

“ MISS, I
DON'T
GIVE A
SH*T ”

Two memories:

Me around 8 years old: Mum, why is Laura always dirty and scruffy?

Mum: I think her family doesn't have much money; they can't buy as many clothes as we can.

Me: People pick on her, I tried to play with her, but she won't play nicely.

Mum: I don't think her family have been able to teach her how to do that, it must be harder for her mustn't it?

Mum - Alyson Bates

Dad to me, around 15 years old: Equal doesn't mean the same; I always mow the lawn, but your Mum remembers our pin numbers.

Dad - Anthony Bates

Thank you to my Mum and Dad, for giving Adam and I such a solid foundation from which to fly.

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**Engaging With Challenging
Behaviour in Schools**
Adele Bates

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

'I've had juice poured on my head, been whacked by a skateboard – and have taught a Year 7 pupil who has experienced severe trauma how to read their first ever word...'

Adele Bates is a Behaviour and Education Specialist who supports school leaders, classroom teachers, homeschooling carers, and parents to empower pupils with behavioural needs and Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs (SEMH) to thrive in their education. As well as enabling these pupils to learn their timetables or to pass an exam, her main ambition is to help these, often misunderstood, young people to be a part of positive social change. Part of that is advocating on their behalf in wider society, creating platforms for their voices to be heard and to be part of building an inclusive education system for all – hence why she's written this book.

Adele has nearly 20 years' teaching experience in a variety of settings: mainstream primary and secondary, Pupil Referral Units, Alternative Provision and Special Schools. She trains and mentors teachers and trainees and is a Behavioural Consultant for senior leaders and local authorities, advising on whole school approaches to supporting pupils with behavioural needs and SEMH.

In 2019, Adele was awarded a grant to carry out an educational research trip in Finland to observe, teach, interview and learn about the Finnish Education System's inclusive approach to education. This has informed her approaches since.

Adele is a TEDx Speaker 2020 and has delivered training and keynotes for educational events and organisations across Europe, including the National Education Union and Amnesty International Education. She is the Educational Associate for Trauma Inform, an Associate on Behaviour with Independent Thinking and has been interviewed as an expert on teenage behaviour for BBC Radio 4. Adele is a contributing writer for education books: *For Flourishing's Sake*, *Big Gay Adventures in Education*, *Square Peg* and *The Big Book of Whole School Wellbeing*. She has a First-Class Undergraduate Degree, a Master's Degree and a PGCE.

For Adele's tips, resources and to work with her further, visit her website at adeleeducation.co.uk where you can also become a part of her community of Inspiring Educators. You can catch her on Twitter @adelebatesZ.

Adele is originally from Burton-on-Trent, now based in Brighton (and sometimes Bulgaria) where she lives with her partner Elitsa. Her brother Adam is usually floating around in her life too. Adele is a trained opera singer; she enjoys knitting, yoga, meditation, painting, flamenco, forests and never stops reading.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must start with the brilliant story that brought this, my first book, into existence.

Rachel Musson, founder of Thoughtbox Education, had given me a free ticket for an education conference – despite never having met me. Rachel was one of the first people I didn't know who I spoke to about being a freelance educator. She was incredibly enthusiastic and invited me to do my first ever education interview as a blog post for her company.

At that conference, I wandered around the book stands in a break and, for some unplanned, unknown reason, got inspired to ask one of the chaps what you actually had to do to become an author. Publisher at SAGE & Corwin, James Clark, talked me through the proposal process and asked “why, do you have an idea?”. Honestly, I had no idea, but having found out I was speaking to a publisher, I blagged something about a ‘behaviour book’. James sounded vaguely interested. At that point I had noticed he had been multitasking: keeping watch on the stand, with watching the cricket on his iPad. I seized my opportunity and cheekily suggested that he go to my website and read my blog instead...

A couple of weeks later, I was astounded that James emailed me, having thoroughly read my blog, encouraging me to put forward a proposal. It was the end of summer term, Year 11 exam-madness, so I got a bit excited but had to put it off until we reached the holidays. At that point, I read the email properly and digested what this could mean – I could write a book. Gosh.

So firstly, thank you to Rachel for the free ticket to an event I otherwise wouldn't have gone to, and thank you to James for prizing himself away from the cricket on that sunny afternoon.

Once in the SAGE world, Diana Alves has given me ongoing encouragement from the start. Her positivity and eye for detail have been invaluable. I am also unsure how she manages to read and feedback on things so quickly when I'm having a ‘writer's wobble’. Thank you.

At the very start of the process, I attended a fantastic course with Arvon, led expertly by Alexander Masters and Melissa Benn. Not ever having thought of myself as a writer before, this was the first writer's retreat I had ever been on; it was a dream come true. Thank you to all of the Arvon people who support writers in this way. It makes a huge difference. Melissa, thank you for mopping up the tears and helping me realise I could do this at the early stage when the shine of ‘oh I'm writing a book!’ turned into ‘ummm...how do I write a book?’ Your own writing in education is an

inspiration. Also thank you to Prof Zoë Playdon, Debra Shaefer and the other supportive participants on the course; I can't wait to read your books too.

Next, I acknowledge my interviewees: when I had the idea of introducing experts for each chapter, I thought of my dream team – I got them. Some are brilliant friends and colleagues; others are people whose work I was admiring from afar. There were also a couple of people I was secretly fan girling inside and couldn't believe they said yes! So, for your time and enthusiasm for this project, and more importantly, for the work you do for our young people, thank you: soon-to-be Dr Frederika Roberts, Rachel W, soon-to-be Dr Lisa Cherry, Frédérique Lambrakis-Haddad, Kate McAllister, Mark Goodwin, Pranav Patel, Dr Emma Kell, Rachel Tomlinson and Bukky Yusuf.

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Thank you to the Society of Authors for the Writers Grant during the unstable lockdown period. This enabled me to keep writing.

This book was written through many lockdowns both up a Bulgarian mountain (thanks to my hosts Laura Giosh-Markov and the tragically now passed away rock legend Konstantin Markov for the tranquillity, desk and raspberries) and in my Granny Pippa's house on our return to the UK. Thank you for the loan of your house Granny Pippa, Philippa Bates, it made a big difference in buying me time to finish writing. Moreover, thank you GP for your own lifelong advocacy for education for all, it obviously rubbed off a bit.

Thank you to the many pupils and colleagues in different schools where I have worked. I cannot name all of you for safeguarding and practicality reasons, but you have helped me learn what I share now.

This book would not have been written, and definitely no one would have been interviewed, without my fabulous VA at the time Michelle Gillson. Thank you for keeping me in line and pointing out when I was being over-optimistic with my time-keeping. Best of luck in your business now as a Dubsado Expert...and thank you to my VA now Lora May for picking up so smoothly and cheerleading.

x “MISS, I DON’T GIVE A SH’T”

Ian Gilbert, a huge thank you for your proofreading and pushing me to claim *I am what I am* through my writing. Your support and provocation on the final push were invaluable – you made it a better book. I feel honoured to have had your expertise and guidance throughout this process, and it’s a joy to be a part of the Independent Thinking family.

Mum and Dad Bates, Alyson and Tony, thank you for laying the foundations and supporting me in everything I do (even when you don’t get it). Your unconditional love enables me to do the ambitious things I do.

Adam Bates, my baby brother, thank you for always being there no matter what, no matter when, and for never doubting my ability to do this, especially when I did. Hello?

