

FOUNDATION DEGREE FOR TEACHING ASSISTANTS 2004/2005

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Module 4 Behaviour Management

"Effective behaviour management is essential to the smooth running of a school and in the creation of an environment where everyone's rights and responsibilities are addressed. A balance between fundamental rights and responsibilities is at the heart of behaviour management" (Rogers, 2000 p.12).

The school system and the community of people that constitute the school need to be the focus for intervention and change. As Rutter (1979) argued, positive and measurable outcomes in behaviour and learning can occur apart from the socioeconomic conditions of the children in school. Progress will be limited if the schools attitude and stance is "How can we be expected to develop good learning and behaviour when we have got kids like these in this environment." A recent survey reports that the majority of teachers consider 'home background' to be the most significant factor in 'problem behaviour' (Croll and Moses, 1985).

The classroom climate has a huge impact on pupils motivation and attitudes to learning. A study by Wragg and Wood (1989) emphasises the importance of the first few lessons with a new class in establishing positive behaviour and fostering pupils intrinsic and extrinsic motivation towards learning.

Jones and Jones (1998) formula - Motivation = expectation of success x expected benefits of success x work climate.

Kyriacou (2001) claims that the classroom itself should be purposeful, task-orientated, relaxed warm and supportive with emphasis on the pupils and their learning. The appearance and layout of the class is equally conducive to positive attitudes and should facilitate the activities taking place.

Glasser (1986) Johnson and Johnson (1991) Johnson et al (1993) observed the positive influences that peers have on each others learning. Gooderow, (1993) and Kohn (1996) claimed if children felt supported at school and trusted their peers, they would enjoy it more, value their l

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learning and put in more effort. Whereas Mize (1995) argued that withdrawn and unhappy children negatively affect the atmosphere and can sometimes provoke discipline issues.

Identifying situations likely to cause unacceptable responses is a vital skill within the classroom. Kyriacou (2001) claims that 'prevention is better than cure'. A good teacher is able to minimise the occurrence of pupil misbehaviour and that the essence of pre-empting misbehaviour lies in vigilance plus action.

Sue Cowley (2003) feels that boredom is a factor causing some students to misbehave in class. And those students who see school as somewhere they are forced to stay, despite lack of interest, will misbehave either to dissipate feelings of boredom or to add excitement to the lesson.

Therefore, making lessons fun and interesting, relevant and topical, pitched at the correct level with plenty of variety may encourage Pupils to remain focussed and not succumb to unacceptable responses.

Glasser believes that disruptive student behaviour arises because school work does not meet individual pupils' needs. Teachers and Teaching Assistants should be aware of these needs within the classroom and take any specific learning and emotional difficulties into account. If these difficulties are interpreted incorrectly, then this could lead to misbehaviour claims Cowley (2003)

Avoiding confrontation and remaining positive and calm are the keys to achieving a serene atmosphere.

"Frame everything you say in a positive light" (Cowley 2003)

Establishing classroom rules are best developed over the first few weeks of the academic year when children are psychologically and developmentally ready to hear them. Rogers (2000). Sue Cowley (2003) agrees and says a set of rules makes a teachers life easier and they can refer to these when giving punishment, making it clear they are following school policy rather than personally attacking the child.

Most schools follow a sanctions system where punishment builds up gradually and once a system is in place, theorists say you will need to be

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consistent in its application and will need to be reasonable, workable and appropriate (Emmer et al 1997, Evertson et al 1997).

Equally important in motivating positive behaviour in the classroom is praise and reward. Carter and Carter (1992) agree that positive recognition is the 'sincere and meaningful attention you give a student for behaving according to your expectations' and will motivate them to repeat appropriate behaviour and increase self esteem.

Kyriacou (2001) states that pupils expect you to be a good example of the expectations that you convey. Therefore it is important, as an adult in the classroom, to model good behaviour at all times. A report based on school inspections Ofsted (1993) have noted the importance of the example set by teachers when establishing positive ethos in the classroom.

"It is important to bear in mind that the type of strategy that will work best depends not only on the teachers skilful use of those strategies, but also on their ability to take account of the context in which they are working and in which the misbehaviour occurs" (Corrie, 1997 p56).

Child A is eleven years old, he is of mixed race, living with dad, older brother and grandmother. Dad is Asian and a local drug dealer in and out of prison. Older brother is a bully and is embarrassed by his younger brothers learning difficulties, taking every opportunity to humiliate him and call him 'thick'. Mum has not got access to the children due to a history of neglect and physical abuse from her husband.

As a result, Child A has been witness to acts of incredible emotional and physical abuse. He is frequently 'beaten up' by his brother who sees abuse as a way to get his own way or to resolve a problem. Child A is also a bully and has little social awareness about how people ought to behave towards one another, hence his relationship with adults in positions of authority.

