

How can we improve pupil's behaviour during a lesson through positive discipline in the Key Stage 2 classroom?

Aims, focus and purpose of the research

The research activity proposed aims to explore how a pupil's behaviour during a lesson can be improved through positive discipline. The overall purpose of this activity is to inform and improve my personal teaching practice.

Through prior research undertaken by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 2006, it has been discovered that children respond better to discipline if it is given in a calm and positive manner. It has been concluded that when teachers are willing to observe their students and respond in ways that encourage positive behaviour, they help their students become responsible for their own behaviours and they reduce the likelihood of misbehaviour. Different teaching strategies have been created to support teachers in engaging with positive discipline and, through my research, I intend to explore these strategies and discover which strategy is most suited to myself as a trainee teacher as well as my Key Stage 2 pupils. Through this research I also expect to discover how positive discipline could fail and what environment causes it not to work, this will be taken into consideration when planning my research. As part of the new curriculum in Wales, Donaldson (2015) suggests that it is a high importance that there is a development of the health and well-being of children and young people and through my research I aim to discover a link between positive discipline and a development of the health and well-being of the pupils in my class.

Research context

In my year 5 class, there are some minor behaviour issues that are repeated on a daily basis by the same minority of children. I discussed with my research partner how we could explore using positive discipline to put a stop to the incidences occurring and restore focus to the class. Using positive discipline interested me as I have seen that the children do not respond particularly well to being told off or removed from the classroom and in the long run, it appeared to cause more disruption to the child's learning. As my partner experienced similar events happening in her classroom, we decided that our research question should be 'how can we improve pupil's behaviour during a lesson through positive discipline in the Key Stage 2 classroom?'. For my class, this meant rewarding children with *dojo points* when they were working well and doing what I had asked of them. As this was a system already in place within the school, the children knew the benefits of gaining as many of these points as they could. The

idea of using this in my lesson was so that the children who were misbehaving and not focusing on the work could see that they were missing out on the rewards. As a result, they would make the conscious decision of working like the rest of the class.

Literary review

The term ‘positive discipline’ refers to the approach of the teacher focusing on the good behaviours that are occurring in the classroom instead of the misbehaviour of individuals. The overall goal of using positive discipline is to give the students the ability to think critically and make good choices on their own accord. By using a positive discipline approach in the classroom, the child who is misbehaving will begin to notice rewards given to the well-behaved children, they are then given the opportunity to learn and adapt to what is expected of them from the teacher and receive the rewards themselves. Positive discipline is devised around the idea that there are no good or bad children, but good and bad behaviours – good behaviour can be taught and reinforced while bad behaviours can be diminished without harming a child physically (Ball, 2006).

I looked further into positive discipline and the effect it would have on key stage 2 children, by reading books, journal articles government documents and other online material. The proposed research sets out to explore how a child's bad behaviour can be eliminated without the need for a disruptive and negative experience for the child exhibiting the behaviour, the teacher or the rest of the class. Louise Porter discusses in her book *Behaviour in Schools* (2006) that there is the philosophy amongst scholars that when a behaviour earns students something that they want, they will repeat it; if the behaviour results in a negative consequence, they will cease to do so again in the future (20). This philosophy will be investigated throughout the research project as it sets out to discover if children will become aware of the fact that they are not receiving a small reward until their behaviour improves. Children behaving well throughout the lesson will be receiving these rewards as often as the teacher deems appropriate and those who are misbehaving need to make the personal choice to mimic the behaviour of the others in the class in order to improve their behaviour receive the reward.

Ellis and Tod, in the book *Behaviour for Learning: Proactive approaches to behaviour management* refer to the idea of positive behaviour as ‘positive correction’ (2009: 188). This term surrounds the idea that ‘teachers should seek to frame their correction and direction positively when misbehaviour occurs’ (188). They state that by using phrases such as “face forwards, please” instead of “stop turning around” will allow the children to hear exactly what

the teacher expects of them. It gives the children the opportunity to picture the correct behaviour for the classroom and will be more likely to replicate this than the unwanted behaviour in the future. This method will be used in the lesson alongside the small reward system in the classroom as a way to further promote the use of positive discipline in lessons.

