

The development of effective behaviour management strategies

Steve Horne

“In my experience as an associate teacher I have found that most student teachers have shown a high degree of competency in personal professional qualities, relationships and communication with children, and also with planning, preparation, evaluation, records and curriculum.”



Steve Horne
Silverdale Normal
School,
Hamilton

In my experience as an associate teacher I have found that most student teachers have shown a high degree of competency in personal professional qualities, relationships and communication with children, and also with planning, preparation, evaluation, records and curriculum. However, they tend to have a degree of difficulty with aspects of classroom control and management. This paper provides a brief report on an investigation into the development of effective behaviour management strategies by a second year primary student teacher (whom I shall call Judy) on teaching practicum in my classroom.

Data were collected by means of three interviews and regular observations during the six weeks teaching practicum. Following Bogdan and Taylor (1994) I consciously worked to establish an open and trusting partnership-type relationship with Judy so that she would not feel threatened by the research process. This included providing Judy with the usual feedback given by an associate (in this case from a total of 18 observations) and sharing with her in an ongoing manner all data that were documented.

Judy also had the benefit in week 5 of her teaching practicum of the children's advice. A class discussion was conducted during which the children were asked how they thought adults could most positively affect their behaviour. This was facilitated through a series of questions adapted from Wood (1995), for instance, “What are some examples of behaving badly?” and “What are some ways that adults can encourage you to behave well?” and “What should adults do when you misbehave?”

Findings and discussion

Six main themes emerged from the various data concerning the development of effective control and management strategies.

1. Assertiveness and self-confidence

The importance of being an assertive teacher cannot be underestimated. Collis and Dalton (1994) state that our effectiveness as teachers is largely dependent on how assertive we are in the classroom, and Wilson-Browne (1994) makes the interesting comment that, “A teacher who shows assertive behaviour is saying, I respect myself and you; our needs are equally important.”

In Judy's case, she realised mid-way through her practicum that assertiveness and self-confidence are key factors in the development of effective control and management strategies. She noted that, “For me, this has been the biggest challenge – having to become more assertive as well as relying less on my associate to handle the more difficult problems.” By the end of her practicum Judy stated that she was definitely a more assertive, confident teacher and that she was able to successfully implement a variety of control and management strategies such as ‘reading’ children and diffusing potential problems before they eventuated.

2. Planning for pupil learning

Several authors (e.g. Collis & Dalton, 1994; Van der Kley, 1991) have made the point that detailed planning for children's effective learning is also a good management technique. By mid-way through her practicum Judy too had realised this. She commented, “I have come also to understand the importance of planning and organisation being

directly linked to my effectiveness as a teacher.” She found that her careful planning helped her think through issues of learning and management, and she found that consistently letting the class know **why** they were doing particular activities helped in this respect.

3. Organisation of ‘the little things’

Both Vaughan and Weeds (1994) and Van der Kley (1991) emphasise the need for attention to organisation if children’s learning is to be maximised. In Van der Kley’s (1991, p.40) words, “You can’t run an effective class programme unless you are well organised.” Early in her practicum, Judy spoke of the difficulty she found in remembering the little things with respect to organisation. However, at the end of the six-week practicum, when asked what would be the most important piece of advice she would give to a colleague about to go on teaching practicum, Judy answered most emphatically that organisation is of great priority.

4. Reflection and evaluation

Oliver (1992, p.19) noted that, “Developing skills of critical reflection/evaluation was perceived as an important part of professional development for student teachers. Student teachers were realising the value of becoming critically reflective.” Judy seemed particularly skilled in her ability to reflect and evaluate. She was able to ‘pull apart’ her lessons and carefully reflect on why things did or did not happen, and successful she and the class (collectively and individually) had been in achieving their goals.

5. Rapport with pupils

Material from the General Teaching Council for Scotland (1992, p.3) states that, “Appropriate behaviour can be achieved by the teacher displaying high standards of speech, manners, etc. Understanding and relating to pupils does not mean letting them do what they like. Be friendly, but firm.” Judy found that management became easier as she

got to know the children and they too had a history with her. She treated the children as individuals, consistently modelled positive ways of communicating with them, and generally made the class feel valued and appreciated.

6. Provision of hands-on, inter active activities

Beatty (1973, pp.71-72) has summed up the importance of hands-on, interactive activities saying that, “Children who are busy, involved and learning successfully are not disruptive. People are most likely to be interested in something when they can individually participate.” Judy realised for herself that having children working purposefully and productively minimises management problems. At the end of her practicum, for example, she commented on the need to keep children focussed, busy and interested in order to create positive behaviour. Until then, Judy had not realised that being interactive is as important as ‘getting through’ the curriculum areas.

Final comments

Other related control and management issues that emerged from the study which student teachers need to consider are:

- Responding positively to constructive advice
- Taking risks and learning from both successes and non-successes
- Realising that control and management techniques are different for different class levels and that there is no perfect recipe of strategies
- Carefully observing, analysing and adapting strategies that the associate teacher uses
- Ensuring that class instructions are clear
- Establishing a distance between themselves and the pupils
- Challenging inappropriate behaviour.

As an associate teacher, I need to model a wide range of effective control and management strategies. I should model best practice

consistently both to my class and student teachers on practicum in my class.

Oh, and what advice did the children have? They said that if they misbehaved they should be told off, grounded if necessary, or suffer the withdrawal of privileges – or words to that effect. At the same time, they wanted to be treated with fairness and understanding, and they wanted the teacher to talk with them and listen to them so they could understand what they had done wrong and how they could act upon this. In short, they wished to be respected as people and not considered objects to be embarrassed and yelled at.



References

- Beatty, J. (1973). How to maintain discipline in your classroom. *The onion sandwich principle and other essays on classroom management*. Columbus, Ohio: Merrill.
- Bogdan, R. & Taylor, S. (1975). *Introduction to qualitative research methods: A phenomenal approach to social sciences*. USA: John Wiley & Sons.
- Collis, M. & Dalton, J. (1994) *Becoming responsible learners*. Tasmania: Eleanor Curtain Publishing.
- General Teaching Council for Scotland. (1992). Probationer teacher support. Behaviour management. *Training units for first year probationer teachers: Primary/nursery*. Edinburgh: GTC Scotland.
- Oliver, D. (1992). An evaluation of the teaching practice experience of third year student teachers. Hamilton: University of Waikato, School of Education.
- Van der Kley, M. (1992). *Classroom management – and how to be an effective teacher*. Christchurch: Macprint & Publishing Ltd.
- Vaughan, L. & Weeds, A. (1994). Managing an effective classroom. In C. McGee & D. Fraser (Eds.) *The professional practice of teaching*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.
- Willis-Browne, G. (1994). *The assertive teacher*. London: Arena.
- Wood, B. (1995). Suggestions from children on how to help us behave. *SET No.2, Item 1*.