"Students with an emotional or behavioural difficulty may cause problems by being overly confrontational and unable to control their anger, or they may appear introverted and emotionally fragile. Some of these students

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will have learned their problematic behaviour through example. Their parents may have had a lack of parenting skills, or indeed they may have reacted in a very aggressive, negative way to the child throughout their upbringing." (Cowley 2003 p101)

He has difficulty in understanding why his teachers and peers find his behaviour objectionable and feels he is victimised because he is regarded as a 'troublemaker' and also because of his difficulty in learning.

His moods swing erratically from being bright and cheerful, helpful and eager to please, to sullen, cross and defiant, sometimes not knowing whether to laugh or cry. He often comes into school having not had a meal since his school lunch the previous day, adding to his inability to concentrate and stay on task.

In the classroom, during the introduction of a whole class lesson, Child A frequently finds the language difficult to comprehend. If I am sitting with him I try to reiterate what the teacher has said in order to reinforce his understanding and also encourage him to 'put his hand up' as he tends to be reticent and needs plenty of encouragement and reassurance to join in.

The class teacher differentiates the activities throughout the groups and providing Child A has support he more often than not completes the task in hand. I ensure that I use praise generously and try to avoid confrontation by ignoring minor upsets to enable him to meet the objective of the lesson.

We have a Record of Achievement book for Child A to record stages of learning. I involve him in the completion of this book, as he struggles to retain the skills and processes, therefore his self esteem is raised and his confidence developed when he has done well and this is written down for the class teacher to see.

"The need to foster pupils' self esteem as learners is fundamental to establishing a positive classroom climate, and the most important influence on pupils' self esteem in the classroom is your interaction with the pupils. If your comments to pupils are largely positive, supportive,

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encouraging, praising, valuing and relaxing, rather than negative, deprecating, harsh, attacking, dominating and anxiety provoking, this will do much to foster pupils' self esteem". (Kyriacou 1991 p73).

During writing activities Child A will use the lap top sometimes in order to try and foster his enthusiasm and maintain his motivation. However, the teacher recognises the importance of him developing his writing skills so he is also encouraged to 'put pen to paper' in order to achieve the learning outcomes intended.

I recognise the importance of promoting independence, so try to remain one step behind, allowing Child A to take calculated risks. As Fox (1993) comments.

"It is a difficult task to maintain the balance between giving support and promoting independence. This involves being clear about your expectations and firm in your directions without pressurising the child. However, sensitivity should tell you if and when to intervene." (Lorenz 1999, p19)

Child A does not enjoy school and seems to regard it as an alien, hostile place. His fears and insecurities seem to create his defensive and aggressive responses. He refuses to accept the authority of adults and sets out to show his rejection by refusing to cooperate.

Therefore, in my opinion, the class teacher finds it hard to like Child A and most of the attention she gives him is negative and critical. He senses the unfavourable perception and acts accordingly knowing that the most effective way of getting attention is to misbehave.

Unless Child A has got one to one support within the classroom, the content of the lesson does not always allow him to contribute ideas from his own knowledge and experience. This makes him feel disaffected and alienated and he refuses to work due to boredom, resentment and frustration.

He is often completely bewildered by instructions and does not have the literacy skills to understand the printed material. I feel he disguises this lack of understanding by work avoidance tactics i.e. disruptive behaviour.

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He is acutely aware of looking stupid or getting into trouble for not completing his work.

The classroom is quite light and airy but tends to be overcrowded which makes it easy for Child A to distract others or to be easily distracted himself. He often chooses to sit on his own because he expects to fail and does not want his peers to be aware. He does not work independently and prefers to just 'give up'.

In our classroom the school rules are displayed prominently and all resources are easily accessible and clearly labelled. Although there is not a lot of space, there is room to move around the classroom easily. Child A usually sits at the front of the class at a desk on his own from choice. He likes to wander round at every available opportunity, using minor distractions like someone entering the class to do so.

Adults in the classroom use non-verbal communication to minimise attention if he starts to get restless. As Porter (2000) claims, eye contact and physical proximity can bring behaviour back into line without drawing attention and give a non-confrontational reminder to pupils about what you expect from them. The class teacher gives clear expectations of behaviour both to him and the rest of the class regularly.

We have a tick system in school which means after two warnings your name goes on the board and then you receive a tick everytime the teacher has to talk to you. After three ticks it is a visit to the Headteacher who gives another warning and makes the child aware that if she has to see them again that day then parents will be called in.

Recently Year 6 were having a spelling test and Child A was encouraged to 'have a go'. Once he realised there were so many he could not attempt, he slammed his pen down, swore, folded his arms and slumped down in his chair.

I knelt down next to him in order to get on his level and pointed out that he had done really well with the ones he knew and not to give up, reassuring him that making mistakes is all part of learning. I asked him to sit quietly and if he heard a word he thought he might be able to spell, to

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write it down, he proceeded to try the word 'therefore' and I gave him a wink and said 'thank you'. I decided to ignore the swearing as it was not directed at anyone and would talk about what was acceptable in class later on.

