

# THE A TO Z OF MANAGEMENT OF BEHAVIOUR WITHIN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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**T**he behaviour of students in physical education (PE) lessons has the potential to have the largest impact on pupil progress. It is also one of the major concerns that trainee teachers have when commencing their initial teacher training (ITT) year (Carter, 2015). Without appropriate management of behaviour strategies, everything else that deserves and demands a focus is simply disregarded. Ofsted (2014) explained in the 'Below the radar' report that students are potentially losing up to an hour of learning each day due to disruption in lessons. This is comparable to 38 days of teaching lost per year. In a time when schools and departments are under pressure to teach a much greater depth and breadth of knowledge, this only adds to the existing pressure in schools. Therefore, the issue of behaviour management is of paramount importance.

The status of behaviour now features as a separate judgement in Ofsted's new framework for inspecting schools. This further emphasises the importance of behaviour management for all teaching staff, regardless of experience or subject specialism. Inspectors would be looking for a calm and orderly environment across the school as these feature within the behaviour and attitudes judgement in the inspection framework. This can be more difficult in a physical education environment therefore it is even more important to have clear routines in place.

Physical education departments which have been the focus of a subject-specific deep dive under the new framework have been asked questions regarding the behaviour of students within the department. Additionally, there is an expectation of what the inspector and subject lead will see concerning the behaviour of students when observing PE lessons.

Furthermore, classroom management is one of the six key factors identified by Coe *et al* (2014) as having a positive impact on learning. This research examines the effective use of lesson time and managing behaviour. Management of behaviour, as opposed to behaviour management, is a subtle yet important shift of mindset, with the management of behaviour being pre-emptive and behaviour management being reactive to the behaviour incident that is occurring.

For many experienced teachers of physical education, it can be quite difficult to articulate why they have a strength in the management of behaviour. I draw on an experience I had a few years ago, in which a trainee teacher was required to look at behaviour incidents in PE as part of an assignment they were completing for a university assessment. They came to me at the end of one of the visit days and said, "Behaviour is really good here, but it isn't helping me for my assignment; I haven't got anything to write about." This was a turning point for me as it indicated that the teacher, in this case, was most likely pre-emptive in their approach.

The purpose of this article is to provide a brief and alphabetically arranged list of practice, vocabulary, anecdotes and resources for all physical educators who wish to review some key strategies to help with the management of behaviour. I drew inspiration from Lynch and Monk (2017) whose article in *Physical Education Matters* on the A to Z of assessment was both refreshing and informative. I hope this serves the same purpose for readers. I would like to emphasise that the selection of title name for the initial has been a constant source of hindrance, for example, many more examples for C exist, however I hope I have covered 'care' for instance within several different letters.

**A – Alternatives** – When you want a class to be quiet, consider carefully how you are going to achieve this. Asking "Can we all be quiet please?" gives the students an alternative, which could cause more issues than solutions. It might be better to request: "Quiet – now. Thank you." Less polite in the short term perhaps, but it does not signal any disregard for our students. This topic is continued in G – where I look further at specific language use.

**B – Bickering** – Low-level disruption that has the potential to escalate and can be increasingly difficult to manage appropriately. Go in too soft and it will continue; too hard and it can deteriorate into something much more problematic. This situation can be managed proactively by knowing the students and moving groups before it becomes an issue. If you are unable to tell who the instigator is, then simply move both parties – see F for fair.

**C – Consistency** – First and foremost, you represent the standard you walk past. I frequently find myself correcting uniform, picking up rubbish from the floor and explicitly modelling opening doors and saying please and thank you to students. By doing this, you are displaying what you expect the students to be doing also. Don't confuse consistency with being cruel. Young people (students) need structure and consistency of approach from all teachers, especially in an environment that can be constantly changing.

**D – Déjà vu** – How many times do I have to say this? I feel as though I am talking to myself. If you find yourself asking yourself this internalised question, think: Why do I need to repeat myself? Was I specific enough in my command? Do I need to create a different condition to receive the behaviour I expect? Next time you find yourself in a situation of déjà vu, think about whether you made it explicit enough the first time.

**E – Enthusiasm** – Proactive teaching that inspires students can be transformative to positive behaviours. Students are often the best readers of body language. Teaching is an act and the management of behaviour by showing enthusiasm is the headline show. It is difficult to show this enthusiasm when it is the eighth week of a long, cold, dark term but it is essential. If you are enthusiastic, then the students will try to follow that lead.