Elitsa Zaykova, my unexpected, wonderful partner. Thank you for never questioning that I could write a book and never pretending you will ever read it. Your practical help – chef, IT support, finder-of-things-I-have-misplaced – and emotional support has enabled the book to get written. I love you.

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FOREWORD

BY BRITISH TEENAGERS IN ALTERNATIVE PROVISION FOR EDUCATION

I have written this book about young people for whom the education system does not work, and so I am honoured to have collated a foreword written by some of these pupils.

For confidentiality and safeguarding reasons, they must be kept completely anonymous. Some of these young people are in care, some have been excluded from mainstream schools, some excluded from several. All of them are of secondary school age and are now educated in Alternative Provision; this can range from PRUs to APs, some mainstream and some alternative or tutoring.

The young people were asked several questions, I have left their answers as raw and honest as I can, without my interpretation or advice for teachers on 'what you could do next' (there's plenty of that in the book).

Not all pupils were able to answer every question and some answers were too identifying to include. For me, the responses give us a huge insight into the educational journey and relationship that these young people form with schools in their childhoods. It makes me sad, angry and fuels me to do the work I do.

Please read their experiences, ideas and advice carefully. These young people, the ones whose behaviour has not been supported in our mainstream education system, are the experts after all.

It may be the most useful part of the book.

WHAT'S YOUR CURRENT SCHOOLING SITUATION?

"I've been to four schools, three primary and one high school. I'm currently in Year 8 but not in school. The plan is to start back at school in Year 9."

"Permanent exclusion, currently out of PRU."

"Two schools, one primary and one high school; hate both."

"Excluded several times from primary. One full time education so far at high school."

WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORDS 'SCHOOL' OR 'EDUCATION' WHAT DO YOU THINK OF?

"Frustrating, hassle, obligation, boring, rubbish; don't like it."

"Frustrating (enjoyable when I was doing what I wanted)."

"Hassle, stress, 'blags my head'. School is only fun when I am on the terror. Don't like it; crap."

"Community, opportunity, obligation, varied."

"Boring, but fun at the same time. I was actually quite good at PE, believe it or not. I was quite fit for a 6-year-old but not now. I loved break and lunch but the food could've been better."

DESCRIBE YOUR BEST TEACHER – WHAT MADE THEM SO GOOD?

"I either like a teacher or I don't, nothing in between. No reason either way. The day I understand why is the day I become a millionaire, but that will never happen anyway. Same for worst teacher, don't know really. Probably Miss P getting angry over the smallest thing, she needed to chill out, I can just rub the mistake out!"

"Nothing. Only thing was Forest School in Year 7, he let me plant and grow. We got wood and built a fire. He didn't boss me around, he wasn't trying to get me to kick off at him. Boxing was OK too."

"Only one at high school. Strict but liked him, sounds nice. He was in the army but he is funny sometimes. I liked Miss L at primary, not boring, she was funny and did fun things with the class. She explained things quickly, she was nice. Sometimes she shouted but we still got hot choc."

DESCRIBE YOUR WORST TEACHER – WHAT DID THEY GET WRONG?

"Teacher at high school, tells everybody off, you get an 'unmet' for anything, nearly every kid all the time. She has a weird way of saying 'Excuse me...'. She tells me not to jump around. This is annoying."

"Scottish teacher at high school, couldn't understand him. Gave detentions for anything, even your collar sticking up. Rules all the time, just a twat... did not like him."

"Maths at the PRU, always having a go. Picked on me, shouted at me that I was going to do some work today. Blagging me, threatened to take away the

pool table for lunch if I didn't do the work. Kept shouting at me to do the work, I refused and he told me to get out. I carried on arguing and he grabbed me and tried to throw me out, we ended up on the floor. All the other kids were shouting and other teachers came. It wasn't just me, he spoke to all kids bad. He works at the high school now and he goes on about me to my mates and girlfriend – 'I don't care who your boyfriend is...'

"I wish he didn't start it, he always was trying to wind me up. I didn't know what to do most of the time in lessons so why didn't he help me?"

DESCRIBE YOUR FAVOURITE MEMORY FROM ANY SCHOOL OR TUTORING – WHAT WAS SO GOOD ABOUT IT?

"Playing football on the field. I was good!"

"I liked playing rugby for the school team in Year 7. We won a couple of games. Me and R scissor tackled one of the other team, nearly broke him in half. I played second row."

"I went to C primary school from reception to Year 3. This is my favourite school because it is the one I have the most memories from, mainly all the people I knew there."

"Maths tests, I love them. I love being a geek and a nerd. It is not a contradiction. I loved getting a hot chocolate at primary."

DESCRIBE YOUR WORST MEMORY FROM ANY SCHOOL OR TUTORING – WHAT WAS SO BAD ABOUT IT?

"I hated the lessons and the teachers. On the last day I hit my mate with a tennis racket – I didn't hurt him and we are mates now. The school felt like high school, teachers were really strict and everybody hates them; most kids hated the lessons too. It was all points, teams and houses. Classes got split up and we were put into sets, I found myself with kids I didn't like. Plus, I got a detention for putting the date wrong – what was the big deal? I could have just rubbed it out. Also, I got an injury on my finger (some sort of callous or growth?) and it made writing hard, sometimes it was bleeding and I couldn't stop it. I had an operation to remove it in the end.

All that happened at school was I got told off for my finger bleeding on my work or not being able to write properly."

"I went to go on a managed move before I went to the PRU. Mom said I had to behave really well and keep quiet, don't mouth off. So I went into the meeting with the Headteacher and the Deputy and kept quiet. So the Deputy started saying he could tell how naughty I was just by looking at me. I didn't even say thank you when he opened the door for me, I said I was trying to keep quiet and they don't know anything about what I am like. I walked out of the office and didn't go on a managed move. It really blags my head when teachers do that, they shouldn't be allowed to do it."

"Detentions at high school... but these were kind of fun too."

IF YOU WERE TO BE ASKED HOW BEHAVIOUR SHOULD BE APPROACHED IN SCHOOLS, WHAT WOULD BE YOUR ADVICE?

"Rules: yes you need them, but kids don't follow them anyhow.

Punishment: doesn't work. I will do the thing I'm being punished for even more just to annoy teachers.

Rewards: these are good. I like to get something for being good.

Exclusion: Waste of time, I just get time to myself. No, I don't do the work..."

"They should believe kids more."

"Tutor is the best school I've had. Do small bits at a time – no orders or detention or stay behind. Much better away from my mates, not so good if my mates are around."

"Be chill with the kids. Let them take their time, don't rush work. Be calm, don't shout if they get it wrong!"

Rules are OK for getting work but don't see why there are rules for tie, uniform, trainers; what's the point about rules for hair?

If I had a bad day I just want to go home and sleep; listen to music or video on my phone. But my bike is the best thing, it means everything to me and I wouldn't change it for anything.

I wish school didn't keep checking up on me when I was in school, every lesson somebody sticking their head in and asking if I was OK."

"Rewards are good for making me behave better – I can show my carer and make her proud.

Punishment doesn't work, I keep doing it. I get distracted and don't think of the consequences, I forget."

IF YOU HAD 2 MINUTES TO TELL ALL TEACHERS IN THE UK ONE THING TO MAKE THEM BETTER TEACHERS, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

“When you are telling kids off let them say their side too, don’t cut them off.”

“My message would be to *be fair*. Think about if a teacher was speaking to their own kids like that – they wouldn’t like it. You are twice my age, why are you shouting at me? Blags my head.”