In the book *Teacher Leadership and Behaviour Management* (2002), Chris Kyriacou writes about a humanistic view of discipline (40-53), in this section he discusses how there has become an increasing awareness of the importance of children's self-esteem and how this has changed the outlook on disciplining pupils in school (48). He compares this to a humanistic approach to teaching and the idea that children should be taught personal growth, a perspective of their own self as well as understanding the power of choice. This, in relation to the question posed for research, gives merit to the idea that positive discipline in the classroom would have a beneficial effect on a child.

Continuing on the humanistic approach to teaching, Donaldson has suggested the development of children's health and well-being in his 2015 report, titled *Successful Futures*. Donaldson states that the Welsh Government must become committed to 'ensuring that the school setting is a healthy setting, where children and young people's education can be supported by a holistic approach to health and well-being' (27). If a child is in a classroom with a teacher who's approach to discipline is to shout and remove misbehaving children from the environment it is thought that this will have no effect on changing the child's behaviour, and they are likely to just repeat the problem. Being shouted at can also be a very stressful experience for the children, having a damaging effect on their well-being (Linsin, 2011). Through this research I aim to find out if applying a positive discipline approach will teach children how to problem solve, make choices and have an understanding of positive life skills, having an overall improvement on the health and well-being of the pupils.

Although there are many different approaches to behaviour management, it is hard to find any theorists who disagree with the idea that a positive discipline approach is one of the most effective, and many different methods have similar elements to a positive discipline approach. It is noted by Bennett, T. in his online article for the Times Educational Supplement (TES) '*Why yelling is not a suitable behaviour management strategy*' (2019) that children will subconsciously decide if it is 'worth' behaving or misbehaving based on the response that they know they will receive from their teacher. If a child knows that their behaviour will result being shouted at, it isn't a sufficient deterrent from that behaviour. By approaching it with positive

discipline, children will know that by misbehaving they will not receive something that benefits them, e.g. a reward. Using this simple technique removes any stressful encounters that could occur through using a tough approach and allows a bond to grow between teachers and their students. Classrooms that use positive discipline as the behaviour management strategy, help to promote an inclusive, learning-friendly classroom that welcomes, nurtures and educates all children regardless of their gender, intellect, social skills, emotions, linguistic skills or other characteristics. This type of classroom can help end misbehaviour as children feel less of a need to act out, as they will have a sense of belonging (UNESCO, *Positive Discipline in the Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Classroom: A guide for teachers and teacher educators* [2006]: 2).

Positive discipline works well as part of a well-rounded pedagogy. As a trainee, I am starting to create my own approach to teaching and classroom management. By following the literature that I have read about positive discipline and the results of my research, I am hoping to discover an approach I can apply to my own pedagogical practice.

Lesson Study design

I have decided to carry out my research project in the style of Lesson Study.

Developed in Japan, Lesson Study is a model for collaborative, professional learning where two or more teachers work together to develop their practice in the classroom. It gives the researchers the ability to focus on the needs and learning of real pupils whilst trying to solve a teaching or learning-based problem which is affecting pupils' progress. Lesson Study is a professional learning process and it works because it focuses on the learning and progress made by children as their teachers collaboratively develop specific pedagogic techniques that they have identified issues with (Department for Education, 2009: 4). It is built on the premise that the best way to improve education is to "get teachers together to study the process of teaching and learning in classrooms, and then devise ways to improve them" (Fernandes & Yoshida, 2004). As a result of a Lesson Study, teachers are able to keep a record of what they learn and pass the practice knowledge which they gain onto others.

Within Lesson Study projects, there are specific methods of data collection which are used, these are: reflection, observation and focus group. Along with my research partner, we have chosen to create our own model of these data collection methods to best suit the research project that we will be undertaking.

