

## **Know Better Behaviour: Bringing Some Discipline to a Website**

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### **Background**

This paper is about work in progress, the development of a website for teachers concerned for their pupils' behaviour. Difficult behaviour by pupils in schools is seen as a priority for attention in contemporary Scotland by the press (e.g., Schofield, 2004), the teaching unions (e.g., Educational Institute for Scotland, 2003) and the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) (e.g., SEED, 2001). Our task is to help experienced, concerned teachers articulate sound intuitive and evidence-based practice, which will develop their professionalism when they meet behaviour that disrupts learning.

The key policy document on discipline for Scottish education, "Better Behaviour, Better Learning" (BB-BL), was the product of the Executive's Discipline Task Group and was published in June 2001. Its findings and recommendations were based on evidence gathered from a wide range of sources including 600 primary and secondary teachers, children and young people, and public views gathered through a dedicated website. The work of the task group identified the complex nature of indiscipline and concluded that there was no single solution that could solve all the difficulties. The group established key principles linked to national priorities, and the BB-BL report provided 36 recommendations featuring key issues and principles which the Scottish Executive, local authorities and schools could consider when developing policy.

Local authorities then set up local discipline task groups of their own to produce a plan of action for developing and implementing the national recommendations on "Better Behaviour, Better Learning," taking into account local issues and priorities. Authorities provided the Scottish Executive with interim reports in April 2003, followed by final progress reports in November 2003. Implementation of BB-BL remains ongoing and authorities continue to receive £10m (\$A25m) a year to support action on promoting positive behaviour.

Three years on from the creation of the Discipline Task Group, authorities and schools have reported that they have reviewed policies and guidelines on care, welfare and discipline, resulting in good progress in policy development and stronger partnerships between schools and authorities. Schools have used additional staffing in varied and innovative ways. Teachers report that additional staffing including the posts of home-link workers has been important to the successful implementation of BB-BL. Support staff in schools have responded positively to training programmes leading to recognised qualifications, and the staff involved comment that they feel included and valued as members of school communities.

Teachers and administrators say that renewed emphasis on the reward and praise system, the focus on establishing pupil councils, buddy schemes and conduct and behaviour in corridors and playgrounds has had a positive impact on managing behaviour. Some authorities and schools have reported reduced incidents of low level indiscipline. The introduction of dress codes is widespread with reports of a sense of pride and strong identity in the wearing of a uniform. The imaginative developments and practice in early intervention has led to improved literacy, behaviour and social skills for children.

A "Connect Report" will be circulated to all local authorities in autumn 2004, giving an overview of successful progress and a means by which practice can be shared. It is part of a wider initiative called the Connect Programme being taken forward by a national development officer (Shannon Bigham), to facilitate information exchange between authorities and practitioners. A "Connect" magazine will be issued to all teachers in Scotland during autumn 2004 and will illustrate some examples of creative and effective practice being used in Scottish schools to promote positive behaviour. The website which is the focus of this paper will be launched at the same time, and will also identify innovative practice to support children and young people with behavioural difficulties.

### **"Know Better Behaviour" in the Context of Professional Development**

There is some satisfaction with initiatives that are under way, but the work continues, and the web-based resource that is the subject of this paper is one aspect of it. Its immediate context is continuing

professional development (CPD) in which all Scottish teachers are expected to engage as a professional duty. Indeed, there is a new structure for recognising advanced standing and competence among the teaching profession in Scotland (General Teaching Council for Scotland, 2002). Following the McCrone Report (McCrone, 2000), teachers who demonstrate advanced professional effectiveness can have their status recognised by becoming chartered, with consequent financial benefits. Professional effectiveness is a difficult concept to pin down, but the Chartered Teacher Standard expects evidence of it in the form of practice that is informed by reading and research, and of positive change effected in the classroom. The purpose of the “Know Better Behaviour” website is to promote continuing professional development for all teachers who are concerned by issues of conduct in their own schools and classrooms, whether or not they are on the Chartered Teacher studies programme.

