

# Leading with behaviour

Geoff Moss and John Bayley round off MST's innovative series on behaviour management with their conclusions from 15 years of work in the field

We began this series a year ago by examining school discipline policies and their fitness for purpose.<sup>1</sup> We then went on to describe the approaches that teachers need to adopt with today's pupils in order to teach better behaviour.<sup>2,3,4</sup> In the last article we analysed the continuing training needs of teachers when acquiring these skills.<sup>5</sup> In this final article we will describe our conclusions from 15 years' work advising and supporting schools on the implementation and management of their discipline policies. We see many school management teams who understand sequenced development plans well enough but don't know specifically how to manage staff who are having difficulty with behaviour management.

We have found that we can take the underlying philosophy and practice of Assertive Discipline in the classroom and, with appropriate amendments, apply the same principles to the staffroom. Just as we need to be clear about the behaviour we are teaching to our pupils, we must also be explicit about the behaviours that teachers will demonstrate in the classroom. We mostly need a much higher level of specificity about this. What we say about the classroom – "fuzzy expectations lead to fuzzy behaviour" – will also be true for the staffroom. Senior managers should 'walk their talk': how they expect teachers to communicate with pupils should be mirrored in how they themselves communicate with their staff.

Figure 1

## Diagnosing assertive discipline development level using Situational Leadership II

In classrooms where the social conditions for learning are not met – the ‘three Rs of behaviour’ – you will need to use the following Assertive Discipline skills to establish them. This checklist can be used to help diagnose a teacher’s development level with these skills. The evidence may be obtained from discussion or from observation. This diagnostic then allows the teacher to identify those areas of further support they need from their line manager in order to accomplish the tasks.

### Scoring

Thinking of your own practice in your classroom, score each skill on a five-point scale according to your current level of both competence and commitment in applying this skill with your classes.

**A. Competence:** How well do you understand this concept?

1 = don’t know it at all / 2 = a rudimentary grasp / 3 = somewhat / 4 = mostly / 5 = completely understand it

**B. Competence:** Irrespective of your level of motivation to use it, how proficiently can you apply this skill in the classroom?

1 = not at all / 2 = a little but still a beginner / 3 = somewhat / 4 = mostly / 5 = expert

**C. Commitment:** Irrespective of your current level of proficiency, how motivated are you to use this skill?

1 = not a bit motivated / 2 = only a little / 3 = somewhat / 4 = mostly / 5 = completely sold on this idea

**D. Commitment:** How confident are you in your ability, either right now or once learned, to apply this skill?

1 = not at all confident / 2 = a little; not much / 3 = somewhat, on occasions / 4 = mostly / 5 = completely confident of my ability

SKILLS OF ASSERTIVE DISCIPLINE		COMPETENCE					COMMITMENT						
1	How to communicate assertively	A:	1	2	3	4	5	C:	1	2	3	4	5
		B:	1	2	3	4	5	D:	1	2	3	4	5
2	How to construct an effective behaviour plan	A:	1	2	3	4	5	C:	1	2	3	4	5
		B:	1	2	3	4	5	D:	1	2	3	4	5
3	How to give clear activity directions for each	A:	1	2	3	4	5	C:	1	2	3	4	5
		B:	1	2	3	4	5	D:	1	2	3	4	5
4	How to use positive repetition after each direction	A:	1	2	3	4	5	C:	1	2	3	4	5
		B:	1	2	3	4	5	D:	1	2	3	4	5
5	How to use behavioural narration to focus on	A:	1	2	3	4	5	C:	1	2	3	4	5
		B:	1	2	3	4	5	D:	1	2	3	4	5
6	How to amplify supportive feedback using a range	A:	1	2	3	4	5	C:	1	2	3	4	5
		B:	1	2	3	4	5	D:	1	2	3	4	5
7	How to use class-wide rewards to deflect negative	A:	1	2	3	4	5	C:	1	2	3	4	5
		B:	1	2	3	4	5	D:	1	2	3	4	5
8	How to provide corrective feedback through clear	A:	1	2	3	4	5	C:	1	2	3	4	5
		B:	1	2	3	4	5	D:	1	2	3	4	5
9	How to amplify corrective feedback by using	A:	1	2	3	4	5	C:	1	2	3	4	5
		B:	1	2	3	4	5	D:	1	2	3	4	5
10	How to apply a discipline or corrective hierarchy	A:	1	2	3	4	5	C:	1	2	3	4	5
		B:	1	2	3	4	5	D:	1	2	3	4	5
11	How use redirection with pupils who do not	A:	1	2	3	4	5	C:	1	2	3	4	5
		B:	1	2	3	4	5	D:	1	2	3	4	5
12	How to use refocusing with pupils who argue back	A:	1	2	3	4	5	C:	1	2	3	4	5
		B:	1	2	3	4	5	D:	1	2	3	4	5