**F – Fair** – I would suggest if you were to poll 12-16-year-olds about what they want most from a teacher, fairness would feature in the top three. The Arthur *et al* (2015) research on character in education found that fairness also features in the top six character traits of teachers of all levels. What is fair? Fairness is heavily linked to C – consistency. Fairness is about applying a management system the same way on both Tuesday morning and Friday afternoon. It is also worth noting the utmost importance of following through with any consequences – students need to know that you mean business if a warning has been given.

**G – Good, good, good** – The language you use as a teacher matters. Overuse of any word can become disengaging. Be explicitly positive with your language: excellent, fantastic, brilliant and exceptional. I personally prefer not to use outstanding as I feel it has lost meaning in the same way as good has in the world of teaching and learning. The key message is to be specific in your praise intention.

**H – Hello** – The power of a warm greeting can never be underestimated. A simple “Hello, how are you?” can help to get the relationship between a teacher and a student off to a good start. After this, you can ask follow-up questions about sporting results, what they did in the last lesson, what they are looking forward to doing etc.

**I – Issues** – When we think of the range of possible issues that may be presented to us during or before a PE lesson, it is wide-ranging, e.g. lateness, forgotten kit, off-task behaviour. For each of these issues, the action needs to consider the individual. I find it useful to think of the iceberg scenario, which has been well used and widely reported in terms of what you don’t see when someone is successful. Behaviour actions you can see are only the tip of the iceberg; the underlying issues and emotions regarding this action are well below the surface.

**J – Juvenile** – ‘Kids will be kids’. This phrase will ring true from time to time but do remember that you are always the adult in the room and you and the other students deserve to be in an environment that is conducive to learning. Calm and purposeful discipline is most effective. Your tone and the

positioning of your body are important. For example, standing side on to an irate student is far more effective than going face to face with them.

**K – Kit** – Be a role model regarding how you dress and act. Do you take your shoes off when teaching gymnastics? Is your hair tied back when demonstrating a skill or task? What message is this sending to the students? Do you specifically demonstrate how to respect equipment? I realised that I needed to implement equipment strategies, an example of which was in a table tennis lesson when students would tap bats against the table during a demonstration. This was resolved by instructing students to leave the bats and ball on the tables before coming in.

**L – Language** – The precise language we use and the instructions we give can have an influential impact on students. Students can use vague instructions as an excuse to misbehave. An approach could be sought by using the CASPER approach (NUT, 2006):

- **Calm:** You should always try to appear calm, even if you are not feeling calm. The first step in a difficult situation is to create thinking time. Take a deep breath. Teachers that show success within the management of student behaviour are the ones who create a sense of order and calmness, whilst still articulating their care and commitment to young people’s

achievement. It takes great skill and experience, but this can be learned.

- **Assertive:** Have good eye contact. State your needs clearly and use ‘I’ statements, e.g. “I need”, “I want”.
- **Status preservation:** Students operate within a peer group. When correcting behaviour, always be aware of this and use private rather than public reprimands.
- **Empathy:** Show empathy. Avoid challenge questions such as: “What do you think you are doing?” Instead, you could say “Stop what you are doing please INSERT NAME.”
- **Respect:** Model appropriate behaviour to reinforce your expectations. Always show children and young people respect, even if they are disrespectful.” (p4)

**M – Making calls** – “If you don’t change your behaviour, I will phone home.” Why does it always need to be a negative conversation? Previously when working in a school I attempted to make positive phone calls home for students who were consistently well-behaved or for students who were sometimes challenging and had improved. This was particularly beneficial for the ‘naughty boys’ whose most common type of contact home was largely negative. What a refreshing change for the parents to receive a positive call. If you don’t want to call, a postcard home can serve the same purpose.



**N – Noisy** – The nature of physical education means that noise levels are normally quite high due to group interaction and the environmental acoustics. Learning isn't always quiet, but one technique to control the volume of the class could be to have music playing at a softer level during the lesson. If the music cannot be heard then the noise from the class is too loud.

**O – Observation** – A PE teacher sometimes needs to stand back and take stock of what is happening within the lesson. Through this teacher observation, I would suggest the focus could be on two O's: 'On-task' and 'On-message'. Lesson success would be viewed as students being on-task concerning their activity level and progress, but also on message regarding school policies and the environment you want in your lessons.

