

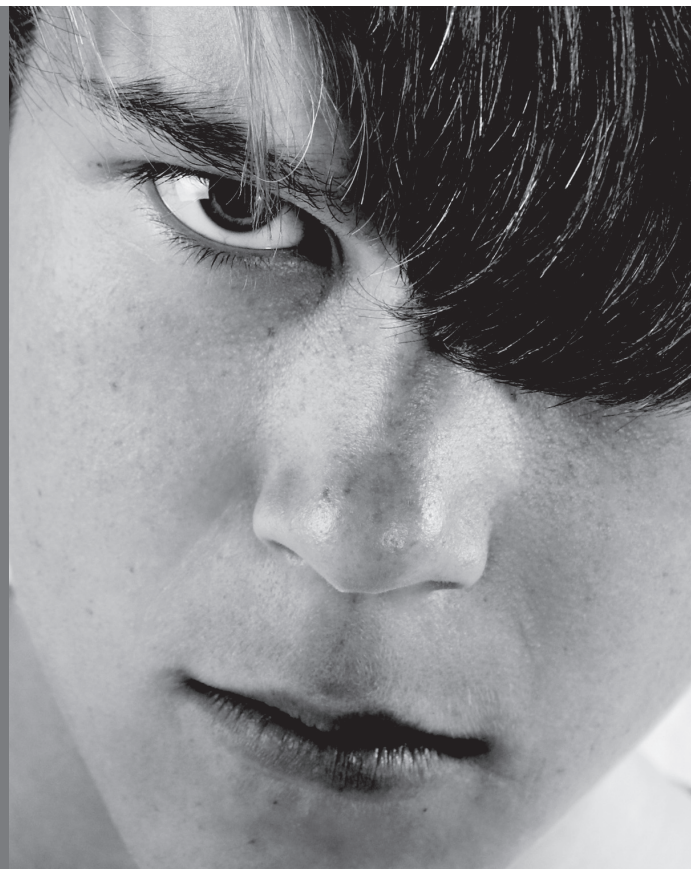


Behaviour Management

Getting it right ✓

IN A WEEK

Susan Wallace



First published in 2017 by Critical Publishing Ltd

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-911106-26-5

This book is also available in the following e-book format:

MOBI: 978-1-911106-27-2

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Cover and text design by Out of House Limited

Project Management by Out of House Publishing Solutions

Typeset by

Printed and bound in Great Britain by

Critical Publishing

3 Connaught Road

St Albans

AL3 5RX

www.criticalpublishing.com

For orders and details of our bulk discounts please go to our website

www.criticalpublishing.com or contact our distributor

NBN International by telephoning 01752 202301 or emailing

orders@nbninternational.com.



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Meet the author

Susan Wallace

I am Emeritus Professor of Education at Nottingham Trent University where part of my role has been to support trainee teachers on initial and in-service teacher training courses. My own experience of classroom teaching has been mainly with 14 to 19 year olds, and I have also worked in a local authority advisory role for this age group. My particular interest is in the motivation and behaviour management of reluctant and disengaged learners, and I've written a number of books and research papers on this topic. My work allows me the privilege of meeting, observing and listening to teachers from all sectors of education. It is to them that I owe many of the tips and ideas contained in these pages.



Introduction

The teacher stands at the front of the room, calling the class to order. Most of the class pay attention, but a small group do not. They continue making a noise, shouting and laughing, tipping their chairs and avoiding the teacher's eye. The teacher claps her hands for quiet, but it has no effect. She raises her voice and calls for order. Members of the class who have been waiting quietly for the lesson to start begin to get restive. Now some of them are talking, too. The noise level is rising. Time is ticking. The teacher is wondering what to do next...

Does that sound familiar? Every teacher, no matter how experienced or confident they are, will come up against problem behaviour at some time or another. It comes with the job, and as a teacher you have a professional responsibility to deal with it. Experience and confidence help, of course; as does a supportive management team and an effective behaviour policy. And so some teachers have it easier than others. But, across the profession as a whole, the problem of dealing with behavioural issues is one of the most common concerns voiced by teachers. This book is a response to that concern. It offers a straightforward toolkit of strategies and approaches, with examples of how they might be applied in practice. It is designed to be read and digested over just one week. It is short and to the point. It doesn't make you wade through a lot of theory, but it does point you to where you can find out more about the thinking and psychology behind the strategies on offer in case you want to know more – either out of interest or as part of a teaching qualification.