### Scoring

To obtain a rough approximation of your overall development level on these Assertive Discipline skills total your scores for each column. For both Competence (A + B) and Commitment (C + D) columns apply the following grading. 95–120 = high; 75–94 = moderate; below 75 = low

Competence	Commitment	Leadership style needed
Low	High	Style 1 – Directive
Low/Moderate	Low/Moderate	Style 2 – Coaching
High	Low/Moderate	Style 3 – Supportive
High	High	Style 4 – Delegating

Clear expectations of teacher behaviour, supportive feedback to motivate and reinforce new practice, and corrective feedback to put right what was going wrong are the key principles for managing adults just as they are for managing pupils. And just as we preach the gospel of 'behaviour education' rather than 'behaviour management' with our pupils, so our approach to work with adults is about leadership rather than management.

This is not, then, about putting in place a 'policy' and expecting everyone to follow it, then despairing when they don't. We have to take a developmental perspective, indeed a truly educational approach, to teacher skills development in this area. These are difficult skills to learn and to apply. Those learning the skills don't require 'management'; after all, there is often little in place yet to 'manage'. What they need is skilled leadership to take them on what can often prove a long and difficult journey.

Why so difficult? The point we have stressed in this series is that the children we face in today's classrooms are not the same as previous generations. We have witnessed a techno-cultural revolution in the last ten years that has contributed to a rapid change in expectations and attitudes about adult-child roles and relationships. This rapid cultural shift has, in many cases, created a 'social disruption' between teachers and pupils within our schools – one requiring a more sophisticated set of skills to create the necessary social mediation than would have obtained in the past with traditional 'discipline policies'.<sup>6</sup>

When teachers are engaged in the acquisition of such social mediation skills, they are taking part in a developmental process, and those who are leading this enterprise are as much involved in a process of professional development as one of organisational change. The methods that leaders then adopt are those that provide the necessary and appropriate levels of support and direction for each teacher. This is not a 'performance management' task. A performance manager will often act as judge; a leader will more often perform the role of coach. The feedback on performance is formative rather than evaluative.

In our own work on leading change in organisations we have begun to train managers in our Situational Leadership II programme,<sup>7</sup> a method which we find entirely congruent with our own approach to classroom management using the Assertive Discipline method.<sup>8</sup> In consequence the leadership shown by teachers in the classroom and the leadership of senior managers share a common methodology: being clear about what should be done, supporting it when it happens, and redirecting back on course when it doesn't. Both approaches are also informed by a common philosophy: this is not something we are doing to others, whether they be teachers or pupils; it is something we are doing with others and for others.

There are three key components to the Situational Leadership II programme: *diagnosis*, *flexibility*, and *partnering for performance*.

■ **Diagnosis** means identifying the development level of a person's ability to manage a specific task – in this case, a teacher in respect of one of the Assertive Discipline skills with this task (knowledge and skill) and by the commitment that person shows towards the task (motivation and confidence). See figure 1.

