



GETTING THEM TO BEHAVE

Newly Qualified Teachers Project

Behaviour/ Classroom Management

MAKING LEARNING THE PRIORITY

Getting learners learning

One of the biggest anxieties for an NQT is keeping their classes calm and orderly. Almost all jokes and 'stories' about teaching careers rotate around children misbehaving and getting up to mischief.

While we like to exaggerate the 'modern' challenges associated with classroom management, or 'behaviour management' or 'discipline', the truth is: children and teenagers have always been energetic, mischievous, creative and at times downright troublesome. It's part of growing up. And working with this is part and parcel of the job of being a teacher.

What do we mean by "Classroom" or "Behaviour" management?

It is useful to distinguish between two ideas that often overlap. There is

- Generally socially unacceptable behaviour
- Behaviour that isn't compatible with school forms of learning and structure.

The way we address the issues we encounter depends on which of these we are facing (amongst many other things).

This tool is a guide to walk you through an approach to managing actions and choices on the part of your learners that are inhibiting their (and/or other pupils') learning, and/or your ability to perform your job.

It is built around three fundamental foundations:

1. Careful planning
2. Building relationships
3. Constructive correction & structure

All three are necessary for creating classrooms where all learners—and you!—can feel safe, ready to learn and with a sense of belonging.

Antisocial behaviour

Bullying, physical intimidation, theft, vandalism... we need to help our children understand the social consequences of these behaviours, and at the same time recognize that they have learnt these behaviours from somewhere [the adults around them!]

Children are minors and can't be legally held responsible for criminal activity the way adults can. This is because we recognize children are not able to think through consequences like we do.

THIS DOESN'T MEAN THAT CHILDREN COMMITTING OFFENCES IS LESS SHOCKING OR TRAUMATIC. Sometimes it is more.

But at all times, we must remember that child offenders need our help, patience and guidance, not our anger and condemnation.

If they can learn to misbehave, they can also learn to behave—we must keep believing this.

Behaviour that disrupts learning

Criminal and antisocial behaviour is not the same as disrupting learning (although sometimes a child may do both). It helps to consider that schools are quite 'odd' places: lining children up in rows in large groups in silence for hours on end is not really how human beings behave normally (outside of the army or prison).

Imagine getting 40 adults to sit in silence, not look at their phones, face forward, and pay attention for 6 hours a day. Without getting bored.

Do you think you could?

The point is: managing a classroom is a tough task. Read on for ideas and reflections to help you help your learners focus on learning.





The best defense is an offense

Many teachers, old and new alike, believe that they have to get *behaviour* right **before** learning can happen. It's not quite so simple: learning and behaviour go hand in hand.

Often your best strategy to avoiding undesirable behaviour is to plan your lessons tightly and appropriately.

In effect, to
TEACH THEM WELL

A well-designed plan that meets your students' interests, needs and current levels of understanding will give them no time to be bored or feel disaffected. Much of 'bad behaviour' is a learner who is either under- or over-stimulated.

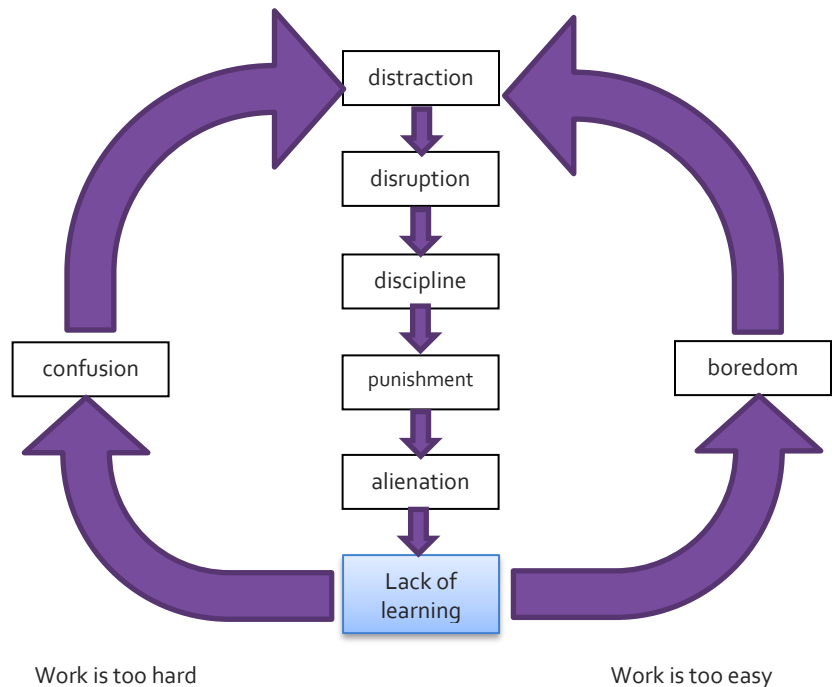
When everyone is presented with an opportunity to learn in a way that appeals to them, most disruption somehow magically disappears. This is easier said than done in classes of 40 students or more. But good differentiation, knowing your learners, predictable structures and routines, **and establishing good relationships with them** will win you 90% of your 'bad behaviour' battles.