It is aimed at all teachers who would like to improve their behaviour management skills – either because they have a difficult class or because they know that, sooner or later, they'll meet one. It's designed to be useful, too, for teachers who may find themselves having to deal with just one or two disengaged or disruptive learners whose behaviour is spoiling things for the rest. Tom Bennett, chair of the Initial Teacher Training (ITT)

Behaviour Working Group, in his response to the 2015 Carter Review of ITT, refers to '*the Three Rs of the Behaviour curriculum*' (*Developing Behaviour Management Content for ITT*, July 2016). These three Rs, he suggests, are Routines, Responses, and Relationships. Routines are about establishing expectations and habits of behaviour; Responses are about implementing effective strategies and interventions; and Relationships are about developing our understanding of what drives our own behaviour and that of our learners. It is these same three Rs which underpin the content of each of the chapters that follow.

Most of the behaviour improvement strategies offered here are applicable across all age groups, 5 to 18; that is, from primary to secondary and further education. So, whichever sector you teach in, and whether you are a trainee teacher about to have your first experience of classroom practice or an experienced teacher looking for new ideas about how to handle that difficult class, there's plenty here for you.

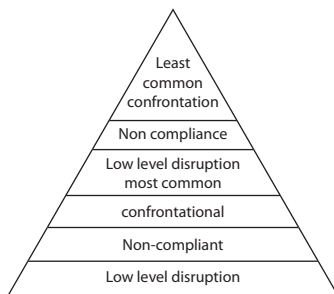
What exactly is meant by 'disruptive' behaviour? Well, a useful definition to keep in mind is that it is behaviour which gets in the way of – or disrupts – learning, whether that is the learning of the whole class or only of those engaging in the behaviour. Ofsted has commented on the prevalence of '*low level disruption*' in today's classrooms: talking while the teacher is talking; not getting on with the task in hand; wandering about the room, and so on. This sort of behaviour poses an ongoing challenge to teachers at every stage of the education system. It can also be described as 'disengaged' behaviour, because these learners are choosing not to engage with their learning. An even greater challenge for the teacher is non-compliant behaviour – refusing to do, or avoiding doing, what is asked. And then, most serious of all, is behaviour which is actively confrontational. Whether the learner is 6 years old or 16, this can be a troubling experience for even the most confident teacher. But the more extreme behaviours are in most cases the least common. It is low level disruption which you are most likely to encounter, as the following figure illustrates.

One of the key aims of the chapters that follow is to provide you with ways to prevent behaviour escalating up that triangle; to address it at the low level disruption stage so that it doesn't become openly confrontational.

This book is not about 'blaming' bad behaviour, however. It doesn't encourage labelling or demonising. Its emphasis is on building positive relationships as far as possible, and on looking for the causes of disruptive behaviour so as to be better able to address them. So, as well as offering plenty of tried and tested strategies and approaches for managing behaviour in the classroom, it also aims to give you some understanding of *why* learners might be behaving in the way they do. This is an important first step in learning not to take such behaviour personally because to do so would be to allow it to undermine your confidence in yourself as a teacher.

Because the book is written for teachers of all age groups, it uses the term 'learner' rather than the more specific 'pupil' or 'student'. 'Learner' also serves to remind us of *why* behaviour management is so important. It's not just about making life more peaceful for the you and the rest of the class. It's about supporting and connecting with children or young adults who have disengaged from the learning process and about getting them back on track; keeping open the opportunity for them to achieve and flourish; encouraging them to think of themselves as *learners*.

The book is divided into seven main chapters designed to be read over the course of a week, one chapter each day. Each chapter sets out a number of strategies for you to try. Many of these are divided into two or more sub-strategies so that you can experiment and see what works best for you



and your class. Following each strategy is a scenario showing how it might look when put into practice, or suggesting ways you might audit your own teaching to judge how it could be incorporated. Ideas or theories which underpin or support the wider strategies are briefly summarised under the heading, 'A Spot of Theory'. There are several of these in each chapter. This feature, together with the Further Reading listed at the end of the book, is provided if you wish to learn more about the relevant theoretical background, or might want to reference it in your studies.

The seven daily chapters follow a logical progression. Day 1 provides a range of strategies for emergency use. They are techniques that can be applied straight away, should you need them, so as to buy yourself some breathing space for Day 2, in which the focus is on diagnosing what's going wrong and why. Day 3 offers ways in which to avoid disengaged or low level disruptive behaviour escalating into anything worse, while Day 4 goes on to suggest some effective strategies for dealing with noise. The problems of boredom and disengagement are tackled directly on Day 5; and then Day 6 presents strategies for dealing with ringleaders, cliques and attention seekers. The final day, Day 7, sets out some useful techniques for managing your own natural fears and anxieties – those that arise when facing, and having to deal with, problem behaviour.

If you are very short of time, you'll find towards the end of each chapter just one suggested strategy out of the many outlined, presented under the heading, *If you only try one thing from this chapter, try this*. And finally, each chapter closes with a checklist which enables you to note down what worked best for you, and with whom.