Over the years, there has been much discussion of the concept of good teaching (see, for example, Skinner, 1954; Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Pease, 1983; Stones, 1992; Brennan, 1996). The act of teaching can be seen as a production line, a craft, a profession or an art. Much Scottish practice is certainly based at the level of craft, partly because of the way we educate our preservice teachers, with an emphasis on school placements and observation of qualified teachers in the classroom. Yet, there are many competent professionals who daily practise what Skinner (1954) called the art of teaching. In creating the website, we needed to respect the skills and knowledge of these practitioners, and still provide opportunities for all teachers to engage in ideas for supporting youngsters who may act in inappropriate ways in the class. Therefore, building the website required a balancing of demands. On the one hand, we had to respect the intuitive knowledge of the expert teacher (Berliner, 2004) for whom teaching is an art. On the other hand, we had to rattle the cage of conservative approaches to the practice of teaching, when they overly relied on what teachers do now, rather than on what improvements they might make.

Thus, “Know Better Behaviour” takes the position that teaching consists of transactions that take place among various participants. In the context of inappropriate behaviour, the most important of these transactions occur between pupils and teachers. A transaction may be defined as a “series of interpersonal messages exchanged between persons” (Tartwijk, Brekelmans, Wubbels, Fisher, & Fraser, 1998). Interpersonal messages both result from students’ and teachers’ actions, and also cause students’ and teachers’ actions. In particular, we wanted to distance ourselves from crude deficit thinking, which sees the pupil as the source of the problem at all times, or treats their difficulties as a pathology (Corbett, 1996). It can be too easy to attribute unacceptable behaviour to faults within the child. Inappropriate conduct may be a problem for a school, but it need not point to a clinical problem or some deficit within a student (Martin & Hayes, 1998).

## **Conceptual Framework**

### *The Context in Systems*

The roots of “Know Better Behaviour” lie in a systems approach to the analysis of education (Banathy, 1992) which we have used at Strathclyde in a variety of settings. These include communication in Asperger syndrome (MacKay & Anderson, 2000), and teachers’ understanding of effective classroom discipline (Grieve, 2004), as well as Banathy’s original context of the analysis of whole schools (McCartney, MacKay, Cheseldine & McCool, 1998). In “Know Better Behaviour,” we were concerned with two aspects of systems, namely, functions and structures. The functions are the aims and purposes of a system, and would include “promoting learning,” “good relationships among pupils,” and so on. The structures are the means by which the functions are achieved, and take many forms including classes, grouping of staff into class teachers and school management, school disciplinary policies and procedures, specialist services, and so on. For “Know Better Behaviour,” we constructed a grid framework for the organisation of phenomena of school life that relate to discipline, based on a combination of functions and structures, illustrated in Table 1.

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The rows of the grid in Table 1 are concerned with the dynamics of classroom relationships. These three rows centre, first, on the direct contact of class teaching in terms of groups of behaviours which are associated with good discipline in research and professional literature. There is also a row on school ethos, the development of which has been official policy in Scottish education in recent years. It has been examined in policy studies (e.g., MacBeath & McGlynn, 2002), and promoted in education

authorities through self-evaluation schemes such as “How Good is Our School” (HM Inspectorate of Education, 2002). The third row of the grid comprises support structures beyond the classroom that have a direct effect on its functioning. The four subdivisions of that row include physical and conceptual structures that are designed to help staff and pupils achieve the aims of education. The columns of the grid contain two groups of people: three subgroups who are based in school and three subgroups who have an interest in how the school operates, but who are based outside it. We argue that this framework of columns and rows incorporates, respectively, the key players in issues of discipline in schools, and key dynamics that determine the success of attempts to achieve good discipline for relationships and learning.

### **Bringing Some Discipline to the Website**

#### *The Context for Discipline and Relationships*

We have said that we came to “Know Better Behaviour” from the standpoint that issues of discipline are issues of relationships — they are transactions among pupils and teachers. Existing websites made us concerned that their view of issues of discipline was essentially a reaction to difficult incidents, packaging teacher-proof advice that appears in every book on behaviour management, without considering the complexity of the factors that precipitate indiscipline. As argued above, teachers need a view of discipline that takes account of a wider context, and a greater range of explanatory factors. We felt it was important to give them examples that would encourage them to address the complexity of issues they must juggle to achieve good discipline in classrooms, and to intervene effectively in disruptive incidents. They should look further than the child as the source of the problem and the start of the solution. Issues of conduct are multifaceted, and so case studies about conduct should deal with staff and curriculum matters as well as with pupil matters. Our aim is to encourage a more reflective attitude among the teachers using the web site in relation to their own role as a powerful factor in classroom transactions of every sort (Croll & Moses, 2000). The framework of Table 1, then, displays discipline as a matter of relationships, of transactions among people, and of the cultures and subcultures in which these interactions are set. It acted as a memory aid when we were developing the content of the case descriptions to help ensure that we included a comprehensive selection of relevant experience throughout the material of the case examples.