**P – Planning and preparation** – Effective management of behaviour can be considered by planning clear expectations for tasks which are supported by a set structure and embedded routines. I have seen various examples from teachers who are working with difficult groups being able to have a set warm-up which is either student- or teacher-led depending on the activity being taught. Preparation of equipment and being able to give students a clear role in the lesson are indicative of successful practice. A well-planned lesson features high levels of student activity which has been strategically managed in terms of what learning is expected to be taking place (including the support and challenge of task and student groupings).

**Q – Quality First Teaching (QFT)** – The term QFT first appeared in the DCSF 2008 guide to personalised learning. QFT can be summarised as teaching that contains highly focused lesson design, high demand for student involvement and high levels of interaction alongside appropriate teacher questioning, modelling and explaining (DCSF, 2008). PE lessons where modelling by teacher and peers is commonplace lend themselves to high-quality practice. However, modelling and student involvement must be followed by appropriate questioning and explanation of the task or the skill that is being taught.

**R – Rewards** – What is your own policy for rewarding and, more importantly, recognising good behaviour? When things go wrong it can be easy to highlight. You must reward when things are going well or when behaviours have changed for the better within your lessons.

**S – School Policies** – Schools have behaviour policies for a reason. (See C for consistency) You must not deviate from this as it can cause issues in the future. The last thing you want is to be labelled as is 'Mrs Jones allows

us to do that'. Apply the policy consistently, in all lessons, with all students.

**T – Tactical talk** – A prepared scripted intervention provides you with a starting point for a controlled conversation between you and a student. It can ensure you remain calm and in control of the situation and your emotions. The talk needs to highlight what you are unhappy with but keep a positive tone. An example of this could be along the lines of, "You usually work well in this lesson. I need you to make the right choice regarding your behaviour". This takes time to practise and you will develop your own script (and follow-ups) as you teach.

**U – Unique** – All teachers will have slightly different standards relating to expectations of behaviour. Consistency is key and cannot be undersold. The unique nature of PE teaching having different 'classrooms' (fields, gymnasium, fitness suite, sports hall) means that behaviour standards need reinforcing, adapting and articulating to the students you teach at different points throughout the year. A teacher in another subject would not necessarily need to do this as lessons tend to be based in the same teaching space.

**V – Vision** – Seeing a problem before it becomes a problem is easier said than done (linked to O). Often this comes with experience of a prior situation within a lesson. This can be frustrating to a young teacher. Ask yourself when looking at a student or group of students working, "Does this look different from what I expected?" "Is the behaviour being displayed harming learning?" If the answer is yes to both of these questions, then an intervention may be necessary. If it only looks different from what you expected, let it run; students are likely to be working out different methods of completing the task creatively.

**W – Work in progress** – Change is a necessary part of managing students' behaviours. This does not happen overnight. Teachers are required to reinforce, reintroduce and recap routines that have been set over the year. Though structure and routines are essential, PE teachers do need to be willing to change teaching methods to meet the students' needs where appropriate. Just because a method worked with one class or one activity does not mean that you must always deliver in this style.

**X – X-ray vision** – 'Have eyes in the back of your head' and 'Never turn your back on the enemy' have the potential to be quite empty and impractical statements. However, when teaching a PE class that might be working on different pieces of equipment at different times, it starts to become apparent why this is important. I tell my trainees to teach from the corners and always have your back to the wall/fence. I have found these to be

specific statements which they can show and implement in their practice, meaning they can observe the impact of their teaching and assessment of students with regards to attainment, focus and on-task behaviour.

**Y – You** – If you were to ask a hundred PE teachers why they wanted to become one, a high percentage would likely say that they were inspired by one of their teachers. You are unique in your approach and delivery for the students you teach. You don't know it, but you are already inspiring the next generation of PE teachers. Your role is of huge importance, not only to the health and wellbeing of students but to the future. You set the standards for your PE lesson, for how you want your physically educated students to respond.

**Z – Zero Tolerance** – Sometimes a zero-tolerance approach needs to be enforced, for example when there is a potential health and safety risk. When teaching throwing in athletics, I suggest it may not be the best approach to have unstructured guided discovery. It is best in this situation to avoid ambiguity. What behaviours do you expect from the performers? What are the students doing when they aren't performing? When do they throw and collect? The behaviour you expect from the start needs to be non-negotiable in this situation. ■

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