This book is designed to be easily read, easy to use, and easy to relate to your own practice and experience. Some of the scenarios may alarm or amuse you; others may feel all too familiar. Its ultimate purpose is to help you to manage classroom behaviour more confidently and effectively, and to support you in building a positive and productive classroom environment where the focus can be more firmly on the enjoyment and rewards of learning and teaching.

DAY 4: Won't listen; can't listen: dealing with noise

Good noise or bad noise?

First of all, let's be clear about what we mean by *noise*. As teachers, we all know from experience that a noisy classroom is not necessarily an unproductive classroom. Sometimes noise is a necessary component of the learning process, whether it's the learner talk essential to activities like groupwork and discussion, or the use of essential learning resources, from music to machinery. And we also know that the more learners become engaged with a group task, for example, the more animated their talking is likely to get. This means that the volume of learner talk can actually be a barometer of how much learning is taking place – in a good way.

There's the question, too, of tolerance levels. What *you* might describe as a productive buzz of learner activity, Ofsted might label '*low-level disruption*', and your colleague in the next classroom might call an unacceptable level of noise. So what we need is a rule of thumb to help us recognise when to intervene in order to bring noise levels down. And it's this:

Noise is a problem when it becomes a barrier to learning.

In practical terms, this means it's a problem when learners:

- can't hear (or aren't listening to) what you're saying;
- are talking 'off task', not engaging with the lesson;
- are making it impossible for other learners to work effectively;
- are disturbing other classrooms;
- are generating noise which feels aggressive or threatening to you or others.

The noise may be low level rather than dramatic; but if it's causing these sorts of problems, you will need to address it. Today's strategies are designed to help you do that.

Today's strategies

- Getting off to an orderly start: Meet and greet (1); Straight down to business: No time to chat (2)
- Grabbing and keeping their attention: Sparkle (3), Pace (4); All change (5)
- Using (and not using) your voice: Softly softly (6); The silent wait (7)
- Organising the environment: Eyes front (8); Mixing it up (9); Back row seats (10)
- Using rewards and sanctions to keep noise down: Rewards and how to use them (11); Setting up sanctions (12)
- Working together: Peer pressure (13)



Strategy: Getting off to an orderly start

It's much easier to overcome the problem of a noisy classroom if you can prevent noise building up in the first place. Getting the lesson off to an orderly start is the key to success. To ensure this happens, a couple of factors are essential.

- *You need to be there already when the learners arrive. (If you're teaching in primary education this, of course, is a given. But in secondary and further education, where learners and teachers are moving around the institution independently from one classroom to another, it's not always easy to achieve.)*
- *You need to start your lesson promptly with a noise-busting activity.*

Then you're ready to implement the dual Orderly Start strategy, which goes like this:

1. Meet and greet

Stand by the door and greet your learners as they come in. Greet as many as you can by name. Look pleased to see them all. Personalise your welcome in a positive way wherever you can. For example:

- “ *Good morning, Ryan. That was a nice piece of work you did for me yesterday/last week.*
- “ *Hello, Mo. You're looking very cheerful today.*
- “ *Come in, Bella. Well done for working so hard yesterday.*

Obviously, it's impossible to speak to every individual, especially when the learners come barreling in, as they often do. But the ones you don't address

directly will still hear what's being said to the others. So the Meet and Greet strategy works in a number of ways:

- *It establishes your effective presence right from the start.*
- *It reminds them that you're in charge.*
- *It says: 'Switch off the chatter now. The lesson starts here!'*
- *It breaks up conversations that may have started in the corridor.*
- *It gets the lesson off to a positive start.*

2. Straight down to business: No time to chat

An engaging activity right at the start of the lesson cuts down the opportunity for chatter and noise to build. There are three essentials here: It needs to be implemented immediately, require them to concentrate, and be relevant to their learning. Here are some ideas:

- *'I'm going to play you a four-minute clip from YouTube about [whatever they did the previous lesson/day/week] and I want you to watch and listen carefully and note down the different words they use to describe [X].'*
- *'Two teams. This side of the room versus that side of the room. We're going to have a six-minute quiz about what we did last lesson/yesterday/last week. Any shouting out and the point goes to the other side.'*
- *'On your tables you'll each find a diagram of [something covered last lesson/yesterday/last week]. I want you to label it correctly and add and label anything you think is missing. You've got ten minutes, starting...now.'*

Strategy in action

A noisy start to a lesson can look (and sound) something like this:

Teacher (loudly):

“ Okay everybody. Settle down!

Noise continues.

Teacher (louder):

“ That’ll do. Settle down now. Bella, that’s enough.

Noise continues.

Teacher (shouting):

“ Come on, everybody! That’s enough! Settle down. Mo! I said settle down. Now!

Noise continues.