The content of the website is reached through a range of case studies, based on our own recent experience and the immediate experience of practitioners. We gathered information from a range of teachers and head teachers, through informal interview. We decided to concentrate on persistent, low level disruptive behaviour (Wheldall & Merrett, 1989; Dyson, 2001; SEED, 2001), the persistent troubling incidents that disrupt learning and relationships in school, and on more challenging behaviours such as shouting and arguing with the teacher. With those targets identified, it was possible to specify a number of other characteristics which ought to be observed in the case studies, as follows.

- The examples should be drawn from the age range in which such behaviour is most likely to be prevalent, namely, from the transition from nursery school to primary school at the younger end, to the middle of secondary school, after which such behaviour is likely to diminish, in the experience of many teachers.
- The transition stages between preschool and primary school, and between primary school and secondary school are often sources of difficulty.
- Females and males should be included, as disruptive behaviour is not just a male phenomenon.
- The locations should include preschool, primary and secondary schools, to reflect the different types of school organisation in the different sectors.
- The examples should focus on staff issues as well as pupils’ behaviour, to take account of the transactional context in which we see issues of behaviour and discipline.
- The relevance of the curriculum should be recognised, particularly with regard to the learning of pupils who may be disaffected with school and disruptive in it.
- There should be reference to the part that formal and informal school policies play in matters of discipline, and to the role of school management in developing and implementing policies.

#### *Technical Matters: Three Levels for the Support of Professional Development*

The purpose of the website is primarily to promote continuing professional development for teachers who are concerned by issues of conduct in their own schools and classrooms. There is a need to engage this audience quickly on the website and encourage their participation. Consequently, the website has three levels for the support of professional development. At the first level is an outline story of the case study, designed to strike a chord with teachers and invite them to investigate further. (Gemma’s story, <http://kbb-rev.atticmedia.com/casestudies/gemma>, is a good example.) The case study is supported by

cartoon style graphics. The teachers are then guided through the study as it unfolds, using Flash technology, which is fast and easily supported by most IT platforms. We were advised by Atticmedia, the project's web designers, that a Flash website can support compelling visuals, motion and sound. However, Flash does not support much text content, but that has worked to our advantage. Much web advice for teachers is worthy, but wordy, and seems to miss the point of capturing teachers' attention rapidly with relevant, engaging material. Atticmedia's use of Flash seemed an ideal for capturing attention, and for enticing viewers to read on to further layers of content, as described below.

The format of the case studies is the same in each instance. A scenario based closely on a real life incident or persistent difficulty was described, and then suggestions were made as to the cause of the difficulty. For example, the suggestion "Could it be curriculum?" is made in a case study about a group of disaffected pupils in the first year of secondary school. The participants can click on the curriculum link and see some suggestions for overcoming the barrier to learning, or for seeing the difficulty from a different perspective.

Sometimes the suggestions need further explanation, and so the second level of supporting professional development has been created. It consists of short summaries of perhaps 20–100 words which expand on key ideas, such as "circle time" or "integrated community schools." Beyond the short summaries is a third layer called the knowledge hub. This is an especially important section, designed to give support in depth to teachers' professional development. It is the area of the website where detailed and, if necessary, lengthy knowledge sources can be lodged. The following are stored on the knowledge hub.

- Articles where there are relevant articles to support the case study content: these are either included in full, or have been summarised
- Summaries of research which are relevant to the case studies, or a suggested course of action.
- PowerPoint™ presentations which extend the summary suggestions.
- Hot links to other sites. We have kept these to a minimum for a number of reasons. First, we wish users to remain on the "Know Better Behaviour" for as long as possible. Second, we have no control over the other sites, and often links can be dead, which can be frustrating for viewers, who may then lose the incentive to rejoin the SEED site.

This three-layer format can accommodate the supported the sparse-text layout of Flash in the main web pages comfortably, yet, beyond them, allows the site to have a great deal of text content for readers who wish to extend their professional development.

