

WHAT IS 'GOOD' BEHAVIOUR AND HOW CAN TEACHERS ENCOURAGE IT?



REFLECTING ON GREAT TEACHING



Evidence Based
Education



INTRODUCTION

Great teaching involves “**activating hard thinking**” in students; in fact, this is defined as Dimension 4 of the Model for Great Teaching (Coe et al., 2020). This model argues that a great teacher is one whose students learn more – this is irrespective of teachers’ practices, specific skills, mindsets or understandings. Ultimately, our goal is for our students to learn.

However, learning does not occur in a vacuum. Classrooms are not laboratory settings with perfectly controlled environments and automated participants. Students are complex beings with a range of needs, priorities, motivations and interests. Classrooms are plagued with interruptions and distractions – both within and beyond our immediate control. Ignoring all these imperils the likelihood of learning taking place.

Even the greatest “activation of hard thinking” is essentially meaningless if the conditions are not right for learning to take place – that is, if a teacher has not considered students’ needs and the classroom environment.

The Model for Great Teaching (page 3) highlights the pivotal nature of these conditions. It lays out additional dimensions of great teaching:

- **Dimension 2:** Great teachers create a supportive environment
- **Dimension 3:** Great teachers maximise opportunity to learn

Threaded throughout the elements of Dimension 2 & 3 is the concept of student behaviour. These dimensions recognise that student learning can only be realised if students are in class, are engaged in the learning process, and behave in ways conducive to learning (not just their own, but also that of their peers).

Anyone who has been responsible for teaching a group of children (or even a group of adults!) can quickly recognise the importance of encouraging good behaviour. Many teachers can relay instances of poor behaviour derailing a lesson sequence or learning objective.

“Good behaviour” is often used in colloquial speech without a clear definition. Sometimes people fall back on the maxim: “It’s hard to define, but I know it when I see it.”

Instead, this eBook offers a definition for good behaviour and what it entails, as well a strategy that any teacher can consider to encourage good behaviour in their students.

A Model for Great Teaching

1. Understanding the content

- 1 Having deep and fluent knowledge and flexible understanding of the content you are teaching
- 2 Knowledge of the requirements of curriculum sequencing and dependencies in relation to the content and ideas you are teaching
- 3 Knowledge of relevant curriculum tasks, assessments and activities, their diagnostic and didactic potential; being able to generate varied explanations and multiple representations/analogies/examples for the ideas you are teaching
- 4 Knowledge of common student strategies, misconceptions and sticking points in relation to the content you are teaching

2. Creating a supportive environment

- 1 Promoting interactions and relationships with all students that are based on mutual respect, care, empathy and warmth; avoiding negative emotions in interactions with students; being sensitive to the individual needs, emotions, culture and beliefs of students
- 2 Promoting a positive climate of student-student relationships, characterised by respect, trust, cooperation and care
- 3 Promoting learner motivation through feelings of competence, autonomy and relatedness
- 4 Creating a climate of high expectations, with high challenge and high trust, so learners feel it is okay to have a go; encouraging learners to attribute their success or failure to things they can change

3. Maximising opportunity to learn

- 1 Managing time and resources efficiently in the classroom to maximise productivity and minimise wasted time (e.g., starts, transitions); giving clear instructions so students understand what they should be doing; using (and explicitly teaching) routines to make transitions smooth
- 2 Ensuring that rules, expectations and consequences for behaviour are explicit, clear and consistently applied
- 3 Preventing, anticipating & responding to potentially disruptive incidents; reinforcing positive student behaviours; signalling awareness of what is happening in the classroom and responding appropriately

4. Activating hard thinking

- 1 Structuring: giving students an appropriate sequence of learning tasks; signalling learning objectives, rationale, overview, key ideas and stages of progress; matching tasks to learners' needs and readiness; scaffolding and supporting to make tasks accessible to all, but gradually removed so that all students succeed at the required level
- 2 Explaining: presenting and communicating new ideas clearly, with concise, appropriate, engaging explanations; connecting new ideas to what has previously been learnt (and re-activating/checking that prior knowledge); using examples (and non-examples) appropriately to help learners understand and build connections; modelling/demonstrating new skills or procedures with appropriate scaffolding and challenge; using worked/part-worked examples
- 3 Questioning: using questions and dialogue to promote elaboration and connected, flexible thinking among learners (e.g., 'Why?', 'Compare', etc.); using questions to elicit student thinking; getting responses from all students; using high-quality assessment to evidence learning; interpreting, communicating and responding to assessment evidence appropriately
- 4 Interacting: responding appropriately to feedback from students about their thinking/knowledge/understanding; giving students actionable feedback to guide their learning
- 5 Embedding: giving students tasks that embed and reinforce learning; requiring them to practise until learning is fluent and secure; ensuring that once-learnt material is reviewed/revisited to prevent forgetting
- 6 Activating: helping students to plan, regulate and monitor their own learning; progressing appropriately from structured to more independent learning as students develop knowledge and expertise

WHAT IS BEHAVIOUR?