Teacher (shouting more loudly and clapping hands):

“ I SAID QUIET! RYAN! STOP TALKING AND TURN TO THE FRONT!

Now, compare this start to what’s happening in the Meet and Greet strategy on the previous page. There, instead of kicking off noisily with the teacher and learners on opposing sides, the lesson starts in a friendly, positive mood. Instead of having to begin with criticism and ‘telling off’, the teacher is able to establish a positive mood, handing out approval and praise. Instead of having to raise their voice, modelling exactly the behaviour they *don’t* want from the learners, the teacher is able to communicate pleasantly in a normal speaking voice – because that’s the best example to set the learners.

For the No Time to Chat follow-up, sometimes called a ‘settling activity’, there are plenty of possibilities. As well as those on the previous page, you could set learners the task of spotting mistakes in pictures or text; or matching pictures/diagrams to relevant words.

NB: If you have a class who are particularly difficult to settle down, you might consider offering a prize for successful completion.

A Spot of Theory

The psychologist, Abraham Maslow (1908–1970), tells us that learning won’t effectively take place unless the learner feels comfortable and safe. A positive welcome and an orderly start to the lesson will provide the reassurance that they are in safe hands.

Strategy: Grabbing and keeping their attention

3. Sparkle

If learners are chatting among themselves rather than listening to you, it may be that they find that more interesting than what you have to say or how you are saying it. Adding some extra sparkle to your teaching style can make a big difference. Here are some ways to do it:

- Look and sound enthusiastic. Some days this will call for you to use your acting skills, but it'll be worth it.
- Don't talk AT them. A monologue from the teacher can cause learners to switch off and talk among themselves. So make it a conversation as far as you possibly can, by asking and inviting questions, drawing them in, giving them an opportunity to talk – but to you and the rest of the class rather than just to their neighbours.
- Look happy to be there and *smile*. This sounds so simple and you've heard it before; and yet you'll be amazed at how well it can work to draw learners' attention to you rather than each other.
- Make as much eye contact with as many of them as possible. This draws them in and keeps their attention on you.
- Surprise them. Don't be predictable. If they know you always stand by your desk, or walk up and down by the whiteboard or pay more attention to the left side of the room, you might as well be wallpaper – and they'll soon begin to ignore you.

4. Pace

When you've got the class straight down to business with an activity that gives them no time to start growing noisy (see previous page: No Time to Chat), you should make sure you follow up by keeping the pace going. Pace is very important if you want to avoid learners growing bored and making their own noisy amusement (The Victorians had a doom-laden saying they were fond of, which was: *The Devil finds work for idle hands!*) Some useful ways of keeping up the pace are to:

- Impose clear and fairly tight time constraints on all tasks. Give a clearly audible warning countdown as the end of the allowed time approaches. *'You have five more minutes to complete the task ... You now have four more minutes...'* and so on. This keeps learners focused on the task because it introduces an element of non-threatening competition – them against the clock.
- Have relevant follow-on tasks prepared to give to learners who finish individual or group tasks early. This way, no-one is sitting (or wandering about) with nothing to do.

5. All change

To reliably hold learners' attention you will need to incorporate frequent changes of activity into your lesson plan. Remember that an average attention span – the time we are comfortable focusing on one topic or activity – is around 20 minutes. For younger learners this can be much less. After this time, the attention will wander. Regular changes of learning activity, therefore, can be very effective in keeping learners focused, engaged and settled.

Strategy in action

- A. Take particular notice of your own behaviour next time you teach a lesson, and try to evaluate your performance as honestly and objectively as possible against the following checklist. (Award yourself a mark out of ten for each category.)

- How animated is your body language?
- How enthusiastic do you appear about the topic?
- How happy do you look to be there?
- Are you making eye contact with the learners?
- Are you engaging them in conversation with questions and answers, allowing them their say, rather than doing all the talking yourself?
- How would you score yourself overall for 'sparkle'?

This is a useful way of finding out what you could be working on to put even more sparkle into your teaching. Perhaps you'll score ten out of ten across the board, in which case your learners are very lucky!

- B. Imagine you are watching a colleague teach. She has divided the class into five groups and set them a group task. She has given them 15 minutes to complete it. After 10 minutes she begins the audible countdown, but two groups have already finished and have begun talking among themselves. The noise is growing louder and it looks as though it's distracting the three groups who are still not finished. She hands out an extension task to the ones who've finished, but – in your view – she's missed the moment. The noise is well established now and it's hard to get the learners back on task. At the end of the lesson she asks your advice. What would you suggest that she does differently next time?

A Spot of Theory

As well as keeping up interest and pace, frequent changes of activity can also help accommodate different learners' approaches to learning. Howard Gardner's work on Multiple Intelligences suggests that as well as cognitive intelligence (abstract thinking) we should also take into account abilities such as kinaesthetic intelligence (learning through movement) and emotional intelligence (learning through emotional engagement).