Non-participant observation is a research technique used within Lesson Study whereby the researcher watches the participants of the study with their knowledge, but in a non-invasive way. This approach is used as the participants being observed may respond differently to a situation knowing that they are being observed at that moment in time, which could have an effect on the end results of the research (A Dictionary of Sociology, 1998). To combat this, we agreed that the observer needed to be seated away from the focus children throughout the course of the lesson. As a way of recording the observations, my research partner and I created an observation schedule (appendix 1) based on the '*Leuven Scale of Involvement*', which we adjusted to include how different extremities of behaviour could affect the learning of other children in the class. Leuven's Scale originally involves a 5-point scale to measure both the well-being and the involvement of individual students. If there is a consistent low level of well-being and or involvement, it is likely a child's development will be threatened. The higher the levels of well-being and involvement we can achieve for the child, the more we can add to the child's development (Laevers, 2005). As a means of collecting qualitative data, we took inspiration from Leuven's scale and created our own rating system that increased from 1-5 with 1 being an extremely low level of disruption, i.e. doodling, and 5 being an extremely high level of disruption, i.e. a physical outburst towards peer(s) or staff. With this observation schedule, we will be able to monitor a target child's behaviour and compare it to one of the ratings on our scale. We will also be able to record the action the teacher takes towards the child exhibiting this behaviour and how the child responds to the teacher's action. This observation scale was created with the idea that we could easily look back and reflect upon the events that take place within the lesson, as well as a way of being able to visually compare the behaviour of the focus children. Although this method is sufficient for our research, it may come with some downsides, for example, a child may behave in a way that we have not prepared for on our scale or if a child behaves in a way that is between the numbers on the scale, it cannot be correctly recorded in the style we have chosen.

My partner and I also designed a reflection pro-forma (appendix 2) to use as part of our Lesson Study. After discussing the positives and negatives of different reflection methods, we developed one that was appropriate to our research. By combining Gibb's *Reflective Cycle* with Brookfield's *4 Lenses*, we were able to create a reflective system that prompts an in-depth reflection of the self, the students, our peers and the literature surrounding the research project. Gibb's reflective cycle has six distinctive stages, leading from description of the event or experience to conclusion and consideration for future events. Although the reflective cycle is structured well and would keep our reflection on track, it makes the reflection limited to

ourselves. The 4 Lenses, created by Brookfield, proposes four lenses that can be engaged by teachers in a process of critical reflection: (1) the autobiographical (self), (2) the students' eyes, (3) our colleagues' experiences and (4) theoretical literature. Combining these lenses with the reflection cycle allows not only a thorough self-reflection, but a reflection of all aspects of the Lesson Study.

We have also decided to choose three sample children to interview at the end of the lesson study to find out, from a student's point of view, the answer to our research question. We decided that by choosing three different children from our classes, it will give us a small idea into what children think about when they or their peers experience positive discipline. The focus group I have chosen for my part of the Lesson Study contains two boys and one girl. Two of the children in the focus group are known to cause some disruption in the class so will personally experienced positive discipline and the other is very rarely the cause of any disruption in the class. By choosing these three children as a representative sample, I will be able to gather some more qualitative data that could be put towards finding the solution to my research question. The questions that my partner and I created (appendix 3), ensures that our focus group will feel at ease and can easily understand what we were asking of them. The questions also require the children to think critically about the way teacher's respond to poor behaviour.

Ethical considerations

When planning my research project, I have found that there are some ethical considerations to take when making observations in a classroom. As the children in our focus group and observation lesson are under the age of 18, I had to gain consent from the pupil's parents before they could participate. This was done by sending consent forms home to the parents (appendix 4), outlining the aims and reasoning of the research project taking place. Following Article 12 of UNCRC (2019) 'children should have a say in matters that affect them', once the forms were returned, I spent time with the pupils who were taking part explaining to them what my research entailed. The UNCRC also states that the opinions of children should be taken into consideration when decisions are made that could affect them in any way. Children should not be removed from the decision making regardless of their age. Prior to the Lesson Study taking place, I gave all of my participants an information sheet (appendix 5) and asked the children if they were happy for my partner to observe them, as well as if they were happy to answer questions in an interview-style conversation. I reminded the children that if at any point they did not want to be observed or answer my questions, then they would be instantly removed

from the project without consequence. The children taking part in this research project were also promised confidentiality throughout the course of the research project and to secure the identity of these pupils. The pupils in the first part of the Lesson Study will be referred to as Child A, Child B and Child C, and pupils in the second part of the Lesson Study will be referred to as Child D, Child E and Child F when any written observations and comments are made. The participating children were also reassured that once the research project is over and all of the necessary notes are taken and recorded, they will be deleted accordingly. To further the comfort and security of the children participating in the focus group, the interview took place in an open area of the school where the children were able to come and go as they pleased. Other members of staff were also present during the lesson study and the interview process.