One of the most exciting aspects of the knowledge hub is that the material can be kept up to date easily, and can be altered to reflect changes in thinking and policy, when this is appropriate. The Connect programme, with its examples of good practice, can be linked into the website, thus giving that programme a further way of disseminating its information easily and accessibly. By such approaches, and by keeping the knowledge hub current and fresh, we hope to encourage users to return to it over extended periods of time. Of course, the maintenance of the knowledge hub will be an ongoing task. It is important that the information stored on it is monitored for quality and pertinence and, we would hope, matching in philosophy. This is an area over which the authors will have no control.

### **What next**

The "Know Better Behaviour" website is being launched in September, at around the same time as the Connect Report and Connect magazine are being published. In this way SEED is highlighting good practice in the area of behaviour in education and is disseminating this information in ways that are intended to be innovative and exciting. Once the website is live, there will be evaluation of its use and the appropriateness of the resources. Initially, we plan to monitor the number of hits on the site, and we have suggested to SEED that we initiate a forum for discussion, and that we monitor and evaluate the site's effectiveness by analysing the comments posted on it. However, Scottish initiatives of this nature often appear not to be subjected to independent monitoring and evaluation longitudinally. As with many commissions of this nature, no funding has been designated for monitoring and evaluation by ourselves.

However, we plan to use the website and its knowledge hub as a tool for delivering inservice education to teachers. The content will be made available on a CD ROM, and it can be used, for example, in school-based workshops to supporting staff who have concerns about issues of conduct. In our opinion, inservice education should not be seen as a one off experience. Teachers should be encouraged to try out new ideas and to reflect on their experiences and practice, in order to effect positive change in the classroom (see, for example, Schön, 1987; Russell, 1993; Galloway (in Varma, 1996)). Using the

material we have produced, teachers can learn by doing, by being coached and by interacting and collaborating with coaches and other staff members. (Schön, 1987; Oldroyd & Hall, 1991). The type of inservice exercises that the website and the CD ROM can offer are in accord with a model described by Dean (1991) and Oldroyd and Hall (1991), which promotes teacher learning through

- encouraging an approach to a common problem, in this case, inappropriate behaviour
- being offered tested strategies, contained in the summary of the case studies
- being offered examples of existing good practice, which are contained in the knowledge hub.

However, it is not just in inservice education that we see a role for “Know Better Behaviour.” We think it is an innovative way to encourage students in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) to begin to think and reflect like the professionals they are about to become. The General Teaching Council of Scotland (GTCS) expects the ITE institutions to include in their courses ways of enabling students to feel able to “manage pupil behaviour fairly, sensitively and consistently by the use of appropriate rewards and sanctions” (GTCS, 2003). In order to demonstrate this, they should be able to use a range of techniques to encourage pupils and promote positive behaviour. Unless students have chosen to take an elective in educational support, their knowledge of additional support needs is very limited. We feel that, because issues of conduct in the classroom can be so personal and subjective, the CD ROM, based as it is on case studies from real life, would be an excellent tool for moving students forward in their thinking about and management of issues of conduct.

Finally, we plan to run a pilot conference on Additional Support Needs (the new term in Scottish legislation to identify educational support that is beyond standard provision), with an emphasis on behaviour, for all final year students of the 4 year Bachelor of Education course, before their final placement in schools. We plan to address the main issues raised on “Know Better Behaviour,” and to raise awareness both of the website and of examples of good practice and other initiatives that are in place in Scottish education at present. Presentations made by guests will be sited on the knowledge hub, so that the information is available to all interested parties for review at a later date. This input of information, along with the examples of good practice from the Connect Report, should help to ensure that “Know Better Behaviour” will continue to be dynamic. We hope this will encourage its continued use as a worthwhile resource for all those involved in teaching.

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**Table 1.** Conceptual framework for the targeting of responses in issues of school discipline

Target participants ⇒		In school			Beyond school		
Target areas ↓		Pupils	Class teachers	School management	Families	External management	Other agencies
Direct contact	Transactional thinking						
	1:1 interpersonal skills						
	Classroom management						
	Sanctions						
	Conflict avoidance						
	Conflict resolution						
School ethos							
Underpinning support	Professional development						
	Support systems						
	Policies						
	Collaborative working						