Gardner, H (1993) *Multiple Intelligences*.
New York: Basic Books.

Strategy: Using (and not using) your voice

6. Softly softly

When you're talking to a noisy class there's a natural tendency to raise your voice in order to be heard. Sometimes this works. But with a determinedly rowdy group it can be counter-productive. Sometimes – strange as this might sound – the most effective strategy is to speak more softly. Here are the reasons why:

- Raising your voice can just create escalation. You try to shout over them, so they raise the volume. So you have to shout louder, and they raise the volume again. And so on...
- Being loud is exactly what you want to discourage. If you get loud, you're setting a negative example. (Just picture a teacher yelling, '*DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY SHOUTING!*')
- Feeling forced to shout over your learners is allowing them to set the volume in the classroom. Remember, you're the one in charge here.
- The more they get used to you shouting, the easier it'll be for them to ignore it.
- If you speak more softly, two things are likely to happen: (1) learners will have to quieten down so they can hear you; and (2) when they see you are saying something but can't quite hear what it is, some learners will begin 'shushing' the rest. This creates peer pressure, one of the most effective forms of behaviour management.

7. The silent wait

This takes some nerve and can be difficult for new or trainee teachers, but sometimes the most effective thing to do with your voice is to stop using it for a minute or two. Standing silently in front of a noisy class may seem difficult at first, but the pay-off can be well worth it. When learners see you waiting patiently, looking perfectly relaxed and with a smile on your face, they know you are ready to begin. In most cases, the one or two who notice first will begin to shush the others (peer pressure again). When the class is quiet enough to hear you without you having to raise your voice unduly, you can say, '*Thank you*', and begin.

- Your silence sends a signal to the learners. It says: *I'm ready to begin and I have confidence in you that you'll notice this and settle down.*
- The smile is very important. Your smile says: *I'm happy to be here. I like you. I'm not intimidated by your noise.* The '*Thank you*' is a model for them of polite behaviour.
- Waiting patiently for a minute or two and looking relaxed about it says: *I'm comfortable being here with you in this classroom because I'm the one in charge.*

Strategy in action

Speaking softly is a strategy you can use at any point in the lesson. The Silent Wait strategy is most often employed at the beginning of a lesson, but can also be useful when you need to regain learners' attention at the end of some group activity.

Like all strategies, these have their limitations, and very occasionally it will be necessary – even advisable – to raise your voice. Look at the following scenarios. Are there any here in which Softly Softly or the Silent Wait would be inappropriate?

(**Answer at the bottom of the page)

- It has taken you a little while to set up the data projector – or perhaps you have some other problem with technology – and meanwhile the class has grown quite noisy. Now you're ready to begin, how do you get the noise down so that the lesson can proceed?
- Your learners have been doing project work in groups. You gave them 20 minutes for the task and the time is now up. The noise level has risen to a point where you're worrying that teachers in neighbouring classrooms might complain. What's the best way to get the class listening again?
- You are taking a class for another teacher. The learners' behaviour is quite unruly. Some of them at the back of the room are laughing and talking loudly, tipping their chairs back, trying to put their feet on the table. You're aware of how dangerous this is. This needs immediate action. What do you do?
- You need to give the class some essential information. Most of them are talking among themselves. What strategy could you use to get them to listen?

Answer:

- ✓ If learners are endangering themselves or others, a shouted warning may be necessary. But remember: shouting is an aggressive form of communication. In the long run, effective classroom behaviour management depends on building positive relationships.

A Spot of Theory

Psychologists (eg Geoff Beattie, 2004) have pointed out how we tend naturally, under certain circumstances, to mirror the body language of others. You can test this for yourself. If you are talking to someone and nodding (or folding your arms or leaning forward) they will probably, quite unconsciously, find themselves doing the same. This is why we should always try to model the behaviour we'd like our learners to adopt. And that includes looking relaxed, polite and not shouting!

Strategy: Organising the environment

8. Eyes front

Learners won't know that you need them to listen unless they can see you. You won't be able to hold their attention unless you can make eye contact with them all at the same time. The seating arrangement can sometimes make this difficult, particularly in infant/primary and in further education where learners tend to be grouped at tables. In those cases, you need to make sure that no learners are sitting with their backs to you. If getting them to move once they're seated looks as though it's going to be a problem, get in there first and shift chairs so there are none facing away from you. Or you can make sure the first activity on your lesson plan gets them looking voluntarily in your direction – eg watching something interesting on a screen – so they move their own seats around to see. Or you can use an activity that allows you to give reluctant movers a role they'll like which requires them to get up and roam or sit elsewhere. Being able to make eye contact with all learners at the same time is an essential first step in gaining the class's attention.