“Make it better. Let me chew gum, it will help me focus and you wouldn’t get a stupid black market in chewing gum where I pay 25p for one piece.”

“My advice for teachers is don’t be a twat or a dick.”

OTHER COMMENTS?

“I don’t really want to talk about school anymore...”



INTRODUCTION

“Miss, I don’t give a shit.”

“I cannot be arsed.”

“Sir, you can just f*** off.”

“Leave me alone...”

...and various other sweet refrains can be heard regularly up and down the country from pupils who are struggling to conform to our mainstream way of education. When you are the day-to-day teacher, Teaching Assistant, pastoral staff, senior leadership team, it is easy to be worn down or become numb to this kind of rhetoric and its associated behaviours.

These pupils are communicating to us a resounding “No.” A no to the moment, to the work, to the lesson, to a peer, to the teacher, to education – or for some it’s a much bigger picture; they are also saying no to mental health issues, learning difficulties, difficult home lives, past or current trauma, abuse or neglect. Most concerningly, some are saying no to themselves – the outward aggression is a façade masking an inner no: self-loathing, self-frustration, self-anger and fear.

“Miss, I don’t give a shit” – what is this really communicating to us?

“Miss, leave me alone, I can’t read and I’m embarrassed.”

“Miss, I don’t want you to care, because adults who care eventually leave me – that hurts.”

“Miss, I’m scared to try in case I fail; when I fail at things I get punished or I need to punish myself.”

“Miss, don’t come too close – there’s bad things I have to keep a secret from you.”

“Miss, don’t focus on me too much, you will discover I’m not worth it.”

There are as many explanations as there are pupils – and remember, just because a kid does not have a label, doesn’t mean there is 100% no needs.

Should this type of language, and associated behaviour, be punished? Should there always be consequences? Yes. And no.

Context is everything.

This book guides you through these very real conundrums, providing strategies that sit within your school’s behaviour frameworks – whilst making a longer, and arguably much more useful, impact for learning, pupil wellbeing and sometimes safety.

WHY READ THIS BOOK?

Firstly, there are many practical tips, approaches and strategies that, if implemented (more on that in a moment), will help you and your staff to support the behavioural needs of even the trickiest “cherubs” in your classrooms and schools.

But that’s just the surface.

This book is part of a much wider vision and movement. Particularly in the British education system in the past twenty years or so, there has been an increasing focus in our schools on teaching to the test, grades, performance-related pay for teachers, ‘cracking down’ on behaviour and expecting all our pupils to achieve the same things in the same ways. This takes us far; we have record high numbers of pupils reaching Further Education, which as a nation enables us to be one of the main economic and political players in industries worldwide – and if that’s your measurement of success value, that’s a good thing.

However, there is another side too. Thirty-five pupils a day are being excluded from our schools, illegal off-rolling is common place, as is advising parents and carers to homeschool pupils with certain needs as it’s ‘for the best’ – without addressing for whom it is best (Henshaw, 2017).

Here are some statistics from the Making the Difference (Gill et al., 2017) exclusion report:

- It is our most vulnerable pupils who get excluded; they are twice as likely to be in care, four times more likely to have grown up in poverty, seven times more likely to have a special educational need and ten times more likely to suffer recognised mental health problems.
- Once a pupil is excluded they cost society £370,000 due to poorer outcomes.
- Once a pupil is put into Alternative Provision (AP) or a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) they are less likely to be taught by qualified, consistent staff and are less likely to attain 5 GCSEs.
- In addition, one of the top reasons that teachers leave the profession is linked to challenging behaviour. Interestingly, in 2019 Jane Perryman and Graham Calvert discovered that it is not the pupil’s behaviour per se that causes teachers to leave, but the lack of support teachers feel they have in coping with it (Perryman and Calvert, 2020), which we also address in this book.

These pupils, however, are not just a small part of a negative, media grabbing statistic. They are humans who have the ability to connect, learn and thrive, once the opportunity presents itself to them in a way they can safely take it.

My vision for education is one in which all differences are included and welcomed; an education which is flexible, relevant and leads towards positive social change.

This is at the heart of what this book is about. I believe that pupils with behavioural needs, who challenge the adults around them, have the potential to not just learn their timestables or get a GCSE, but to be key players in the social positive change our society so clearly requires; those key players could be widely known policy makers shifting nationwide infrastructure, or they could be the volunteer at the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) who supports a young person from attempted suicide to find the support they need. I know this to be true because I have the honour of knowing adults who have come on this transformational journey themselves, some of whom you will meet in the interviews accompanying each chapter.

And this is where we, the educators of the young people, come in. We may feel sometimes that what we do with our pupils is small and insignificant, and yet we have the position, power and therefore responsibility to positively influence our micro-communities. Sometimes it can feel like you're a mere cog in a machine with no agency; that a government, a curriculum or an inspection body are what dictate who you are as an educator and how you should teach – that is not the case.

What we do in our classrooms – virtual, remote, physical or otherwise – on a micro level makes a difference. The community we create in our schools can be the difference between safely belonging and thriving for a pupil – or being excluded, lost in the system and becoming one of those negative statistics.

How we relate to our pupils, the relationships we build, makes a difference to their lives.

You have that influence. *You* have that position of power and the responsibility to look after that most valuable resource in all of this – *you*. It's not a coincidence that this is where we begin in Chapter 1. In addition, over the year I took to write this book and interview the experts, I discovered an overriding theme from all of them: no matter which aspect of supporting behaviour we were discussing, self-care and reflection for the adults need to come first.

Yes, this book is a practical how-to in many ways. My desire, however, is that it is also a space to dream and connect with a wider vision of what education *could* be for all and realise what those first steps to that place might be for you, tomorrow morning, starting with the delightful 9F2 in the temporary mobile building with broken heating.

I address the people in my community as Inspiring Educators, because you are the ones in the classrooms and the schools and you *do* have the opportunity to inspire every day – which makes a difference to your pupils. This book tackles the moments when you feel less than inspiring, in fact sometimes when you feel totally hopeless. It provides a safe space for you to unpick some of the most challenging aspects of your job, connect with other stories and people who have similar experiences and, I hope, empower you to take the next step forwards.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

If you are like me, no matter what I say here, you will read this book cover to cover, take notes (in pencil, *never ink*) and try to apply everything.

Truly, this book can be approached in many different ways. One of my favourite chapters to write was Chapter 10: Troubleshooting, which gives you ‘quick’ answers to emergency questions, signposting to the relevant chapters and sections that will help you out – because I am fully aware that sometimes you don’t need theory and reflection, you need something to put in place three lessons ago.

Aside from that, the *best* way to get the most out of this book is to implement, experiment, adapt and try again. Some of the approaches and strategies offered here you will have seen before. Some you will have tried before, and they will have failed. So why would you bother again? Because the joy and infuriation about supporting positive behaviour (and teaching in general), is that it is always changing. We need as big a toolbox as we can, because we never know when we will need to pick up that old spanner again, or try a shiny new jigsaw that we thought was too new-fangled for us – because it happens to be *the* tool that helps *that* pupil unlock their potential for learning in your subject.

Overall, keep asking questions: “Yes, I tried that with Year 11 last year, why didn’t it work? How long did I try it for? What about it didn’t fit for them? What could work better next year? How are these Year 11s different to last year’s? How am I different? What have I learnt that means I now have different ways of using my tools? What has happened in the context of our community that has affected education?”.