Lesson Study 1 & 2: results and analysis

The Lesson Studies took place over two days in two separate primary schools across Wales. The first took place in a primary school in a small urban area in Pembrokeshire. The school has approximately 550 pupils and staff combined. The research project took place in a year 5 classroom with twenty-four pupils in total. Thirteen of these children were given consent to take part in the observation. Throughout this paper, this school will be referred to as ‘school A’. The second took place in a small school in Swansea City Centre. This was also carried out in a year 5 class of thirty-three pupils. Only one of these children was not given consent to take part in the observation. This school will be referred to as ‘school B’.

The research in school A took place in a morning Literacy, Language and Communication lesson. I taught the children this lesson and my research partner made observational notes throughout, using the observation schedule we created prior to the session. The children were set the task of turning previously found research notes into a script they could read from as part of a presentation. Once the success criteria has been created by the whole class, the two lower ability groups finished independent work outside of the classroom and the two higher ability groups stayed inside the classroom with myself, I then prepared them to start the main activity of the lesson. Child A worked on an independent task outside, Child B and Child C remained inside the classroom with me. When the children set off on their task, it was noted that Child B soon became distracted from his work and began talking to his peers around him, causing a low-level of disruption, however, he was soon on track once the task was re-explained to him. He did not stay on task for the entirety of the session and caused some more low-level distractions to his peers. Child C remained on task throughout the duration of the main activity,

only talking to his peers about the work that he was doing. During this time, I was giving out *dojo points* to the children in my class who were meeting my expectation of silently getting on with their task. During the lesson, Child B did notice that the children who are working silently are gaining points and as he is behaving poorly at this point, he stops and begins to do his work – following the example that the working children are setting. He soon became distracting again so a point is not given to him. During this time Child A, who is still outside of the classroom, starts the lesson by being on task and attempting to complete his work. He often needs adult support when doing his work but is able to get on with this task independently. Child A was continually off task during this session and after being asked multiple times to continue doing work, he finally began to focus. Child A came into the classroom after doing minimal work and claimed that he had finished. He sees that the children who are working are obtaining a reward, but this doesn't change his reluctant-to-work behaviour. Child C is given a *dojo point* at the end of the lesson for being quiet and on task all lesson. Child B and Child A do not gain a point as I think that the amount of time they have spent off task throughout the lesson meant that they did not deserve the reward.

When the lesson was completed, the focus children were taken to a separate part of the classroom with my research partner and myself so we could conduct our interview. Child A decided that he did not want to take part in the questioning part of the project, following the promise that the children could withdraw at any time, another child who has assented to taking part in the project took Child A's place.

During the interview process, the focused children were asked some general questions about how misbehaviour was managed in their school. All three children explained that when a child misbehaves in class, they are given a 'warning' by the teacher which is verbally given in a gentle manner, explaining why the warning is being given, e.g. 'child X, I have asked for you to stop talking and you haven't, this is your first warning'. If a child is given three warnings throughout the day they are then placed in reflection. Reflection is a classroom where the children go, supervised by an adult, and have to write an explanation of why they are there and what they need to do to prevent themselves from having to return another day. After knowing that this was the normal routine for the children, we asked the children their opinions of the behaviour management approach that the teacher had taken in the lesson. I asked the children to think back to the end of the lesson when the children saw who had achieved the *dojo points* throughout and who hadn't, I then asked them to explain to me how they thought the children who were left out may have felt. Child A responded by saying that she thought that the children

would not have felt ‘very good but it teaches the children to be good and to listen to the teacher in the future’. I then wanted to find out if the children thought it was right that children had been left out or if they thought that everyone should have received one. All children in the focus group thought that it was the right and fair thing to do. Child B explained that he thought that when I left some children out, it would have made them realise that they need to respect the teacher during lesson time. The children were also given a variety of situations and were asked to explain what they thought the best response from the teacher would be. Interestingly, all of the children said that the teacher should start by responding in a calm manner and wait for a more appropriate time to respond, as shouting may cause more of a distraction than the child who is wondering around. Child C expressed the opinion that children who refuse to work should be kept in class at lunchtime, stating that ‘there’s no point in being in school’ if the children are not willing to learn.