9. Mixing it up

Sometimes, if the noise is coming from particular pairs or groups of learners, the best solution is to split them up. This can be problematic when you're dealing with older learners who may be resistant to the idea of sitting somewhere else and not being with their mates. To avoid cries of '*It's not fair! You're picking on me and not her!*', a useful strategy is to employ

groupwork which involves dividing the class up in a way which appears random; for example, giving each learner a number by counting heads one, two, three, four, five and repeating until all are counted. Then you instruct all the 'ones' to form a group, all the 'twos' to do the same, and so on. This will split up individuals who, when together, tend to create pockets of noise.

10. Back row seats

Sometimes you may want to move particularly noisy and disruptive learners to somewhere they'll create less nuisance. Or you may, with younger learners, want to establish the equivalent of a 'naughty step'. There's a natural tendency to get these learners sitting where you can observe them most closely, at the front of the class. However, this is a risky strategy and can backfire. From the front they can vie with you for the class's attention. They're in a prime position to continue their performance. They now have an audience for any noise they want to make, and any continuing efforts you make to quieten them down becomes entertainment for the whole class. So, counter-intuitive as it sounds, often the best place to put them is at the back of the class. *You* can still keep an eye on them, but they're now out of their classmates' line of sight.

Strategy in action

Have a look at the following three scenarios and decide which of the three strategies might be effective for reducing the noise. (**Suggested answers are at the bottom of the page)

- A. You are briefing the class for a group task but some learners are finding it difficult to hear you because of the persistent talking going on among one group of girls. What do you do?
- B. The classroom is set up with 12 trapezoid-shaped tables arranged as a group of six hexagons, three down each side of the classroom. When your 36 learners are all seated it is unavoidable that six of them will have their backs to you so that you find yourself addressing the backs of their heads. Unable to make or maintain eye contact with them, you find it difficult to prevent them talking when they need to be listening. How do you solve this problem?
- C. One learner persists in interrupting and distracting his neighbours, despite three warnings from you. What could you do in this situation?

A Spot of Theory

Psychologists tell us that eye contact is an important factor in establishing rapport and trust. They also tell us that there is a direct correlation between teacher–learner eye contact and learner engagement. So eye contact may be the single most important factor in establishing classroom control. Allowing learners to sit facing away from you, your desk or whiteboard, even if you regularly move about the room, is simply asking for trouble (TESL Journal, Vol. X, No. 8, August 2004).

Answer:

- ✓ A. Go smoothly into the Mixing It Up numbering off for groups strategy, thus splitting up the talkers without drawing attention to them. Then finish the briefing when the class is reseated in their allocated groups and can hear you without interruption. B. If asking learners to squeeze up meets with resistance, give them something they'll voluntarily move to see, like a topic-relevant YouTube clip. If necessary, shift tables apart into 12 smaller ones. Anything to get Eyes Front! C. Move the disruptive learner to the back of the class where it's difficult for him to distract anybody. Or, if you worry that asking him to move could trigger an even bigger distraction in the form of a confrontation, just implement the Mixing It Up strategy.

Strategy: Using rewards and sanctions to keep noise down

This strategy works by rewarding learners for the behaviour you want to see – in this case, not making an unnecessary amount of noise – and applying sanctions when they behave in an inappropriate way – for example, being unnecessarily noisy, rowdy or disruptive. Encouraging good behaviour with rewards is relatively straightforward. Finding effective sanctions to apply, however, means you will have to do some preparatory setting up. You may have heard this strategy referred to as *the carrot and the stick* approach. However, learners these days won't do much for a carrot; and a stick is, of course, completely out of the question.

11. Rewards and how to use them

To reward individuals, groups or whole classes for keeping the sound down you can use:

- ☛ smiles;
- ☛ eye contact;
- ☛ praise;
- ☛ music while they work;
- ☛ a fun activity for the final ten minutes of the lesson;
- ☛ special responsibility;

- ☛ sweets;
- ☛ star of the week;
- ☛ 'good conduct' certificates or badges;
- ☛ allowing a short, off-task break (5 mins max) for chat.

12. Setting up sanctions

To find effective and practical sanctions you will need to be inventive. Sending culprits to someone scarier than you and higher up the chain of command isn't something you want to be doing too often. Detentions, isolations or a lost break/playtime require additional supervision and may not take place immediately after the offence. The most effective sanction is a withheld or withdrawn reward. So, for example, if they make too much noise you won't allow music while they work; or they'll forfeit the fun activity they could have had at the end of the lesson; or their good conduct badge or special responsibility will be taken from them; or they'll fail to win the five minutes of chat time. In practical terms, these sanctions are straightforward to apply, once you have set up your system of rewards. In fact, the promise of a reward works as both an *incentive* (*'keep the noise down and you'll be rewarded'*) and as a *warning* (*'make too much noise and look what you'll be missing out on'*). In other words, the sanction you'll be using is 'no reward'. This puts the outcome in the learners' own hands. And it's very important that you make sure they understand this.