In a broad sense, *behaviour* refers to the actions (observable or covert) of any living creature. Of course, in a school the primary focus of conversations around behaviour are the students – but the same principles can also be used to describe the teachers, leaders, and other school staff. (Behaviour of these groups can have a significant impact on that of the students!)

Behavioural psychology focuses on an organism's response to a stimulus. Stimuli can be external (such as touching something hot, seeing a signal, or hearing someone speak) or internal (such as feeling hungry, having an ambition, or intending for something to happen). As creatures in complex environments, we are constantly exposed to countless stimuli to which we may respond. Some of our responses may be instant (for instance, pulling your hand away from a hot pan) or considered (deciding to shift your attention from your phone to someone speaking).

We can also describe behaviours as either innate or learned. Innate responses are those which are not taught – humans naturally do them in response to a certain stimulus (e.g., we laugh at something funny or our knee jerks when our patella is tapped). As the name suggests, learned behaviours are those that do not come about naturally, but through instruction – either by one's self through observation, or through instruction.

For example, humans are not born knowing to politely respond to other people, which side of the road to drive on, or how to “correctly” hold a fork. This is apparent when considering how these behavioural norms differ across cultures.

Over time, the behaviours humans exhibit become engrained in long-term memory; they become so routine they can be carried out almost without thinking. This is true regardless of whether these behaviours were taught explicitly or picked up through observation.

These mechanics have been the focus of behavioural psychologists for nearly a century. At this point, some have even attained popular notoriety; people outside psychological research may be familiar with Pavlov's dogs or a “Skinner box”.

For those working in schools, having an understanding of these mechanics is helpful. Educators want their students to exhibit behaviour that maximises “opportunity to learn” and “time on task”; managing a classroom to allow for this is essential (Coe et al., 2020; Creemers et al., 2013). While many teachers may have sensible ideas of what these behaviours look like, it is equally important to think of them in relation to stimuli, as well as both innate and learned responses.

WHAT IS “GOOD” BEHAVIOUR?

While it may be easier to describe behaviour in relatively objective terms, describing “good” behaviour is difficult, especially in a classroom setting. One teacher’s definition of good may differ radically from another’s. Conversations about what is good may soon engulf discussions about belief systems, teaching philosophies and educational priorities.

Rather than elucidating a philosophical treatise on the nature of education (see instead, for example, the lengthier works of Plato or Rousseau), one way we can define “good” behaviour is within a framework of *negative good behaviour* and *positive good behaviour*.

Negative good behaviour is the absence of misbehaviour. That is, good behaviour is when students behave in a way that does not disrupt the classroom. (In this sense, *negative* is not taken to mean *bad*, but rather the absence of something – in this case, misbehaviour or disruption.) A classroom exhibiting negative good behaviour is one where there is opportunity to learn and there is time for the students to be on task.

Positive good behaviour, on the other hand, includes habits that help students flourish as a learner and as a human. It therefore encompasses more than “not being disruptive” or “just following the rules”. Positive good behaviour gets to the core of the concepts of opportunity to learn and time on task. These concepts may include things like a quiet classroom, but they also refer to things like students’ attention, focus, and motivation.

Consider punctuality as an example. Negative good behaviour would see punctuality as not being late. On the other hand, a positive good behaviour lens might encompass making plans to be on time, being prepared with necessary work, anticipating journey times, checking for delays, and other proactive behaviours. It’s a complex set of skills, knowledge, habits and aptitudes.

Of these two conceptualisations of good behaviour, negative good behaviour gets a lot of attention from teachers. It’s often easy to spot when there are disruptions or misbehaviour; responding to these stimuli takes immediate attention. When the misbehaviour is removed, it’s tempting to return to the other many elements of teaching.

Positive good behaviour takes a greater investment in time and energy. However, making such behaviours routine and habitual can have longer-term effects on student behaviour; they are the route to students flourishing as learners and humans. A single teacher should not expect to suddenly instil positive good behaviour instantly for all their students, in the same way that they can’t have all their students instantly learn the entire curriculum.

Instead, teachers and schools should see it as an ongoing process that may never be fully realised. A school with absolutely perfect positive good behaviour is probably an unachievable Utopia – but that does not mean schools can’t work towards it.