Concluding the lesson, my research partner and I discussed how we should approach the next part of our lesson study based on the response from the children. To have a comparison, it was decided that the children would again be approached with positive discipline, but the children would be disciplined through positive words instead of rewards. The children in school B were used to receiving the reward of marbles which equated to a bigger reward based on the marbles gained. By approaching this class’ positive discipline differently, my research partner and I could take note of how effective the different methods were.

The research in school B took place in an afternoon Topic lesson. This time, it was my research partner’s turn to teach the class and I had the responsibility of making observational notes throughout. The whole class were given the task of completing five small tasks based around their ongoing class topic, detectives/crime scene investigators. All of the focus children stayed in the classroom for the completion of this task. The lesson began with most children starting the task straight away. It was noted that there was some low level talking amongst the children but this was due to the children supporting one another through the activities - the children were given permission to do this by the teacher. The low-level talking gradually increased in volume and Child D and Child E became increasingly disruptive to their peers. In this lesson study, the teacher did not give rewards to children who were staying on track, so the children misbehaving and causing distractions did not have a subconscious example to follow. I observed the teacher approach the children’s disruptive behaviour by calmly asking for them to return to their seats and stop talking, using please and thank you. This approach worked with Child F who was the least disruptive of the three focus children, but was less effective with

Child D and Child E who didn't listen to the teachers requests. This resulted in the teacher having to use a firmer approach. Throughout the lesson, Child F remained on task only speaking with his peers for support with the work – there was only one moment towards the end of the session where the teacher had to ask him to return to his seat. Child D and Child E became more and more disruptive as the lesson went on. Child D spent a lot of time out of his seat and talking to his peers about unrelated issues. Child E would also disrupt her peers around her, although she remained in her seat for the majority of the session. When the lesson was completed, all three focus children stayed behind in the classroom so my research partner and I could conduct the interview with them. They all agreed that they were still happy to partake in this part of our research project, and they were given the information about what would happen in this part of the project prior to the lesson taking place. The same five questions were asked to this focus group as they were to the children in the focus group the day previous.

The children were again asked to explain what the school's procedure was towards children misbehaving. In this school, the children told us that if someone is 'really, really bad' (Child E) during a lesson they are removed from the classroom and sent to the head teacher but if they are causing minor disruptions, they are put onto the *consequence board*. After hearing this, it was asked what they thought made children misbehave in class. Child F expressed that children would misbehave in class as a means of gaining attention, or because they are finding the work too difficult. The focus children in this lesson study were also given some situations to think about and were given the opportunity to explain how they think the teacher should respond. In this class, the children are given marbles to put into a jar; the group of children with the fullest jar receive a reward. One child suggested that a teacher should respond to poor behaviour by removing marbles from the child until they begin to behave. Similarly to the first interview, the children were asked to think back to an incident that happened during the lesson (children walking around) and if they thought that their teacher responded in the correct way. The children all agreed that teacher was right to calmly ask the children to sit down, as shouting could have made the other children in the class become off task.

Overall, the two classes both responded to the positive discipline in a way which was somewhat expected based on the research done prior to the lesson study taking place. The children were eager to share their views on behaviour management and gave some interesting responses to the questions we asked them.

Research findings compared to literature

When comparing my research findings to the literature read prior to the research taking place, I have found that the theory of children responding better to a positive discipline approach than to a tough approach to be true. Some of the focus children in the first Lesson Study made a conscious decision to change their behaviour once they realised that they would gain a reward, and in the interview process all of the children expressed that they thought teachers should respond in a calm manner as shouting could cause a stressful and more disruptive environment. The research findings have supported the belief of Newell and Jeffry in their 2002 book *Behaviour Management in the Classroom: A transactional analysis approach*. They state that they believe that although bad behaviour must never be ignored, it should not be confronted in an aggressive manner. It is important for a teacher to combat poor behaviour in their classroom by forming and maintaining a relationship with pupils (introduction: xvi). This relationship is formed through a mutual respect of one another, which can be improved through a positive discipline approach. It is also important to model the behaviour expected of them. Continuing to look at the research by Newell and Jeffry, they explain that it is necessary that behaviour modelling is used in classrooms. Some pupils need to learn what good behaviour looks and feels like, in order to behave better they need someone to model the behaviour that will help them develop (37). Throughout the research project, the models were other children in the class and the misbehaving children were given the chance to learn how to behave from their peers who were receiving rewards throughout the lesson.