■ **Flexibility** relates to the style of leadership the teacher now needs from their direct line manager in respect of each task – high or low levels of direction or instruction, high or low levels of support or encouragement. This match between the needs of the 'direct report' and the leadership style of their manager avoids the debilitating effects that occur as a result of under-supervision or over-supervision.

■ **Partnering for performance** is now about putting this into practice through the regular meetings that 'direct reports' will have with their immediate line managers. In respect of classroom management skills, these meetings are opportunities to review behaviour management practice, to discuss issues about implementation, to do some problem-solving and remove blocks to progress.

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*Senior managers should 'walk their talk':  
how they expect teachers to communicate with  
pupils should be mirrored in how they themselves  
communicate with their staff*

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Let us digress here for a moment. Readers of this series will have noted that these elements of our Situational Leadership II programme closely parallel those we describe in our own approach to Assertive Discipline. We begin with a diagnosis of the needs of the class using the 'three Rs of behaviour' checklist. Because not all classes or pupils require the same levels of direction or support for their behaviour, we recognise the need for a flexibility of teaching style using the 'three faces of discipline'. We then seek to provide the appropriate match between the pupils' level of 'behaviour development' and the teacher's 'discipline style'. When we need to spend time with individual pupils about problems with their behaviour, our focus is on teaching better behaviour – not on 'telling off'.

However, in classes where the social conditions for learning have not been established, we more often observe a mismatch between needs and styles. Teachers often fail to be clear enough when giving direction to the required behaviour, not supportive enough in order to reinforce the emerging positive behaviour, and not soon enough in redirecting behaviour that is not meeting the stated target.

As with pupils, so with teachers. The skills development process required in implementing such as the Assertive Discipline method requires a match between the demands of the task (learning and applying each of the

Assertive Discipline competencies) and the leadership of the manager (more or less instruction, more or less support).

## Different needs

Some teachers may be entirely competent in their understanding and completely comfortable in their use of the approach. Others may be mostly competent but lack confidence in applying it in all situations. Some others again may have attempted to use the approach, found it was harder than they had realised, and have lost motivation to continue. Each will have their own leadership needs. Some need to be empowered to get on with the job, to be trusted to work independently. Others will need more encouragement to try out their developing skills in more challenging situations. And then some others will need coaching – further instruction in the method to shape up their skills and high levels of ongoing supportive feedback to motivate them to use them.

If we have carried out a proper diagnosis of each teacher's development level on each of the Assertive Discipline tasks then we are in a position to apply the correct style of leadership to help them develop or maintain their skills. We may at last then apply a standard of educational practice to our own CPD more appropriate to a professional organisation.

So now let's suppose that as a school you have decided to implement a structured behaviour management programme such as the Assertive Discipline method. You've already looked at the needs for improving and maintaining responsible behaviour in classes and throughout the school. You have a consensus to proceed with the particular programme as the approach to meet those needs. Let us suppose you have also provided teachers with initial training in the method. What next?

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*Teachers are often not supportive enough to reinforce the emerging positive behaviour, and not soon enough in redirecting negative behaviour*

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While this initial period of training is important in ensuring that a critical mass of the staff have taken the principles on board, it is only the beginning of the process. They may be sympathetic towards the intended programme, they may have happily sat through a presentation about it, but that doesn't mean they can put it into operation. As a manager you will need to put arrangements in place for ongoing skills training, for problem-solving about issues to do with the organisation, to make amendments as needed to systems within the plan etc. The danger is in thinking that having done 'the training' everything should now take care of itself. It won't. You will need to set up adequate follow-up sessions to ensure that staff feel confident about what they are doing

and about what your senior and middle managers are to do – from the everyday management of routine behaviour issues in classes and around the school to the individualised approaches your school takes for its most challenging pupils.