Strategy in action

Imagine that you are observing the following lesson. Look at the teacher's use of rewards and sanctions. Does he always use them effectively? Are there any missed opportunities where he could have applied this strategy but doesn't? (***Suggested answers are at the bottom of the page*)

The class starts off in quite a chaotic way. It takes some time for the teacher to get the learners to settle down. Eventually he does so by promising them a short 'chat break' later if they now get down to work quietly. Most of the class quieten down, listen and then set to work on the task they've been given. One table is still making a noise which has nothing to do with the learning task. They are discussing loudly the merits of various online games. The teacher warns them that they won't get the 'chat break' if they don't get down to work. He walks around the room, chatting and smiling with the groups who are working well, and praising their efforts. Now and again he turns to the noisy group, who are still being loud, and frowns. Eventually the noisy group say that they'd be able to concentrate better on the task if he'll allow them some music. He agrees. The music plays. The group quiets down. At the end of the task the teacher allows all the class the promised five-minute 'chat break'.

A Spot of Theory

The theory which underpins reward and sanction has its origins in the work of B F Skinner (1904–1990) and the group of experimental psychologists we now refer to as neo-behaviourists. It draws on the idea of positive reinforcement – rewarding a desired behaviour in order to encourage its repetition. This process is known as behaviour modification. Similarly, negative reinforcement – the withholding of reward – is used to discourage undesirable behaviour.

Answers:

- ✓ The promise of a 'chat break' reward works for most of the class.
- ✓ The threatened sanction of a no 'chat break' doesn't work for the noisy group. We soon see why! It's because he doesn't stick to it. They get their chat break after all, despite being noisy for much of the lesson. This was the wrong sanction to threaten them with, because in practical terms how could he allow most of the class five minutes to chat and yet keep that one small group from chatting?! (A more effective sanction would be to say that NO-ONE gets a chat break unless EVERYONE keeps the noise down. This would put peer pressure on the noisy group.)
- ✓ He uses the rewards of praise, smiling and eye contact with the rest of the class, keeping them motivated to stay on task. But his disapproving frowns don't work with the noisy group.
- ✓ The noisy group turns the tables on him by offering him the reward of them working quietly if he'll allow music! He's lost the initiative here. He could have offered them the reward of music earlier in the lesson. Now he's set the precedent of them being able to bribe him into allowing music on demand. They've modified his behaviour instead of him modifying theirs!

Strategy: Working together

If you've ever sat in a well-lit theatre before a show, and then listened to what happens when the lights go down and the curtain begins to rise, you'll have heard the audience chatter dying away and a few voices saying 'Ssshhh!' from here and there in the auditorium to silence the few who are still finishing their conversation or rattling their popcorn. And it usually works very well. There's rarely any need for a Stage Manager to walk out into the spotlight and urge the audience to be quiet so that the show can begin, because peer pressure alone has been sufficient. If some members of the audience make a noise, other members of the audience will 'Shush' them. And that's exactly what you're aiming for in this strategy: to get the majority of the class working with you to keep the noisy ones reasonably quiet. You'll achieve this by setting up peer pressure.

13. Peer pressure

The use of peer pressure links very closely to the use of rewards and sanctions. Having read the answers at the foot of the previous page, you'll know by now that the teacher in the Rewards and Sanctions scenario missed the opportunity to exert peer pressure when offering the reward of the chat break. If he had said something like:

As long as you all work quietly with no shouting and no messing about, you'll all get a five-minute chat break at the end of the task. But if there's any shouting or loud behaviour from anybody, then there'll be no chat break for anyone, I'm afraid.

The important words here are *all*, *anybody* and *anyone*. There may initially be cries of '*Unfair!*' but that doesn't matter. What you have done is to shift the dynamics in the room. The possibility of a reward is now in the learners' hands, not yours. The learners who want the reward and are willing to work for it will have a natural interest in keeping the rest – the noisy ones – from spoiling their chances. You can now hand the nagging and shushing (if these become necessary) over to them. And you'll probably already have noticed how learners who may be resistant to doing what the teacher tells them to do will buckle very quickly in order to keep on the right side of their peers. It's very rare for young learners to want to be unpopular with their classmates. This is something you can use and put to good effect.

A word of warning, however. It's absolutely essential to keep a balance here and not to let peer pressure tip over into bullying. The peer pressure strategy can be a positive and useful one, but must not be allowed to build into a situation where teacher and class could be perceived as 'ganging up' on one or two individual learners – particularly if those learners are already isolated or unpopular.