I will now be able to implement the information found through reading literature and move forward in my teaching technique by finding the best approach to positive behaviour, depending on what suits the needs of my children. For younger children in the Foundation Phase, I believe that the promise of a reward would be a more effective approach than having to verbally give out positive discipline. Children in Key Stage 2 responded well to the reward system, but this was not effective towards all of the children in the class it was practised in. The Welsh Government support these findings in their handbook published in 2012 titled '*Practical approaches to behaviour management in the classroom*' where they explain that rewards that follow a behaviour, make a behaviour more likely to occur again, but it needs to be something to which the children aspire to and want (12). They note how younger children will desire different rewards than older children and that they need to be approached slightly differently.

Although this behaviour management method comes with many strengths, I found that it also has some limitations. The method takes some practice to become effective and it may take time to find a reward system that works for all of the children in the class. An example of this is during my research, my pupils were already aware with the benefits of gaining points so they were more inclined to behave once they knew they were receiving them for behaving as I expected. However, there were some children, e.g. Child A, who were not interested in the benefits of gaining the points so the method was not as effective for them. As a way to combat this limitation with Child A, I applied a slightly different approach to rewarding him and by working together we negotiated what his reward could be. We decided that as he finds it hard to motivate himself to work, a reward of spending time on his iPad when he had completed his work was fair.

Conclusion and recommendations

The research project has given me an insight into how I can develop my own teaching pedagogy. In previous professional teaching experiences, I have found it difficult to implement an effective behaviour management technique. I believe that by spending time finding out what interests the children in my class in my next school experience, I will be able to propose a reward that my pupils can receive when they are exhibiting good behaviour in class and around school. I will also give the children a clear explanation of the behaviour that will be expected of them and explain that exhibiting this behaviour will result in earning the reward.

I believe that in my own research lesson, I was able to collect reliable data and the method used was valid in finding the answer to the question posed by my research partner and I. The sample children used in both the observation and interview process gave a wide range of responses to the method that could be analysed and compared to one another. The responses also raised questions surrounding why children behave in different ways in different situations and how a method that works for one child, may not work for another. It was also interesting to see how the method worked differently with children from an large, inner city school to a small, town school. Although the data I collected from my class was reliable towards this research, I believe that if the lesson study had taken place in a Foundation Phase class or with different focus children, I would have collected a different set of results. I believe that the method used in my class can easily be implemented across all schools, as supported through the research undertaken by others, but the effectiveness of the method is going to vary from child to child, class to class and school to school.

If I was to undertake this research again, I would like to do it in a Foundation Phase classroom as a means of being able to compare the effects on the behaviour of younger children to those in a Key Stage 2 classroom. I would also interview a bigger selection of children to gain an even wider understanding of how children think teacher's should respond to poor behaviour. By doing this, I could think of more ways to adapt my teaching to facilitate the needs of a wider range of children.

School A is a school that has already implemented a positive behaviour strategy into their policy and teachers are encouraged to follow a 'no shouting' rule in every classroom. The children are used to being disciplined in a calm manner that is in return, having a positive effect on the overall ethos of the school. I think that by already having a reward system implemented in the class, it was helpful towards my research project as the children already had some idea of what was expected of them. I think that researching this method in a school that does not use a positive behaviour management style would have created a different outcome on this research as it would take a while for the children to get used to having to realise when and why they need to change their behaviour, instead of being told to change by the teacher.

Overall, I believe that it is possible to improve pupil's behaviour during a lesson through positive discipline in the Key Stage 2 classroom. Based on the research carried out, in both the reading of literature and carrying out the Lesson Study, pupil's gain an understanding of how they should be behaving and realise that they can look to their peers to model their good behaviour. When a child realises that children behaving well are receiving something that benefits them, they are inclined to change their behaviour so they can also receive the benefit. Removing a tough approach to behaviour management in the classroom also improves the behaviour of the children and creates a less disruptive learning environment as they develop a level of respect towards their teacher, their peers and themselves.

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