Your likely aim is to develop a consistent approach to behaviour management. If you are to achieve it you must be clear about the performance targets that staff are expected to meet, when these should be achieved, how this will be done, and with what support. While the early steps in a behaviour programme focus upon clarifying a school-wide standard of pupil behaviour, at some stage you will also need to determine what should be the school-wide standard for teacher performance. Having agreed what that level of teacher skill should be, then some monitoring arrangements will need to be set up if you are to ensure that an acceptable standard is being achieved. This is the stage where some leaders and managers begin to falter! It is also often the stage where your assertiveness skills will be critical to your progress.

Assertive leadership begins with the clear communication of expectations, and then makes use of feedback to coach, support and correct the performance of staff in meeting those expectations. Feedback provides us, of course, with evidence about how near or far we are from our intended target. The purpose of feedback, in the context of behaviour management, is to make adjustments to our strategy, to press forward when things are going in the right direction, to put the brakes on and to redirect where they are not. It is part of a continuing coaching process, not a one-off judgement.

You need to plan for the phases of development in your school from the initial introductory phase of classroom behaviour plans to their practical application, using such as 'behaviour coaching' techniques. You will need to determine when and how you extend the principles school-wide – to corridors, the playground and so on. You need to adapt these procedures for all pupils with the additional measures you take for more severe behaviour issues.

In order to achieve this you need to determine what organisational systems will be needed within the school and to consider the professional–personal competencies that will be required by various staff to complete each phase. You will probably set these out in the form of an action plan for school improvement in the area of behaviour management. It may help to list the skills required of teachers in the classroom in a sequence of competencies which won't all be achieved at the same time. It may prove more practical to focus upon one or two key competencies at a time in the course of such an action plan, perhaps completing the sequence of skills over the space of a year or two. This might include:

- steps to be taken – a sequence of skills and resources to be introduced
- date this process started; date by which to be finished
- who is responsible for taking action at each stage
- how they will do it (including any 'barriers' to overcome)
- who will manage, supervise, monitor this
- how they will monitor what is happening or not (including 'blocks' to doing this).

You may use a planner to record these action steps along



**Figure 2: Example action plan**

This is an example of an action plan. You will need to draft out your own plan to fit the needs of your own school.

Action steps	Start/finish	By whom	How	Led by	How
<b>Development of classroom plan</b>					
1. Classroom ground rules – final draft completed	May 2007/ 16 June 07	all teachers with all classes	departmental meetings on (dates)	HoDs	using agreed criteria
2. Repertoire of in-class rewards proposed (dates)	May 2007/ 16 June 07	all teachers	departmental meetings on	HoDs	using agreed criteria
3. System of in-class sanctions proposed	May 2007/ 23 June 07	Department proposals	via HoD from dept meetings	HT	collated by SMT
4. Consultation completed – with pupils – with parents – with governors	May 2007/ 7 July 07	– tutors – HT – HT	tutor group; letter – parents put to governors.	HoY; SMT; chair	
5. Classroom plans introduced to classes	September 2007	all teachers all classes	first lesson of autumn term	HoDs	as per training
<b>Teaching strategies in use in lessons</b>					
1. Clear activity directions; common routines established; signal for attention taught	September/ October 2007	all teachers (with 'group A classes')	during first half term in normal lesson	HoDs	as per training; sample lessons observed
2. Positive repetition of directions now used as routine strategy in lessons sample lessons observed	October/ November 2007	all teachers (with 'group A classes')	as part of regular teaching routine	HoDs	as per training
3. Other high levels of supportive feedback as positive reinforcement in use	etc...				
4. Consistent correctives; verbal warnings; hierarchy of sanctions	etc...				
5. Records kept of warnings, sanctions	etc...				
6. Follow-up one-to-one meetings with pupils who chronically or severely disrupt	etc...				
<b>Monitoring, coaching and feedback for staff</b>	etc...				

the lines of the example in figure 2. Of course, the actual steps for your school may be different, depending on the programme you have introduced, as may the responsibilities at each stage, so you will need to amend this plan as you see fit.