Differentiation

Differentiation is a skill that you will continue to hone and master as you gain experience as a teacher. It requires:

- Accurate information about your learners: their interests, their weaknesses, what they know and don't know, their prior experiences.
- Deep knowledge of the curriculum to know how to take certain content and topics and scaffold or stretch it without just 'covering the curriculum faster'.
- A mix of activities & styles, to give each learner a sense of success in a lesson.

Cycles of disruption due to over- or under-stimulation



A helpful point of departure is to remember how pleasant genuine learning feels. It is exciting. Mastery is empowering and makes people feel good.

At the same time, being confused or bored is unpleasant for everyone, including adults. For many of our children, *this has been their main experience of school*. How awful.

The cycle described above can be interrupted at multiple points. Many teachers try to interrupt at the level of 'discipline' and 'punish', believing that higher sanctions will shock the learner back into compliance. However, this more often than not results in increased *alienation* from the teacher and the school (alienation is 'disconnectedness') and still doesn't result in improved learning.

There will always be one or two learners whose challenges run deeper than boredom or confusion. But for the most, crafting genuine learning experiences creates a cycle of achievement, praise and positive reward for effort. Learners feel they have achieved and want to learn more.

INTERRUPT NEGATIVE BEHAVIOUR CYCLES BY ENGAGING LEARNING: CONSTRUCTING APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES THAT ARE NEITHER TOO HARD NOR TOO EASY.

Praising appropriately

Positive feedback packs ten times the power of negative admonition, hands down. But you can overdo it, and erode the currency of praise, resulting in a ratcheting effect.

Children learn to internalize good habits through repetition, but eventually need to be able to do the right thing without the promise of praise, as external reward becomes intrinsic. Often, older learners with less structured home environments where they don't receive much positive affirmation respond to praise in ways that younger children would, as they have not yet internalized their locus of self-control.

Praise for actions you know don't come easily to the learner. If answering in class is challenging for them, praise this. If giving others a chance is hard, praise that rather.

Try to avoid making praise a performance/one-upmanship. Watch for learners who always want an audience when being praised: your commendation is not meant to make others feel bad. Rather quietly tell a learner that you are pleased or impressed with a choice they made.



Connecting: building relationships

The second aspect of effective classroom/behaviour management is to **build relationships with your learners**.



Praise (described on the previous page) is one of the building blocks of recognizing and appreciating the positive aspects of your learners and their choices.

A second component of relating to your learners is convincing them that you *actually like them* and believe in them.

Teachers know that many other factors in a child's life affect how they perform at school. Most of these are outside of the teacher's control.

But the biggest factor that matters IN school is how we as teachers think about our learners, our expectations of them and our belief that they can learn and achieve.

If we think they can, they will.
And if we think they can't, they won't.
That's a lot of power.

OUR LEARNERS NEED US TO KEEP BELIEVING IN THEM EVEN WHEN THEY LET US DOWN OR MAKE MISTAKES.

Building up positive healthy relationships with learners interrupts negative cycles at the level of alienation (disconnectedness). When a learner feels bored or confused (or scared! Or angry!), they will be less willing to "act up"/get into conflict with you if they value their connection with you and don't want to jeopardize that connection.

[Although sometimes they are acting up to *test* that connection i.e. to check that you're not going to abandon them at the first sign of trouble. This occurs a lot in schools with high staff turnover.]

One of the ways of doing this is by **FRAMING BEHAVIOUR AS CHOICES**. When a learner trips up (and we all do sometimes), frame the issue around the behaviour, and *not the child*.

Saying "I don't like it when you _____" ...is very different to saying, "I don't like you."

Framing poor behaviour as a choice (and not intrinsic to the learner's character) also opens up that there is an alternative, a better choice. Put this together with telling the learner that you believe they are capable of choosing differently.

Contacting home...

"It takes a village to raise a child..." children need more than one adult in their lives who they can depend on to protect them and meet their needs.

Sometimes a child's caregiver/guardian/parent can be your greatest ally in addressing poor behaviour decisions.

However, it is unfortunately also very common in teaching that when you finally meet the parent/guardian of a child who is repeatedly in difficulty, the pieces of the puzzle fall into place. The child's behaviour makes sense, because the home environment is the primary source of the issue.

Try to learn about your students before you make the decision to contact home. Often it is useful to communicate with parents about issues at school that they might not be aware of. There are also times it is appropriate for the school to expect parents/guardians to live up to their role and not expect the school to put boundaries in place that are parental responsibility.

However, there are also times when contacting home makes the situation worse. This is especially the case where parents or guardians are punitive or violent in disciplining the child for 'poor behaviour'.

If you are unsure, talk to a senior colleague at the school and find out what is known amongst the staff about connecting with home. This will help you to judge whether calling home about behaviour issues is a productive avenue to pursue or not.

Getting to know your learners

If you're new in a school, you need to develop strategies to get to know your learners as quickly as possible.

