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Introduction

This chapter will:

- Outline the theoretical and evidence base of the book
- Provide an overview of the content
- Encourage you to promote positive behaviour, not just learn to manage difficulties
- Make links between theory and practice.



Knowing what works

Belief is powerful. There are a number of beliefs and myths about behaviour in school that are not helpful to you as a new teacher. You need to be aware of these so that you can base your practice on the evidence of what works.

The myth about control: You *do* need to be in charge of yourself, in charge of your class and in charge of situations. Trying to control students and ‘make them’ behave can lead you into futile battles and loss of face. This book shows you how to address this dilemma and be seen as an authoritative, but not authoritarian, teacher.

The myth that reward and punishment are all you need: The mere threat of punishment will work with some children (and make others anxious) and be a badge of honour for others. Where student behaviour emanates from distress, sanctions alone just deepen the problem and can damage important relationships. The most challenging students are likely to be the most vulnerable in our schools. Their behaviour stems from the experiences they have had (or not had). Whatever a school can dole out does not come close to what they have already had to deal

with. This book offers you some alternatives to encourage pro-social and cooperative behaviour.

The myth that excluding highly challenging students makes everything better: An evaluation of 'zero tolerance' policies in American schools (Skiba et al., 2006) found that although there might be a short-term sigh of relief from teachers, these policies often led to authoritarian regimes, poor teacher–student relationships, no improvement in behaviour overall and reduced academic outcomes. They can also lead to a 'school to prison pipeline' for some young people, reinforcing a cycle of social exclusion and disadvantage. This book shows you how to help keep pupils connected to school in positive ways whilst still maintaining high standards of behaviour.

If, as a new teacher, you want to establish and maintain a positive emotional tone in your classroom where students are positively engaged and behavioural difficulties minimised you need to be thoughtful and strategic in your approach – and check out where your support lies.

The New Teacher's Survival Guide to Behaviour (2nd edition) is founded on the evidence of what is effective. Some of this may challenge your existing beliefs. Read with an open mind and try out the suggestions given. This book is based in the following.

Research on:

- effective educational practices
- resilience and mental health
- school and student wellbeing
- the importance of school connectedness
- relational quality in schools
- what is known to be effective in promoting positive behaviours and responding to behavioural challenges
- emotional and social aspects of learning
- the experiences of new teachers
- the causes of teacher attrition.

Theoretical approaches:

- *eco-systemic thinking* – everything is inter-connected and mutually influential, what happens in one part of the school system has a ripple effect beyond the immediate context.
- *social constructionist perspectives* – there is more than one version of a 'truth' and different realities are constructed by how things are presented and discussed.

- *positioning theory* – when we ‘position’ a student or family we are also ‘positioning’ ourselves in relation to them – this impacts on actions we take.
- *restorative approaches* – behaviour is seen within the context of community cohesion so relationships and connectedness are all important.
- *positive psychology* – maximising a strengths and solutions approach.
- *personal construct psychology* – we all try to make sense of the world and what happens to us: experiences, expectations and interpretations are circular.
- *cognitive behavioural approaches* – and the interaction between thought, feeling and action.

Real-life experience:

- Case studies, anecdotes and quotes provided by practitioners, together with the author’s experience from varying perspectives within education in both the UK and Australia.

Beyond behaviour management

Although this book includes many strategies for responding to difficulties it is not just about how to manage behaviour. It includes how you think about students and your interaction with them. It explores your role as a facilitator of learning and ways in which you can develop an effective educational environment for all students. It tries not to sidestep issues that matter in the reality of classroom life. This includes the negotiation of power and control to meet the needs of everyone as much as possible. An optimal classroom ethos needs the development of emotionally literate interactions (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). This means being assertive without being aggressive, acknowledging and taking account of the affective and preserving personal integrity in the face of opposition – whether that is from students, parents or colleagues.

Being a teacher

Being a teacher is potentially a meaningful, rewarding and stimulating profession. Spending time with students, from young children to teenagers, can be both fascinating and fun. This book has been written so that as a new teacher, you might have the best possible chance of being motivated to stay in education, fully involved and passionate about the difference you can make for your pupils and their future.

4 THE NEW TEACHER'S SURVIVAL GUIDE TO BEHAVIOUR

Here you will find suggestions about ways of being in school that enable you to enjoy the interaction both with the students you teach and also with the colleagues who support you. These includes:

- getting and maintaining credibility in your new role
- putting respect into operation
- developing student self-awareness and self-control
- being aware of and promoting a positive emotional climate in your classroom
- dealing with conflict and confrontation in ways which do not undermine your sense of self and purpose
- seeing difficulties as part of the challenge, not the reason to fear coming through the school gates.

Each chapter addresses specific Core Professional Standards for teachers in England and Standards for Registration in Scotland. These are listed in Appendix A. This will help you understand how to meet the expectations of your new role in terms of professional attributes, professional knowledge and understanding, and professional skills.