You will have to plan for the several stages in this process. The example given above assumes that the stage of prior staff consultation leading to appropriate training in the methods has already been achieved. You would then need to ensure that the initial period of implementation was underway – for instance, at the level of classroom behaviour planning, involving teachers, pupils, parents and governors. The next step might be to ensure that the appropriate

behaviour management skills were actually being deployed by teachers in lessons, and you might want to enumerate what these should be. Alongside that you might also want to plan how you will monitor teachers' implementation of the strategies, together with systems for providing additional coaching and support during the application process.

The plan assumes a developmental progression of skills. Where staff will be at different starting points in terms of their behaviour management skills, then clearly not all the skills will be acquired and implemented by all the staff at the same time. You may consider some sort of 'differentiation' of skill implementation. If you have already enlisted the support of some skilled practitioners on the staff they might

## What? Who? How? When?

**What** is it we are trying to manage? Are we clear about the expectation for teacher performance; what training are we providing; what monitoring are we intending to follow; what support and what corrective action do we envisage taking further down the line?

**Who** is meant to be leading this? Which elements are they leading, all or some of it; what role and responsibility do these people have? Has it been made clear; do they have 'authority' for doing all, some or none of it? Who is being led? Do they know?

**How** is any of this going to be done? How will leaders lead? How does this fit into the school improvement plan? How is it supported by plans and targets for continuing professional development?

**When** will all or any of this be done? Have we set time lines for achieving our various steps along the route to our targets?

As a leader you may need to think about the stages of implementation and the different tasks and skills at each stage: at the initiation stage when we are selecting our 'discipline approach', training in it, and introducing it to the pupils; at the maintenance stage when we are troubleshooting and fine-tuning, setting teacher skill objectives, monitoring, coaching and correcting; at the development stage when other elements may be added, such as school-wide application, individualised approaches with our most challenging pupils, and developing emotional intelligence programmes.

Possible stages in the initiation process:

- Identify our current practices and problems; carry out an audit of needs and compare it with an audit of resources. How good is the match at present?
- Determine our strategy. Will this involve any organisational change (about, for instance, structure, roles and responsibilities)? What needs addressing within the physical and social environment ('hot spots' within the school; professional skills possessed by staff, such as behaviour management strategies)?
- Identify our training needs – provide the necessary skills, set up the required systems to support training and subsequent use of those skills
- Establish targets, set timetables – what is the expectation of performance this term, next term, next year? Who will monitor it? How will they deal with it?

Targets should tell us the performance expected in any of these areas. You will need to define the criteria for acceptable performance, monitor whether it is being achieved, and provide supportive and corrective feedback accordingly. Managing all of this effectively takes much more time, effort and resources than many school managers realise.

## Distributed leadership

The NCSL recommends 'distributed leadership' as a way of developing future school leaders. However, how to actually do it is often vaguely understood. In answer we use Situational Self-Leadership – a method that gives clear guidance to all staff about how to identify levels of competence and what sort of leadership style they thus require. We have found that either a 'top-down' or 'bottom-up' approach can work well using this.

Recently we took all the staff at Carrickfergus College in Northern Ireland through the processes of identifying the tasks they had earlier been set within the Assertive Discipline programme. Selecting the most salient two or three, they then worked on diagnosing their development level with each task – their level of competence and their level of commitment. This then identified the leadership style they required of their managers – either more or less instruction in that method, either more or less support to accomplish it. They then were able to 'partner for performance' by negotiating with managers the degree of supervision, further training and ongoing support required to meet agreed targets.

