appropriate data collection strategy, as well as guiding data analysis and interpretation of findings.

The qualitative approach to data collection involved full-day observations of individual children and recording on audio-tape a continuous concurrent narrative of their actions within a variety of settings and situations. Observations of 30 different children over 54 days yielded almost 400 hours of recordings, which were transcribed onto more than 1000 typed pages. Examination of the transcripts provided evidence of 1384 manifestations of UCBs embedded in 1028 distinct sequences of unwanted behaviours within behaviour streams. Analysis of the behaviour streams and interpretation of antecedent events implicated a variety of interrelated physical, social, structural, and cultural factors in the production of UCBs, which are considered in light of findings from previous studies.

Overall, no single factor was found to influence the behaviours of all children, or the same child across different settings and situations. The findings serve to reinforce the known complexity of person:environment relationships, which is further intensified in children between the ages of 3-5 years by their developing socio-emotional and

cognitive systems, innate and learned within-child characteristics, and different experiences of centre-based child care. The findings also reinforce the need for practitioners and researchers to consider more fully the individuality of each child when planning programs and investigations into the impact of child care on children. Implications of the findings for practitioners are stated and recommendations are made for future research.