LEARN NAMES QUICKLY [seating plans are key for this]

Find out about:
→ their families
→ their hobbies
→ their history

Create a connection *IN* the classroom by creating a connection outside. Extra-curricular activities are so valuable for bonding and seeing a different side to your students. And also letting them see a different side to you.

Talk to them. Your students have ideas, dreams, opinions.

Be honest with them and treat them with respect. Learners often know when you are lying.

One of the most important aspects of classroom management and building positive, learning-conducive relationships with your learners is **forgiveness**. Recognise that you too will also make mistakes and need forgiveness also.

Do *not* keep punishing a child for the same mistake over and over. Also, don't punish children for issues outside of their control. This only teaches them that they can't trust you.



Constructive correction & structure

A lot of what has been said up to this point has focused on positive connecting and making learning moments happen. But this is not to advocate a naïve perspective that you will never have to put in place negative consequences for learners' behaviour.

Consequences teach learners that their actions have repercussions. Often, disciplinary action is an adult bringing negative consequences into view for a learner who can't think beyond a certain time horizon. A 10 year old can't think forward 8 years to the end of Grade 12, when their negative choices today and tomorrow will have serious repercussions. But a 10 year old can understand missing soccer with his friends this afternoon.

The mantra is simple:

DISCIPLINARY ACTION NEEDS TO BE CORRECTIVE MORE THAN PUNITIVE.

Some teachers argue that students need to learn the world is unfair and sometimes they will get punished for nothing. This isn't helpful. Students will learn this nonetheless, and many are already all too aware of how cruel life can be. You don't need to make children miserable to teach them that misery exists. This is the opposite of modelling to learners what a fair, kind, considerate adult looks like.

Children listen to what we do far more than what we say.

e.g. telling students not to be late when you are often late doesn't work.

Tiring yourself out with unimportant stuff

Discipline battles are the Black-Hole-That-Eats-Time.

The number of hours teachers lose to policing discipline issues that have little to no relationship to teaching and learning is ridiculous. **Watch out for this.** Nitpicking on uniform, for example, often is a losing battle *and* destroys the relationships you have fought hard to build up.

While chatting to learners, doing extra-curricular activities and planning carefully all sound very time intensive (and they are!), so is confiscating incorrect items or doing detention duty. Rather see it as a question of *how* you spend your time, engaging in teaching and learning activities or playing police. Cool lessons, fun clubs and interesting conversations are a lot more fun than watching learners write out lines.

Behaviour management is effectively the hidden curriculum. We learn how to be, and how to be with others; how to navigate difference and conflict; how to self regulate; how to think through consequences; what kindness looks like, and that mistakes are not the end.

Routines and boundaries

A structured environment is a safe environment. Laying out clear boundaries and consequences *and applying them consistently* helps orient learners towards positive habits. Some teachers see this as 'strict'. But, surprisingly often, learners LIKE their strict teachers.

Strict is not mean. Strict is not cruel. Strict means clear, high expectations and consequences. Strictness sends the child a message: that you care enough about them to intervene, and that you believe enough in them to expect better.

Strict also means safe. Learners know: if X happens, Y will follow. Your classroom is not a free for all where anything could happen i.e. chaos. Someone—an adult—is in control of the situation and this means the learner doesn't have to worry about what might happen next and how they will protect themselves. They can relax and focus on learning instead of looking over their shoulder all the time.

Getting to the bottom of behaviour.

Does the child only act like this with you?
Is there a gender trend amongst teachers who experiences issues with this learner?
Is the child sick? In pain? Hungry? Tired?
Is there a barrier to learning? Physical? Emotional? Cognitive?
Is the child under the influence of substances?
Has the child been neglected or abused?

Classroom conflict tips

A learner is acting out in class:

1. remove the audience so that behaviour is not to impress peers (this is especially important for teenagers!)
2. defuse the situation: don't ratchet/antagonise. Offer a time-out if appropriate (get colleagues/SMT to help here). Don't take a learner on in a competition to dominate—you will lose one way or the other. But get them learning again as quickly as possible.
3. Ignore attention seeking behaviour. This type of activity *wants* you to react. Rather wait and pounce on the first opportunity to give attention for the right reason.
4. Keep it proportionate. Not all disruptions are on the same scale.
5. Use non-verbal cues: sometimes a nod, a wink, a tap on the table tells a student you see they're drifting and corrects their focus back to learning without shaming them in front of the class.
6. Outline choices clearly. Use names. "Sinesipho, when you do X, Y will happen. But if you do A, then B will happen."
7. Chat with the learners. Listen. Ask them what is wrong and why they are unhappy or distressed.
8. Give a chance to get it right. Let the learner try make the correct choice given the opportunity to do so.
9. Use humour. But don't mock or shame.
10. Keep records. Trends and patterns help you spot the root of disruptive or antisocial behaviour.
11. Redirect: re-channel disruptive energy towards something constructive.
12. **Always remain calm. If this is not possible, remove yourself from the situation and get help.**