Conversely, taking a 'top-down' approach, the leadership team at Featherstone Technology College, having already completed the trainers' programme in the Assertive Discipline method, had themselves successfully taken their staff through that approach. So it worked well for them that they should do the same with the Situational Leadership II programme. Having spent two days with one of us, they have now begun teaching their colleagues how to use the concepts of SLII in each team. This has now given middle managers a set of tools for opening up communication and helping others develop self-reliance. Competence is being developed and commitment is being gained by the improved quality of conversations about performance between managers and their teams. "SLII gives us the tools by which we can match the way we support colleagues with their level of development in a constructive manner," said one participant. "Having a shared language allows us to focus on the heart of the situation, and gives us a practical approach to developing leadership."

be able to act as a 'fast track' group, working ahead of the main plan targets, perhaps under the guise of a 'pilot group'. This may then also lead to some individualised planning for all of your teachers as part of each person's own continuing professional development programme.

## Alternative

An alternative or additional approach at secondary level may be to identify classes where these procedures should be easy to implement for any competent teacher (those where the 'three Rs of behaviour' are well established, where most pupils are already respectful of the rules, follow directions, keep on task and so on). Next, identify those classes that are at least reasonably manageable, but where teachers need to motivate pupils more. Finally identify those classes which are currently proving difficult for many teachers to manage. You might grade these as 'group A' ("easier to manage"), 'group B' ("an average class for our school") and 'group C' classes ("tougher classes"). You could then set different times for teachers to achieve targets with each type of class.

Perhaps you might expect that at an early stage in the programme implementation, all teachers should achieve the basic target skills (giving clear activity directions, using a consistent signal for attention, using positive repetition, establishing routines, using correctives and re-direction calmly and consistently) with all group A classes. You might also expect that they will be giving clear directions backed up by positive repetition of directions with group B classes. Later on, you might set a target for when that range of skills will be consistently applied with group C classes.

Well, as they say, so much for the theory. In practice school managers have to balance the energy and time costs of these approaches against the many other competing demands. What we have tried to do in this series is present a way of managing the behaviour issues in schools that makes for a more positive attitude to the job, to each other and to our pupils. So in conclusion there are two interlocking factors you have to consider: the method you adopt to manage pupil behaviour and how you will manage the behaviour of those employing that method.

About the behaviour management method, don't forget about trimodal profiling: addressing thinking, feeling and action. So to be teacher-friendly the method you wish to promote needs to:

- have a logical strategy that can be readily understood
- address the emotional arousal that can otherwise hijack our best-laid plans
- describe what teachers will do, a sequence of competencies for professional development.

As for the leadership of this, you need to identify what you want teachers to do and how you will help them achieve these tasks. Then, depending on your size of school, you need to recognise that this is a task too big for your senior management team, let alone a sole head teacher! You will need to:

## References

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- identify the behavioural skills that teachers will use as a set of competencies to be achieved within a finite time scale
- devolve the leadership of this to all managers with their direct reports; teach them how to lead the process
- show them how to diagnose development level for each competency with each of their direct reports
- show them how to match the needs of each teacher with the appropriate leadership style, to avoid the perils of either over-supervision or under-supervision
- ensure that one-to-one manager-direct report meetings then take place on a regular basis for this process to be undertaken as needed.

This enterprise is about changing school culture. In many of the staffrooms we visit, we pick up a lot of negative feeling towards the job, towards senior managers, towards the children. A lot of that negativity gets dumped right back in the classroom. That's not good for the pupils, and it certainly isn't good for the mental and physical health of the teacher. If we can adopt a leadership style with each other that communicates trust, openness and a willingness to support others rather than criticise, then we may begin to see it reflected in the classroom as well. Ken Blanchard, the originator of Situational Leadership II, expresses this quite simply as 'servant leadership' – "what can I do to help you?"

**Geoff Moss and John Bayley are training and development consultants with Behaviour & Learning Management Ltd (tel 0870 241 8262). Their book *Social Mediation: Assertive Discipline for Today's Teachers* is to be published later this year.**

**Behaviour & Learning Management is the only UK organisation accredited by Canter & Associates to provide training and resources in the Assertive Discipline method and by the Blanchard Organisation for training in Situational Leadership II for schools.**