THE BIG BEHAVIOUR RULE

You will very rarely hear me discuss rules. Here’s about the only one I share with everyone who works with me:

THE BIG BEHAVIOUR RULE

Any advice you receive from any well-meaning:

- Teacher
- Headteacher
- Specialist (including me!)
- Parent
- Carer
- Grandparent
- Politician
- Therapist

- Twitter feed
- Blog post
- School gates conversation etc.

you can override if it does not work for *your* pupil(s).

Because you are the experts on your pupils, your classroom, your school, your community and yourself. Whilst I or anyone else *may* have more experience or have read more books, we don't know exactly what it's like to be in your shoes – your job is to take any advice you receive and find out what works.

TRIGGERS

You have picked up a book with a swear word in the title, so I will assume that the odd curse will not offend you. In addition, there is content that touches upon traumatic and potentially upsetting experiences for some. It is vital that these are a part of the conversation about behaviour in schools and the point of including them is to investigate how you might support such a pupil who has these experiences, but please do look after yourself first.

SAFEGUARDING

Schools play an essential part in keeping our young people safe. Whilst reading this book it may prompt you into concerns over a pupil as you consider their situations and behaviour in different ways. I implore you to pass on concerns. All schools in the UK will have a Safeguarding policy, procedure and Safeguarding lead – find out yours. The best Safeguarding advice I have ever received was from Rachel W (Chapter 2), who told me: if it doesn't feel right, even if you can't explain it fully, tell someone, it could make all the difference to keeping a young person safe.

CHAPTER HEADINGS

Each of the “Miss” quotes from the chapter headings are real quotes that pupils have said to me over the years. As is the title of the book.

#INSULTOFTHEWEEK

At the start of each chapter, I share some of my favourite #InsultOfTheWeek quotes from my pupils. I have been sharing these with my community of Inspiring Educators for a couple of years now, many others have got involved – bringing much

hilarity and reality checks when needed. We’d love you to jump on twitter with the hashtag #InsultOfTheWeek or contact me and share yours too.

ACTION BOXES

At the end of each chapter there is an action box outlining practical ideas for you to implement – next lesson, next week and long term. These, and your own variation of them, will be what transforms this process from reading a book, into making a positive difference to some of the most vulnerable pupils in your classroom.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

There is no perfect umbrella term to discuss the kind of pupils I wrote this book for – because they are all individuals and umbrella terms tend to exclude and mislabel. Most often I refer to ‘behaviour that challenges the adults’ because this behaviour can come from anywhere (other staff sometimes too) and the behaviour is not intrinsically linked to any person.

There is a glossary at the back explaining some common acronyms and terms used.

OTHER USEFUL POINTS

- Have a notepad and pen (or your digital equivalent) available for exercises, questions and reflections.
- When I ask you to “choose one-to-two pupils” in a thought experiment or activity, don’t be tempted to think of your whole class or all of your SEMH pupils. I am specific for a reason – it is this specificity that will enable you to create *real* differentiation. The process of going through the activity with only particular pupils in mind will be so revealing you won’t be able to help yourself but do the process again for all of them, once you see the effect your small changes are making.

ENJOY

I am a big advocator of enjoyment. You are investing your time and energy in this book, so make it as enjoyable as you can for you – a snippet over breakfast each morning, read it on the commute or form a book club and read it with others. The chapters can easily become bitesize for discussion groups – and for putting into action.

Make it work for you.

And finally, I would love to hear how you get on. I want to know what rings your bells, what made you think, what finally clicked into place for Mo in the behaviour unit in Year 7, what challenges you still face and how I can further support you to clear blocks and empower the young people in your care.

You can connect with me:
on Twitter at: @adelebatesZ
on LinkedIn at: www.linkedin.com/in/adele-bates-03b566208/
or on my website at adelebateseducation.co.uk
Enjoy ☺



3

“MISS, YOU ARE NOT MY MUM”: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

#INSULTOFTHEWEEK

Pupil: “Miss, what does patronising mean?”

Me: “When you talk down to someone as if they’re younger or inferior to you in a bad way.”

Pupil: “Oh, you mean like you did in our first ever lesson together?”

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- Learn why building positive relationships is the way to improve behaviour in the classroom.
- Understand how to build positive relationships with pupils, in order to help them engage in learning.

INTRODUCTION

How we interact with children and build relationships with them affects their behaviour.

In the 1970s, Dr Ed Tronick developed The Still Face experiment (see Further Reading for links to watch a short video). The experiment gives us an understanding of how the emotional development of a child is dependent upon the type of interactions they receive from their primary adults at an early age. If a lack of interaction occurs often, it can negatively affect how the child interacts with others, how much they can trust others and how they get on in society.

Taking this into the classroom, the way we interact with our pupils will directly affect their behaviour. A smile at the door, a welcome to the classroom sets up a positive interaction from which to build. In contrast, “take your coat off, I told you that last week” accompanied by a frown, sets a negative tone to the lesson, and later the relationship. Unlike the Still Face experiment, you are less likely to be the child’s primary adult, and there will already be patterns in place that will reflect how they have been treated by adults up to this point. Take this to heart – most often a pupil’s negative response or refusal to engage with you in a relationship has very little to do with *you* (more on this in Chapter 6). Once you know this, and understand the child better, as the adult *you* can be the one to instigate and sustain a positive relationship – even when a pupil does not have the tools or previous experiences to do so.

CONNECTION BEFORE CORRECTION

With pupils with additional behavioural needs, we cannot take for granted that they will have learnt an unquestioning respect, or feelings of safety, towards new adults. In special SEMH schools where I work, this lesson is brought to me tenfold; when a young person cannot assume that a new adult is safe due to significant trauma, instigated sometimes by a close adult, they are on alert. They very consciously construct the first impression you have of them. There is an element of performance, which acts as a defence mechanism – the only way the child has learnt to keep themselves safe.

- The behaviour = F*** off (thrown chairs, aggression, smirks or *The Blank*).
- In contrast, the message = You’re a new adult. I cannot trust you. Some adults do bad things to me. It’s safer to not let you close.

Hence why, as Clinical Psychologist Kim S. Golding (2015) argues, “Connection before Correction” is a vital strategy for working with pupils with challenging behaviour. Transferring this into an educational setting, it is clear that the relationship that we build with the young person is the *first step* to improving their behaviour – and yet often this can go against our instinct as an adult attempting to exert boundaries and discipline within a classroom.

Golding explains that if a child has had a secure attachment (more about this in Chapter 4) with a primary caregiver(s) at an early age, they have learnt that they are loved unconditionally – no matter if sometimes there are seemingly negative actions from the caregiver – being shouted at or boundaries being put in place. In contrast, when a child does not have a secure attachment with the caregiver, it plays out differently; the child feels that negativity towards them is about *themselves* rather than the *actions*. The child has learnt that they are shameful. The core belief becomes ‘I am

shameful or bad’. If this pattern is repeated, it ingrains the belief further and transfers to other scenarios. “Children who mistrust therefore learn to resist authority and to oppose parental influence... They trust in themselves rather than others. These children develop controlling behaviours as they try to take charge of their own safety. It feels safer to be in charge than to be influenced by another” (Golding, 2015: 3).

Back in the classroom, when the teacher shouts at the child, or by this time young person, to be quiet or take their hat off, the same emotions are triggered; an adult is expressing negative behaviour towards them, they cannot trust that this adult has their best interests at heart, so they have to control the situation themselves – “f*** off, Sir”, or head on the table. All of which re-affirms the core belief – I am shameful or bad.

Evidentially, this is not a useful frame of mind from which to begin formal learning.