Throughout the book are references to relevant legislation and guidance, especially Every Child Matters, which describes five outcomes for wellbeing: being healthy, being safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic wellbeing (DfES, 2004).

Ways of seeing the world

You need to be aware of not only how you think about things but also the influences on your thinking. Note how a group of teachers talk about their job, the classes they teach, families, individual students and their colleagues. This 'discourse' presents a way of being – it constructs what is seen as the 'truth' without acknowledging that it is, in fact, only one version of several possible 'truths': other teachers may have different ways of talking about the same things (Roffey, 2008).

Negativity about the kids is rare. When teachers do sometimes say something negative others will give a different view. It is not seen as a cool thing to do. (School counsellor)

A teenager described as insolent and disruptive is one version of the 'reality' of that young person. He is clearly viewed as a problem. If the conversation is around how he is struggling to cope with his feelings of rejection and inability to read, this presents another version. The same student is seen to be having problems rather than being a problem.

The teacher who is exploring what is possible to change to maximise the chance of that young person being more settled and learning effectively in school has yet another interpretation of the situation which includes her responsibility for change. Sometimes problems are seen primarily in the light of what can be measured as 'normal', with those who do not conform to this standard being perceived as challenges to the system. Here we analyse what are useful ways of thinking and how these can impact both on what you do in school and how you feel about being there.

Your first time

The first time you go into school as a newly qualified teacher may be nerve racking. First of all you have to negotiate the staffroom; find out where it is, check which mug it is acceptable to fill with coffee and where to sit so as not to offend anyone. And you haven't come anywhere near the students yet!

Over the next few weeks you get to know the ropes – what is supposed to happen and what really goes on. You find out what is valued and what is not, what is seen as important in the school and what is important outside the school, what the pressures are and staff responses to these. You work out the expectations and start to think about how you are going to meet them. It is exciting but also scary.

You as a teacher and you as a person

This book is about you: you in your new role, you as a complex person with strengths and needs – just like your students. It is about the way you think of yourself as well as the children and young people you teach and how you build the relationships you need to have. You have exactly the same issues as your pupils in many ways – pressure to 'perform', issues of control, how to get the maximum amount of satisfaction out of your days, and how to make experiences meaningful and worthwhile.

It can be hard to know which advice to follow and which to discard. Knowing yourself and your values will help in making the dozens of daily decisions that come your way. Although you are no longer a student you are still a learner and mistakes are an important part of the learning process. Don't lose sleep over not getting it exactly right all the time.

You need to look after yourself well to maximise your chances of survival in the classroom. Your physical and emotional wellbeing is an

integral part of who you are and how you function. Maintaining a high level of personal resources and knowing how best to manage your precious time are both central.

The school you are in

Over the first few days and weeks you will gather information about the ethos of the school and who and what is maintaining the current culture – ‘the way things happen around here’. There are clues to this on what is on the walls, how students are spoken to, how staff speak to each other and about each other. You may find a staffroom of deep demoralisation or one of enthusiastic creativity. In some schools everyone takes responsibility for what happens, in other schools it seems that no one does. The conversations in these schools usually go along the lines ‘everything is awful and it’s all someone else’s fault!’ Most schools are somewhere in between and you will need to think about where you fit in and feel most comfortable. Stand back and see if you can evaluate elements of the ethos and how that culture is being maintained.



Case study

In one primary school laminated posters are everywhere, in the main office, the staff room, every classroom and the head teacher’s office. They all say the same thing: THIS IS A NO PUT DOWN ZONE. Both teachers and students say that the school is a very positive place to be, there is hardly any bullying and everyone enjoys being there.

Points for discussion

Why do you think this has made such a difference?

How would it need to be put in place to be effective?

The students you teach

During these first few weeks you are also negotiating your place as the teacher in the classroom. Your students will try to work out what you are like and how you will teach. They will test out their relationship with you and see how you respond to some of the things they do. They will work out how much you tune into them and whether you teach in ways that engage their interest. They will be fascinated by how you manage students who are more challenging and here they will be looking for



personal qualities of self-control and self-respect, humour, enthusiasm and confidence. If you are prone to taking things personally or losing your temper you will be giving them an excellent diversionary side show. It is inevitable that some pupils will try and wind you up to perform and entertain them.

This text offers you a package of survival skills that are not just about strategies but crafting optimal contexts in which strategies can be most effective. You can't watch a DVD if your player doesn't work properly, neither can you pick a strategy off the shelf and expect it to have a positive impact if other things are not in place. You need to construct an optimal context to ensure that your strategies work well at the point of challenge in the classroom. The most powerful aspect of context is relationship. Research increasingly confirms that the establishment and maintenance of classroom discipline is linked to intra and interpersonal competencies; how well you understand yourself and how well you get on with others (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). This includes your relationship with pupils (Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Murray-Harvey, 2010; Stuhlman & Pianta, 2002), colleagues (Miller, 1996, 2003; Rogers, 2006) and significant others, such as parents, partners and friends (Maunder & Tattersall, 2010; Roffey, 2002).