"Whenever a pupil misbehaves, your action that follows in consequence must be aimed at getting the pupil involved in the work again as quickly as possible. Furthermore, your behaviour should serve to dissuade pupils from misbehaving in this way again in similar circumstances" (Kyriacou 1991 p81)

On numerous occasions Child A gets very angry through his frustration and I am always careful not to yell back and ask him if he would like some 'time out' to calm down. I remind him that his choices mean consequences and that may decide whether he will not take part in 'Golden Time' at the end of the week.

"Life is about choices and being able to make the right ones is a useful skill - when a person chooses for themselves they are more likely to stick with what they have chosen. Offering choices as a means of managing behaviour, shifts the emphasis from compliance to cop-operation". (Wright 1998 p10)

He is asked again to make his choice and is reminded that choices mean consequences and more often than not storms out and sits in the corridor for five minutes before coming back different again.

I, personally, feel that the sanctions made in school serve no purpose due to inconsistency and lack of effective communication between staff, SENCO, support services and parents.

However, we have very few supportive parents who support the School's policy of courtesy and respect for others. The majority show little responsibility towards developing good behaviour and positive attitudes in their children, making the effective management of behaviour extremely difficult.

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As with all children, Child A responds to praise and during the recent SAT's tests in year 6, he really persevered with his science paper as he had a reader. He achieved a level 4 and was awarded the Science Prize at the end of term. He was extremely proud and his classmates were genuinely delighted for him.

For some of these children, school is the only place where they have any sort of stability. During the school day Child A, for instance, is acknowledged and cared for and he can forget what is going on at home at least for some of the time. As Rutter (1979) stated, socioeconomic conditions need not impede a child's learning, providing they are in a positive environment whilst learning is taking place.

I agree with Rutter that some teachers are of the opinion that 'what's the point when everything is undone once they get home'. If I am being honest my studies during this module have helped me to realise the importance of remaining positive even in the most difficult of circumstances. It is too easy to see children as a 'lost cause'.

Peer support works well within the classroom (Gooderow 1993. Kohn 1996). Child A responds well to the attention he receives from his classmates. However, when he is feeling unhappy or angry and does not want to conform, this has a negative effect on whoever is supporting him (Mize 1995).

The use of body language, eye contact, is prevalent within the classroom and can pre-empt misbehaviour. Minor disruptions are generally ignored wherever possible.

"Sometimes it is best to tactically ignore a student who has broken a rule, and reinforce the right kind of behaviour. Students who call out instead of raising their hands should not gain your attention. By ignoring them and taking the answer from someone who keeps the rule, you are demonstrating the behaviour you want" (Wright 1998 p12)

Child A often responds to a hard stare or the presence of an adult standing near to him. 'Prevention is better than cure' (Kyriacou 2001)

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As Sue Cowley (2003) claims, boredom is a huge factor contributing to misbehaviour in the classroom. If children dislike school and see it as a place they are forced to stay, they come into school in a negative frame of mind. Although Child A does not particularly enjoy being at home, even though things have improved lately, he would much rather be off school where there are no restraints on him.

Differentiation is also vitally important. Glasser believes that if pupils individual needs are ignored, then boredom gives rise to disruptive behaviour. Child A has differentiated work sheets and activities, whenever possible and whoever is working with him aims to bring the learning objective in line with his capabilities through reinforcement. If I am working with him and I feel he is particularly troubled and restless, I will ask him what he would like to do, whether it be reading his book, times tables etc. By getting him to focus on something he enjoys, he does not distract the rest of the class (Cowley 2003)

Wade and Moore (1993) noted that just managing children's behaviour without attempting to understand their feelings can be a dangerous course to follow (Lorenz 2001 p21)

The day before the first day of term in September this year, we had an INSET day on Behaviour Management. It was lead by Dot Hully and was highly informative. She emphasised the importance of setting classroom rules in the first few weeks of term (Rogers 2000). As a result we spent nearly all of the first week going over class rules with the children and reiterating the school policy. We undertook the decision as a whole school in order to achieve consistency (Emmer et al 1997, Evertson et al 1997).

Unfortunately, as with a lot of things in life, everyone starts off with good intentions but consistency proves difficult, especially if support is not always evident and children are quick to learn that a final warning doesn't always mean a visit to the Head teacher.

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On a more positive note, we have numerous reward incentives in school to promote positive behaviour. i.e. house points, merit stickers, excellent stickers, Head teachers awards, and Prize Giving at the end of the year. Teachers are always careful to choose children that have made the most progress, not just the academic ones. As I mentioned earlier, Child A receiving a level 4 in science, was a huge progression for him and really boosted his self esteem.

As a Classroom Assistant, I try to remain positive at all times and be a good role model both in the classroom and for my own children at home. This is not always easy and I sometimes find it difficult to remain calm and unruffled when children are shouting and swearing at me. However, I realise the importance of establishing a positive ethos in the classroom.

I am in the process of achieving HLTA (Higher Level Teaching Assistant) which involves whole class teaching, initially for one afternoon a week. My studies during the course of this module have enabled me to be more confident when assessing behaviour management strategies and fostering self esteem. I reflect on recent studies, in order to create a climate conducive to learning.

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