Strategy in action

Here are some examples of ways in which teachers can set up a peer pressure strategy to reduce noise and maintain an orderly classroom. You might like to think about which would work best or be most appropriate for the class or classes which you teach.

- *'Alright everyone. This is what's going to happen. You're going to work quietly with no shouting and no running around for ten minutes. I'm going to time you. And if you can do that, we're going to put some music on, and that music can stay on for the rest of the time while you finish the work IF and AS LONG AS you continue to work quietly. But – and this is very important – if EVEN ONE PERSON doesn't stick to that deal, there'll be no music for ANYONE. Is that clear? Any questions?'*
- *'Who would like us all to play a game for the last part of the lesson? Good! Well, that's what we'll do, but only if you can ALL get this work*

finished on time. That means working quietly and sensibly. And then we can have a game of [whatever's appropriate to the class: eg Word Tennis / Hangman / Team Quiz / Pass the Answer etc]. But we won't be able to do that unless everyone has finished their work. Jordan and Ollie, that means you too.'

- *'Okay everybody. Let's have some quiet now. I'm going to be giving you five minutes free chat time later on so you'll be able to finish your conversations and catch up with each other then. But you're going to have to earn it. If I see or hear anyone being noisy, disturbing other people, making it difficult for everyone to hear me or each other, then there'll be no free chat time for ANYONE. So I do hope no-one is going to spoil the chance for everyone else.'*

A Spot of Theory

In his book, Take Control of the Noisy Class (2016), Rob Plevin suggests a variation on the peer pressure strategy which involves appointing a small number of learners to the role of 'Shushers'. At the teacher's signal, they all 'shush' the class from their various positions in the room. This introduces an element of fun into the strategy. (He suggests the possibility of providing them with some kind of badge of office – even special hats!) The underpinning theory here is partly neo-behaviourist – making noise control fun, and partly humanist – emphasising the importance of positive relationships for effective learning.

**If you only try one thing
from this chapter, try this***

Checklist

Use this to keep a record of what worked well for you and what didn't. A strategy that works with one class may not work so well with another. Keeping a checklist helps you to work out what factors or learner characteristics call for one approach rather than another. There's a line at the bottom for you to add your own most frequently used strategy, if it's not already included in the list.

Strategy	Tried it with...	On...(date)	It worked	It didn't work	Worth trying again?
Meet and greet*					
No time to chat					
Sparkle					
Pace					
All change					
Softly softly					
The silent wait					
Eyes front					
Mixing it up					
Back row seats					
Rewards					
Sanctions					
Peer pressure					
Your own strategy?					

Further reading

If you'd like to read more about some of the theories mentioned in this book, or to find out more about the strategies and how they have been arrived at or applied in practice, here is a list of texts which are readily available, in electronic format or as hard copy.

Bates, B (2015) *Learning Theories Simplified: ... And How to Apply Them to Teaching*. Sage.

Beattie, G (2016) *Rethinking Body Language: How Hand Movements Reveal Hidden Thoughts*. Psychology Press

Bruhlmeier, A (2010) *Head, Heart and Hand: Education in the Spirit of Pestalozzi*. Open Book Publishers.

Dix, P (2010) *The Essential Guide to Taking Care of Behaviour: Practical Skills for Teachers*. Pearson/Longman.

Dweck, C (2012) *Mindset: How You Can Fulfil Your Potential*. Robinson.

Gardner, H (1993) *Multiple Intelligences*. Basic Books.

Gershon, M (2016) *How to Develop Growth Mindsets in the Classroom*. Createspace Independent Publishing Platform.

Lever, C (2011) *Understanding Challenging Behaviour in Inclusive Classrooms*. Routledge

Maslow, A (2013) *A Theory of Human Motivation* (editor David Webb). CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Plevin, R (2016) *Take Control of the Noisy Class*. Crown House.

Rogers, B (2006) *Cracking the Hard Class*. Paul Chapman Publishing.

Rogers, B (2015) *Classroom Behaviour* (4th edn). Sage.

Rutledge, T (2012) *Embracing Fear: How to Turn What Scares Us into our Greatest Gift*. HarperOne.

Sunderland, M (2015) *Conversations That Matter: Talking with Children and Teenagers in Ways That Help*. Worth Publishing.

Wallace, I and Kirkman, L (2014) *Talk-Less Teaching: Practice, Participation and Progress*. Crown House.

Wallace, S (2014) When You're Smiling: Exploring How Teachers Motivate and Engage Learners in the Further Education Sector. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 38(3): 346–60.

Williams, M and Penman, D (2011) *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World*. Piatkus.

Wolstenholme, K (2003) *Kinaesthetic Learning Activities in the Primary School*. Birmingham Advisory and Support Service.