Students are more likely to behave well if the relationship you have with them is based on fairness, negotiation and mutual respect. That takes time to build, so how do you react in those first few days and how do you plan to establish your own 'culture' of how things will happen in your classroom? How you present yourself initially to pupils is the foundation for this development.

Your greatest challenges

It is tempting for busy new teachers to wait until they get into hot water, then jump to Chapter 7 to find out what they might have done or how to pick up the pieces! Take time to at least skim the whole book. Go through and highlight ways of working that make sense to you. The search for quick fix solutions plagues our society and education is not exempt. There is not a simple, single strategy that will ensure your survival and help you thrive in the classroom. It is the whole package that makes a difference.

Chapter 7 explores diverse ways of thinking about children who challenge and actions you might take on the basis of these different constructs. It helps you understand that actions you take to deal with difficult behaviour at the time it occurs makes a difference to what happens in the longer term. Strategies that only deal with immediate management are exhausting because you have to keep doing them. This chapter addresses some of the more challenging situations you might come across in the classroom and provides you with a repertoire of ideas about how to respond most effectively. This in itself will make you feel more in control.

An important part of this chapter is what you do after incidents of unacceptable behaviour have taken place. Restorative approaches are often a powerful alternative to retribution in that they encourage students to take some real responsibility for the health and wellbeing of their community.

Finally we look at what you need to survive on the worst of days when nothing seems to work and your self-esteem is under the carpet. What do you need to do to pull yourself up and out to face another day and another class?

Choosing what works

According to an analysis by de Jong (2005) there are seven core principles for best practice in dealing with issues of student behaviour. These are:

- 1 Student behaviour needs to be understood from an eco-systemic perspective. This means a focus on modifying the environment not simply problem behaviour.
- 2 A healthy, safe, caring, supportive learning environment will enhance appropriate student behaviour.
- 3 Student behaviour can be seen as part of student diversity and not fundamentally a 'deficit' concept that requires 'fixing'.

- 4 Enhancing self-esteem through placing the student at the centre of the learning process will minimise behaviour issues.
- 5 Quality curriculum and teaching will maximise student engagement and minimise behaviour issues and alienation.
- 6 Positive relationships, particularly between student and teacher, are critical for maximising appropriate behaviour and achieving learning outcomes.
- 7 The community as a whole can better support students than a school in isolation.

As you go through this book you will see that each of these principles is addressed in some detail. We suggest what you can do to take action on the evidence of what works.

At a conference not so long ago I gave a talk on teacher–student relationships. At the end of the session a young teacher came up to me and said something to this effect.

Everything you've just said has worked for me. When I was first in training to be a teacher I was told that you have to be tough on kids, let them know who's boss, not stand any nonsense, be firm, make them stick to the rules. I decided that I would make a point of having the best possible relationship with the kids I taught, let them know that I liked them but also had high expectations of them. It has worked. I have less challenging behaviour in my class with students who give others a hard time. I love my job.

This is the way it is – this is the way to survive. There are other ways too – but those are not the ways of the emotionally and strategically fittest. Some teachers see survival as the need to win an inevitable battle for control of the classroom and others become bedded down somewhere quiet just getting through the days and waiting for the rescue of retirement. Don't do this – you need a flourishing work life and the next generation needs you! They need you engaged, active, interested, empathic, self aware and interpersonally skilled. You can do it – with help. Here's a start.

Putting ideas into practice

To make this book come alive in real situations, you are asked to put into practice what is suggested and reflect on the outcomes. Get yourself a notebook or diary and keep a record of what you do and what you discover. You will be guided in this at the end of every chapter. Do not expect

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overnight changes but with time and consistently positive interventions, the chances are you will begin to see a real difference in what is going on in your classroom. You will also see yourself as more effective and develop a sense of professionalism and enjoyment in your role. Hopefully you will feel satisfaction in knowing you made the right career decision after all!

Begin by identifying a pupil with whom you are working who has challenging behaviour. Do not select someone on the autistic spectrum or who has serious learning difficulties as this requires more specific approaches than those given here. Choose pseudonyms for the student and the school to protect confidentiality.

Action

Your first action is to look through any files or records to find answers to the following questions.

- When were difficulties first recorded?
- What were these?
- What interventions were put in place?
- For how long did any intervention last?
- Who was involved and what did they do?
- Who was expected to change and in which ways?
- Is there any indication of what was successful?
- How were actions reviewed and followed up?
- What information was passed on at any transition?

Reflection

In a critique of this history what have you learnt about what has happened and perhaps not happened for this student? What good practice have you identified? What questions come to mind? What might you have done differently, if anything?