To *only* enforce discipline and punishment at this stage does little to change the learnt pattern. The shame will increase and the disengagement with learning increases too. Instead, Golding (2015) advises that we develop boundaries and discipline *alongside* building a positive, trusting relationship. Given some children’s experiences, this will take longer for them than for pupils who have had secure attachments in their early years.

MEDIA AND WIDER SOCIETY’S PERCEPTIONS

Our media and society at large do little to help this situation. Teenagers or ‘yooves’ are often depicted as ‘hoodied hooligans’, too loud, too swearsy, inconsiderate, and so on. Open any (digital) newspaper, and the negative stories about teenagers far outweigh the positive. This is a misrepresentation – “Teenager does their homework on time, helps parents stack the dishwasher and always says hello to 86-year-old Doris at the bus stop” does not make the headlines. In addition, in the UK teenagers can *legally* be discriminated against unlike any other group.

We have signs in shops: ‘Only two teenagers allowed at one time’. Replace ‘teenagers’ with any other minority group, and there would, quite rightly, be complaints in line with the Equality 2010 Act. Jay Griffiths’ (2014) highly insightful book *Kith* examines the ‘Childscape’ that is now available for our young people – the environment and places they are able to feel safe, explore and just be children – has changed significantly in the West in the past few decades. Her investigation paints a worrying picture about the kind of overt and subliminal messages our young people are receiving, and how this informs how society relates to them:

Children are discriminated against on public transport and by public services: they are often refused entry to libraries, leisure centres, museums and art galleries, so the commons of public place is cornered off to them [...] while dispersal orders give the police power to clear two or more kids who have committed no crime whatsoever. (Griffiths, 2014: xx)

When we know we are not welcome or safe, we become protective of ourselves, unlikely to open and form relationships – this is human nature.

Again, this is not a useful frame of mind from which to begin formal learning.

SO WHAT CAN WE ACTUALLY DO?

Firstly, educators, whilst often described as *in loco parentis* (in place of a parent), very rarely are a pupils’ parent. In addition, there will most likely be several other pupils in the class, and in mainstream comprehensive teaching there is very little time for one-to-one dedicated relationship building. As such, we must find ways that we can build this into the normal lessons alongside compulsory curriculums.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

As this chapter’s #InsultOfTheWeek demonstrates, first impressions count, and clearly I still need to work on the Children’s TV presenter style that can slip out when I’m nervous and meeting 30+ Year 10s whom I will be teaching for the next two years. Whilst you *can* claw back bumpy starts, if you intentionally set out well it can help no end in building positive relationships with your pupils that will make learning a lot easier.

Your job is to ensure there *is* a welcome – *however* the young person presents to you initially. If the pupil or class have a reputation for being ‘bad’, then they will expect to be treated that way, and will fulfil the prophecy. If we don’t welcome them, we cannot be surprised if they react with negative behaviour – smile, be interested, welcome them into your learning space. They may not know at first how to *receive* a positive welcome; some, unfortunately, will not have received it often – but do it and keep doing. I am a fan of Paul Dix’s (@PaulDixTweets) #ShakeyHandGang movement if it feels comfortable for you – stand on the threshold of your classroom and shake hands (fist pump, dance, whatever works in your context) with each pupil *every* time they enter – find what the virtual learning equivalent is for you. See what happens after two weeks.

The final bit to this is forgiveness – and *you* are the adult, so yes, it’s *your* job to role model this first. If the pupils are not pleasant back to you the first – or first hundred – times, forgive them, welcome them again next lesson.

A pupil may start out with you in a challenging way – it’s a test. Every time you meet them anew be welcoming, be warm, be kind.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND IDENTITY

A note that different pupils will react to different adults in different ways (and you to them) depending on how you look – your gender identity, your skin colour, your age, your accent, your weight, your physical ability, your energy and so on will garner various responses – even before you have said anything. When it comes to behaviour this can work both for and against us. As a white, cis, female teacher, often perceived to be ‘young’, ‘bubbly’ and ‘energetic’, pupils and colleagues expect certain things from me before they know me; it is usually that I would be offended by swear words, too fragile to deal with aggression and might need help from a (usually male) member of staff to deal with behaviour. When this impression is formed by colleagues it is frustrating, undermining and often unhelpful. When it comes to the pupils it can often work on my side – they don’t *expect* me to be able to hold firm boundaries, not be phased by being told I’m a “gay bisexual c***” and still keep turning up, caring for them and helping them learn.

I believe this discussion of identity and managing behaviour is an important conversation. For now, in relation to building relationships, it is useful to know how you *may* be perceived by pupils and how you can work with that when forming relationships. The old adage ‘be yourself’ is key here. Any sniff of inauthenticity the pupils will know and lose respect for you – and if they’re the type of pupils I work with, they will not be afraid to tell you in four letter words either. Fist pumping and being ‘down wit da kids’ works well for some teachers. For me, I would sound like Julie Andrews if she were from the Midlands, trying to do an impression of Ali Gee. There is never any need to think you need to be ‘not you’ to be a teacher – or deal with behaviour. As my PGCE tutor, Dr Steve Roberts, taught me: “there are many types of pupils, so we need many types of teachers.”

Within my community I have opened this discussion further through the project *Behaviour and YOU!* In which I invite my Inspiring Educators to share experiences of how they feel their identity affects the way they can form positive relationships and support challenging behaviour. My belief is that there is more for us to learn here and we will all benefit from sharing. See Further Reading for how to get involved.

CHECK IN REGULARLY

One of the key aspects to challenging behaviour is that it can be (seemingly) unpredictable. From the outside, behaviour can seem unnecessarily extreme – you take a pupil’s phone as per the school rules and they throw a chair at you. Or it may seem to come out of the blue – everyone is working well when suddenly Wayne throws his head down, swears loudly and refuses to engage for the rest of the lesson. The key here is the “seems”.

Behaviour is communication, it is never arbitrary.

Do not be mistaken however, this does *not* mean that pupils will always know why they are acting like they are when you ask them; we can’t expect this, we don’t always know ourselves. Ever found yourself snapping or unfairly judging others? It’s not until you catch yourself doing it that you realise that you forgot to eat breakfast.

So if us, as the adults, can’t fully understand or predict challenging behaviour, and neither can the pupils, what do we do?

Check in regularly; below is the why, read on for the how.

Regularly over a term, a week, a day, a lesson – depending on your role within school – checking in overtly has a few advantages:

- It forces the pupil (and maybe yourself) to regularly have an opportunity to be honest with themselves. Evaluate actions, events and moods. From this place of knowledge, you can both take account of this information when moving forwards with the learning, knowing whether a transitional activity is needed or they’re ready to learn – saving time in the long run.
- It gives the pupils a structured place they know they will be heard; importantly, without your judgement. We mustn’t judge or discourage a child from *feeling* angry, that is a vital human experience. Acting on it and carrying out destructive or harmful action is a separate issue. *Listen* to the feelings and emotions under the actions – without judgement – and you have the key to where your

learning can go that lesson, perhaps alongside consequences that need to be actioned.

- It role models positive communication, which can prevent many a drama. If you know a pupil is upset already, it may not be the time to discuss their latest bad test result with them – what would that gain? We are not here to break children or crush them when they’re down. How would that help their engagement in learning or education?

CHECK IN ACTIVITIES AND MODELS

Now the how, on how to fit in check in activities – with very little planning or preparation required:

- During a register, instead of pupils answering “Yes Miss/Mx/Sir” ask them to give one word about their mood. In two minutes, you can gauge a class of 35 – gold dust if you were wondering whether to get the paints out that lesson or not.
- During a test or mock exam provide whiteboards or recycled paper. At the beginning, a point in the middle and at the end of the test, ask pupils to write down one word that describes how they’re feeling about the test. I have captured these over several mocks over Year 10 and Year 11 exams, and then before the ‘real thing’ reflected on the pupils’ journey with them, helping them realise how, even though they feel nervous, they are much more equipped and ready than they were three, six, months ago. Studies have proved that the more self-confident we feel before an exam, the more likely we are to do well (Frances-White, 2018).
- For particularly volatile or vulnerable pupils, check in with a consistent key worker at the top ends of each day. This should not be the child’s teacher, but someone separate from the formal learning. This member of staff can relay messages or cause for concern to other members of staff, as well as passing on information from home.
- Half termly check ins. In the Finnish model, schools must have a Curator (often translated as counsellor, but not necessarily in the therapeutic sense) for every 500 pupils – by law (as well as a Psychotherapist, School Social Worker and School Nurse – see Further Reading). They meet *every* pupil individually at the start of the year, then schedule in approximately termly/six monthly sessions. The focus is on how learning and school are going, and aspirations for the future and career; the pupil can request an additional session at any time.

It is easy to see: if we get the chance to air worries and challenges, we are *preventing* challenging behaviour. Whether it’s later that lesson or in the school journey as a whole.

FOLLOW THEIR LEAD

As mentioned, pupils with challenging behaviour may not present as if they want to get to know you initially – and for some, for a very long time. For the adult trying to make a connection this can quickly become frustrating and dispiriting. If you are not careful, you may find yourself expressing this frustration as you feel the sense

of rejection yourself. A regular practice of self-reflection (as discussed in Chapter 1) becomes vital here. Your own sense of rejection is an area for you to explore. Putting this onto the pupil, whether consciously or not, will only further increase their resistance towards you – and may result in you resorting to heavy handed punishment to ‘get back’ at the pupil for the negativity they are provoking within you. If this is the case, it is important to talk to trusted colleagues or call out for support.

Whilst there are some pupils who are likely to never welcome you with open arms, over time you can do small things to help them gain the trust they need. If it is safe for you both, allow the pupils to have that sense of control as you build a working relationship together, for example giving them choices over their learning – “we’ve got timestables to do and spellings, which would you like to do this lesson?” – it is a simple choice with few consequences, but the action of giving them agency over their own learning shows that *you* trust them, which sends the signal that you view them as a trustworthy person.

For a child who is used to always being told what to do, or more likely what *not* to do, this trust and respect may feel alien. Some may not know what to do with this trust and grunt at you with ‘I dunno’ or the like. It’s a rinse and repeat exercise – it once took me a full academic year for a pupil to set foot in the library I had set up at his school. Every time I saw him walk past, I would invite him in, usually to the response of “F*** off Miss”. Then one day I needed some shelves moving. I asked him for help – showing that *despite* his usual hostile response to me, that I trusted him, I thought he was capable. He came and helped me, during that I introduced some very casual conversations about the books themselves and reading. A few weeks later he wandered into the library himself, “OK Miss, what’s it all about in here then?”

Another way to follow their lead is to observe them with other members of staff that they already have a solid relationship with. Speak to that member of staff – sometimes, if you are introduced via someone they already trust a special osmosis of “fine, I’ll give them a go” happens. This works particularly well if the pupil has a key worker within the school.

Observing pupils in different settings can also be revealing. If appropriate, join in too – if it’s not your subject then *they* have the upper hand. I was taught how to change a drill bit by a pupil – a pupil who had been excluded from three mainstream schools due to behaviour. They loved having the responsibility of teaching me, because *they* were appropriately in control of the situation. Back in your own classroom it gives you something to refer to – “Thanks Jo for teaching me that the other day” – enabling you to recall positive experiences and show them that they have had a lasting positive effect on you. Then, if you are asking them to do something they find hard, you can refer to them helping you as a model of learning: “Jo, when you helped me with that drill bit, did I get it right straight away? And what would have happened if I had just thrown the drill on the floor?”

DON’T TAKE IT FOR GRANTED

Once you have established a positive relationship with a pupil, don’t take it for granted that it will always be there. A lot of things can happen in a child’s life that can seem huge; and whilst some may act like adults they are still learning. Adult-style sarcasm can be a tricky point. I have observed colleagues learn this the

hard way, when they have used sarcasm with a child they thought ready to handle it, who instead took comments personally, breaking the trust cycle of the relationship which meant having to start from scratch to re-build.

USE LEARNING AS COMMON GROUND

Sometimes I hear teachers say that the ‘relationship bits’ would be nice *if I had time*, which re-enforces the myth that this is an either/or situation and that relationship building is entirely in contrast to formal learning.

MYTH BUSTER: The two are intertwined, just ask supply teachers. Engaging a class *with* formal learning without a former relationship can be hard work (see Further Reading). You might get away with it for a while with classes who have few behaviour needs, but it is not my general experience of teaching in large comprehensive schools and it’s obvious why. That manager who repeatedly calls you ‘Sady’ when you’ve told them repeatedly it’s Sadia? Harder to get motivated to work for them, isn’t it? There’s a question of respect, and more basically – humanity.

I had a very shy girl in one Year 8 class, Elsie. Whilst she would never be classed as having specific behaviour needs, her timidity and general lack of confidence meant she often didn’t participate in learning – she refused to join in with class discussions, group work, unless she was partnered with a friend, and if I forgot to check in with her near the start of the lessons, I would often find she had made little progress as she’d misunderstood a key concept and been too scared to ask for help.

Despite her behaviour not being ‘problematic’ for me or others socially, the effect was the same – little learning took place.

I needed to build a positive relationship with her, make her feel safe and included before she would feel comfortable enough to ask for help or work with others. The key this time was free writing.

FREE WRITING

Free writing is stream of consciousness, journal writing, gibberish. I have written and vlogged a lot about the ways to approach it, how to do it, differentiate it and use it successfully in the classroom for building relationships, wellbeing *and* academic progress (see Further Reading).

One week, I learnt through Elsie’s free writing that she had a hockey tournament that weekend; I made a point of remembering that. The following Monday as I stood at the threshold doing my #ShakeyHandGang I asked her how the tournament went. She was thrilled and flabbergasted. She’d forgotten she’d written about it and knew for certain she hadn’t told me. It was the signal she’d needed to know that I saw her and that I cared. After that, she increasingly engaged in my lessons, asked for support when needed and by the end of the year I was happy to do a positive phone call home celebrating with her parents that she now joined in group discussions.

Building positive relationships is essential to academic progress.

PACE

In the UK special schools and PRUs often work separately from mainstreams within the same Local Authority. I find this a great shame, as there is so much good practice in each that, if shared, would help pupils navigate from one to another, and for some perhaps prevent exclusions. One of these practices is PACE, an approach coined by Clinical Psychologist Dan Hughes (Moore, 2020a):

Playfulness

Acceptance

Curiosity

Empathy

Based on Hughes’ studies into Attachment Theory (more on this in Chapter 4) and his extensive work with children, parents and carers, PACE gives adults a framework with which to engage with young people and establish reciprocal relationships, particularly with those who have experienced trauma.

Educational Psychologist Dr Chris Moore shares a series of four detailed blog-posts on how this formula can be used in the classroom. I will highlight here the key points. PACE is something I return to regularly in my own practice, always with surprisingly successful results.

PLAYFULNESS

Playfulness is all about the positive spectrum of emotions. It is used to elicit moments of shared joy and delight. It can be easy to forget playfulness when we are helping children to tolerate and regulate more difficult emotions, such as anger, terror and envy. (Moore, 2020a)

Moore explains that playfulness is not usually the first approach we use with a child who has difficulty building relationships – before they know you as an adult, they are unlikely to trust any forms of play. Most of us have experienced this at some point – the attempted banter on first meeting with a class? Not always the best introduction; however, used later the shared sense of play and gaming can be greatly beneficial.

In the second week of working in an SEMH school that was in Requires Improvement Ofsted rating at the time, I witnessed an exemplary practice of this by a colleague. I had been working with a pupil who had begun to get very frustrated. We were coming up to half term, and I knew their homelife was not a positive one; anxiety was high. Not knowing the pupil well, I was unable to help them to calm down, I did not understand what had triggered them in the first place, and the situation escalated – the pupil began to rip apart the chair they were sitting on. Feeling trapped, alone and intimidated in my small space, I had to call in for support.

Robert Archard, the Assistant Head and Behaviour Lead, came to help. Having a longstanding relationship with the pupil he was able to use play immediately. This was a refreshing and surprising turn from the atmosphere that the pupil and I had got ourselves into; which was partly why it worked. Robert approached the pupil jovially with a light tone and suggested that a timer was put on to see who could pick up the most bits of sponge from the chair the quickest. I stood, completely bamboozled, as I watched what had been an extremely aggressive pupil suddenly melt, laugh... and tidy up?

After witnessing this mini-behaviour-miracle, I experienced a sense of failure on my part. Why hadn't I thought of this? Why had I not been able to divert the situation in such a successful way? I spoke with Robert afterwards, who explained that he knew the young person well, he could only take that 'risk' of bringing in play into a tense situation due to their established relationship. It was not personal against me, a lesson we forget and return to often as teachers (more on this in Chapter 6).

ACCEPTANCE

Moore describes acceptance as being the most important factor of PACE. "Acceptance is about understanding that the thoughts and feelings underneath the behaviour are not right or wrong" (Moore, 2020b). Whilst this can be extremely challenging for an adult – the child has just set light to their work, they have just spat at you, or hurt another pupil – it doesn't make it any less true: behaviour is communication of thoughts and feelings – those in themselves need acceptance if the child is able to move past their actions. "Acceptance is fundamentally about telling the child, verbally and non-verbally, 'I get it. This is a big deal for you'" (Moore, 2020b). This does not mean that we become lenient about negative actions – consequences, setting limits and discipline are vital, but "Acceptance is about being mindful of the child's past and how that resulted in the behaviour we see today" (Moore, 2020b).

A poignant example: a child is a refugee who has recently escaped a war zone – fighting, stealing and aggression may have been the behaviours they *needed* to adopt in order to eat, in order to survive. The transition from that primal instinct into a peaceful society where the necessities of life are readily available will not be instant. They will need to un-learn behaviours that formerly were not just acceptable but necessary. If we are not careful, our unconscious bias (both as individuals and systemically) may result in overly strict punishments towards young people who have learnt what culture and society is and behavioural expectations in a war zone. It is the child who is then punished, and will take that personally, for something that they had no control over (more on this in Chapter 7).

Acceptance is not easy or instant. You may experience several layers and weeks of rejection, hence why self-care is so important (see Chapter 1).

Acceptance is also hard because we are keen to change behaviour, either to suit our own purposes or to discourage the child from inappropriate or unsafe behaviour. However, when a child has lacked the experience of a caregiving adult accepting and co-regulating their thoughts and feelings, the immediate attempt to change what they are doing can breed further mistrust [...]

Acceptance activates the social engagement system of the brain and decreases defensiveness. (Moore, 2020b)

In practice, acceptance can look like acknowledging the feelings before the action when addressing inappropriate behaviour: “I can see that you are upset that Ms Petrov is not in today, we need to pick up your pens from the floor though now.”

CURIOSITY

Curiosity is non-judgemental – it’s about exploring and understanding, as opposed to trying to change or correct the other’s person experience of a situation. Fundamentally, it enables us to gain new perspectives on the reasons behind a person’s words and actions. (Moore, 2020c)

When we notice a pupil’s negative behaviour, it is tempting and often instinctive to try to fix it, to put it right. The approach of curiosity invites us to find out *why* the behaviour may have occurred in the first place – what is the pupil feeling? What have they experienced? What do they understand about a particular situation? Once we understand a root cause we are more likely to be able to make appropriate responses, differentiate and prevent negative actions in the future.

Moore explains that, for a child who has not had the chance to explore safely or been encouraged to be curious at an early age, a common response is avoidance; it is safer to avoid than try something new (Moore, 2020c). You will see the effects of this regularly in your classroom – pupils who disrupt or become over anxious rather than try something that they might fail at. As teaching staff, it is important to understand *why* they might be experiencing this; sweeping positive statements “come on, it will be fine” are unlikely to be helpful. Be curious – what is the block for the child? To them it will be very real. If we attempt to change them as a first point of call, it reinforces the message that they are not good enough without the changes made by you, further weakening their self-image.

EMPATHY

Empathy is about ‘feeling with’, while sympathy is about ‘feeling for’ [...]. It’s an active and genuine desire to understand the emotion and validate the emotion without judgement. [...] Empathy enables us to relate better to others. (Moore, 2020d)

Empathy is key to building relationships with pupils who may find this challenging, and if the child has not had many positive opportunities to build positive relationships in their life so far, it will be the adult’s role to model this. When a young person does not experience the reconciliation needed to feel accepted once again, they go into a feeling of shame and toxic stress. The focus is inward, on survival, there is little room for considering others in this moment – they have not been considered

themselves when distraught, and so this is not a behaviour they are able to learn from others. In the classroom this reveals itself as mistrust and lack of understanding of others. A pupil may be violent towards another and struggle to understand what the other pupil might feel about that.

Moore (2020d) gives examples of how you can show empathy and role model it in the classroom: through your eyes, facial expression and tone of voice – whilst narrating some of the feelings you think they are experiencing. You can then continue to mix this with curiosity and try to get more specific about the situation. You can also show empathy when they are struggling to work things out or take on information about the consequences of their behaviour. Judge a situation appropriately and respond with sincerity.

Again, Moore re-iterates the importance of seeking empathy ourselves as educators who work with vulnerable pupils. We will often take on their negative emotions; they may trigger insecurities or memories of our own that we must be supported with. At these points it is essential that you seek support and continually maintain and refresh your own self-care, as discussed in Chapter 1.

Interview

Knowing is not the same as being. We can ‘know’ that building relationships is what gets you the best impact in education, but that’s not the same as having a way of being that means I understand that when I smile at you and I look at you, I’m offering us an opportunity.

Lisa, an author, trainer and speaker on trauma, recovery and resilience, brings thirty years of experience working in education, social care settings, criminal justice and health. Lisa’s research in her Master’s in Education looked at the intersection of school exclusion and being in care, and the impact upon education and employment across the life course. This research is being continued as a Doctorate at Oxford University. I have attended several of Lisa’s trainings and have been deeply moved by the way she intertwines her thorough research with such heartfelt personal experiences.

The way we think about relationships needs a little unpicking and often that can be because people don’t necessarily understand the complexity of how to make relationships because maybe, they’ve had straightforward relationships. The very notion that somebody might not have those strong relationships is really difficult for people to consider.

She goes on to emphasise that we all arrive in the classroom with our own perspectives and understanding of the world – which affects how we view relationships.

(Continued)

We might say that building relationships is about having a connection between you and me that enables me to feel safe enough to release oxytocin, to feel warmth and connection so that I can hear what you’re saying. Or we might say that building relationships is about me feeling safe enough with you; we’re talking about emotional safety – I feel like you’re not going to harm me, humiliate me, shame me, punish me or do stuff to me. We might have to do that dance a few times of whether it’s safe enough, by me just testing you out a bit to see if that’s going to work. Then if I feel safe enough, my system is calm enough for me to be able to hear what you’re actually saying to me.

For teachers who are less experienced, she gave a great tip of practicing these skills, even online, with trusted colleagues to feel these things that we might not necessarily have personal experience of. For example, shouting vs. bringing the volume down; experiencing what that feels like, noticing what happens in the body: what’s that tightening in my chest? Why do I feel like I want to get away?

Moving onto the foundations of relationship building:

There are fundamental things that support relationship building early on: curiosity, being respectful, having boundaries, having consistency. If you say you’re going to show up, show up; if you say you’re going to do something, do it.

One of the most important things about building relationships is the repair element. When we have those times where we get it wrong, where that boundary gets blurred, the key then is what do we do with that? How do we repair that situation? How do we say sorry? Are we any good at saying sorry? That’s a really easy way of taking responsibility and showing enough vulnerability for relationship building in a professional capacity; enough vulnerability for a connection – that’s the amber-nectar.

Learning takes place within the relationship.

I asked Lisa how she would respond to the often-heard rhetoric that we don’t have time to build relationships within our schools, or that that is a ‘softer’ approach to teaching. Lisa answered by demonstrating a thought piece she uses in her training:

Think about the teacher that you remember, what is it that you remember about that teacher and what is it that you remember feeling around that teacher? It’s most likely that what you will remember is that you loved that subject because of that teacher, or you remember feeling that you were really good at what you were doing because of how that person made you feel. This can sometimes be enough to help people realise that it is those relationships that actually give us the best learning opportunities.

One of the most distressing divisions that we have seen in this conversation is that somehow being relational is not about boundaries and consistency.

The children and young people who benefit the most from relational approaches need boundaries and consistency if the school is the safe space, if the teacher is the safe relationship.

This isn't boundaryless, this is actual responsibility for your practice, it's consciousness, it's awareness and it's actual responsibility for your boundaries.

In Lisa's own educational journey, she was excluded from two secondary schools and was in care herself – which is relevant, as children in care are more likely to be excluded. I asked her what qualities the teachers had who she remembers helping her: “the people I remember the most vividly were the teachers who sort of had some kind of emotional connection with me.” In secondary schools, despite being an A grade student, Lisa started to have problems in school.

The challenge is, when you are in care, you are probably moving around a lot and you're also dealing with fractured relationships, at the same time as having very little ability to actually articulate what's actually going on for you. I also had lots of difficulties, as lots of children do who are experiencing or have experienced trauma, lots of difficulties with relationships and friendships. That's really difficult because it's friendships that make the difference, and yet it's connecting and having friendships that's the hardest thing for children who are struggling, because you have to be vulnerable.

This honest sharing affirms to us that the pupils who we may have the most difficulty forming a positive relationship with are the ones who are in need of it the most – they are not experiencing these connections elsewhere. Forming positive connections needs to be taught, practiced and role modelled explicitly within our schools.

Lisa left school with no O levels; despite this, she went on to get a degree, Masters and now a Doctorate. Which leads us onto Lisa's final reflection on the focus on relationships within education:

When we don't support people to have their basic qualifications and their basic learning, it has a huge impact on self-esteem and confidence; you can't access anything else without it. We have a balance in how we build those relationships whilst at the same time building that educational resilience that creates a difference across the life course for that person.

All that I'm talking about today is embedded in rich research. There is no research to show that it will really benefit a child to be locked in a room on their own. There is no research that will show you that if I can't self-regulate and you punish me for not being able to self-regulate that I'm going to learn how to self-regulate. There is no research on that.

Source: Interview with author, 2020

Action Box

Next lesson

Include a check in activity at the start of the lesson. What do you learn from it? How can it improve your differentiation for your pupil or class that lesson?

Next week

Continue with your check in activity, tweak if necessary, from what you learnt last week. How are the pupils reacting now? How does the repetition affect their attitude towards it? What differences are you noticing in their responses and how does that play out during the lesson and their progress with the work?

Long term

Choose one or maximum two pupils whose behaviour you find challenging.

Over a period of 4–6 weeks apply the PACE approach.

Keep a record of your reflections or better still share with a colleague – or even share over on Twitter using the hashtag #EduTwitter and tag me in, @adelebatesZ. Actually do this (go and get that journal now, I’ll wait for you), you never remember as much as you think you will. You could focus on a different aspect of PACE each week – re-reading the notes on each part as a reminder at the start of the week (starting with Acceptance first is advisable).

What do you learn about the pupil? What do you learn about their behaviour? What are they trying to communicate with it? What do you learn about your teaching approach? What do they teach you? How can you adapt your learning to better accommodate their needs? What successes can you celebrate with them?

What has any of this got to do with behaviour?

Building positive relationships is essential to long term behaviour management and learning engagement – especially for those who have not had such relationships outside of school. To successfully build relationships with pupils, we need to be consistent and kind over a sustained period of time.

Further reading

The Still Face Experiment – Dr Edward Tronick

In this short article by Mary Gregory (2020) there is a three-minute video demonstrating Dr Tronick’s experiment – how a primary carer’s reactions can influence the emotional development of a baby. <https://psychhelp.com.au/what-does-the-still-face-experiment-teach-us-about-connection/> (accessed March 26, 2021).

Kith: The Riddle of the Childscape – Jay Griffiths (2014)

Whilst travelling the world for her other book *Wild*, Griffiths became interested in the different environments children grow up in in different cultures. With stark contrasts to other countries, it shows how the Western way is not the only way and puts into serious question whether we have got it right for nurturing our next generation.

Connection before Correction – Kim S. Golding CBE

Based on a presentation for the Childhood Trauma Conference, this paper examines the complex behaviour that children can display when they have experienced traumatic homelives and demonstrates the effects it can have on their development. www.researchgate.net/publication/276500716_Connection_Before_Correction_Supporting_Parents_to_Meet_the_Challenges_of_Parenting_Children_who_have_been_Traumatised_within_their_Early_Parenting_Environments (accessed March 26, 2021).

Establishing relationships quickly with pupils you don’t usually work with – Adele Bates

<https://adelebateseducation.co.uk/establishing-relationships-quickly-with-pupils-you-dont-usually-teach/> (accessed March 26, 2021).

A free, easy tool to support wellbeing AND academic progress – Adele Bates

<https://adelebateseducation.co.uk/a-free-easy-tool-to-support-wellbeing-and-academic-progress/> (accessed March 26, 2021).

Free writing for all – Adele Bates

<https://adelebateseducation.co.uk/free-writing-for-all/> (accessed March 26, 2021).

All of these blog posts go into further detail for topics touched upon in this chapter. You can find further articles on my website: adelebateseducation.co.uk/blog

To find out more about the *Behaviour and YOU!* Project and to get involved, check out <https://adelebateseducation.co.uk/introducing-behaviour-and-you/> (accessed March 26, 2021).