Examples of negative good behaviour	Examples of positive good behaviour
Students don't talk while the teacher is talking.	Students' attention is active and focused on what the teacher is saying.
Students aren't late to class.	Students proactively make plans to arrive on time and prepared for the lesson.
Students don't call each other names.	Students respect each other and form positive peer relationships.
Students don't use foul language in class.	Students understand why words are offensive or not appropriate to use in class.
Students don't write on desks.	Students are good stewards of their environment and make sure classroom items are in good condition.

Using routines to encourage positive good behaviour

There are many different strategies a teacher and school could employ to encourage good behaviour, however they may choose to define it. For example, they could set up a system of rewards and consequences or build positive social norms. Here, we revisit our earlier discussion of stimuli, learned behaviours, and habituation and focus on routines.

Recall:

1. Behaviour is a response to a stimulus (or very often multiple stimuli).
2. A response to a stimulus can be innate or learned.
3. Repeated over time, responses can become habitual or almost automatic.

Routines are patterns of behaviour that are used regularly – whether in a classroom or in general. Great teachers employ routines to help maximise opportunities students have to learn (Coe et al., 2020; Praetorius et al., 2018).

They are most powerful with specific sequences of events; they are ideal for behaviours that are generally uniformly applied to similar situations. They are best when explicitly taught and can be reinforced through repeated applications. Routines are good for encouraging positive good behaviours that are expected on a regular basis; they also become easy and automatic over time.

In the example routine below, the good behaviour that the teacher is trying to instil is to start class focused and ready to learn.

1	Students enter the classroom.
2	Students place their homework in the "In" basket by the door.
3	Students sit at their desk.
4	Students put away everything except their notebook and a pen.
5	Students copy the "Do Now" prompt into their notebook and begin working on it.
6	The teacher notes the attendance.

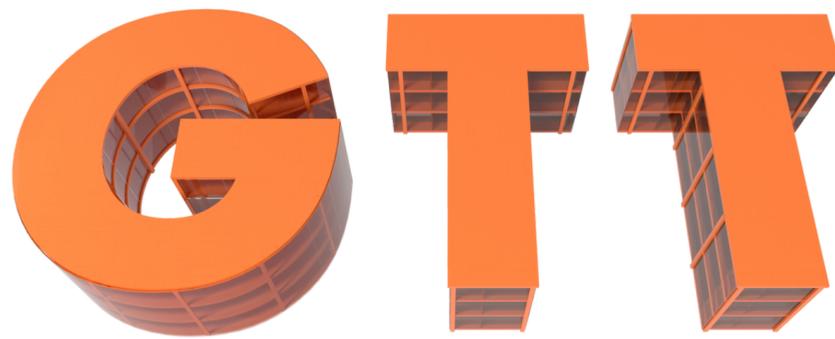
Once routines have been learned, they have certain advantages to a classroom and school:

- They can **save time**; a teacher does not need to keep repeating themselves or instructing students on what to do. In this example, the students do not have to wait to be told to hand in their assignment; it is taken care of in the "shuffle" before class starts.
- They **reassure the class** that there is consistency, structure, and purpose. Here, students are not surprised by the warm-up activity and know to expect it.
- They **pre-empt poor behaviour** by "funnelling" students into the desired behaviour. There's no opportunity for students to plead about forgotten assignments or to try to hastily copy a friend's at the start.
- They **demonstrate high expectations** in a clear, succinct way. What is included in the routine is what is expected, and it is believed that all the students can do it. In this example, the teacher is demonstrating that they expect students to complete assignments and to focus from the very start of class.

A key consideration for routines to be successful is that they must be taught; remember, not all responses are innate! The responses we expect from students for various stimuli (e.g., the start of class, needing to use the toilet, using classroom technology, feeling angry, etc.) may even seem unintuitive to some. Explicitly teaching (not merely mentioning once) the specific steps of the routine are essential for their success.

Here are some steps you can consider taking for implementing a routine in your classroom or school:

1. **Determine** what the routine should include in order to maximise opportunity to learn. What positive good behaviour are you trying to encourage? What unhelpful behaviours are you trying to reduce or eliminate? What stimuli have the potential to prompt disruptive responses?
2. **Plan** when and how you will teach the routine, remembering that mentioning something once is not teaching it.
3. **Design** the steps that the routine includes, drawing on the behaviours you want to encourage and discourage. Be specific and granular – don't be afraid to have very small steps. Every routine comprises many small steps that over time become one routine.
4. **Explicitly** teach the routine.
5. **Communicate** the routine in detail, including why it is important. Be clear about your expectations and consequences.
6. **Practise** the routine with the students, ideally multiple times. Provide feedback and insist the routine is carried out correctly – if skipping a step were acceptable, it wouldn't be part of the routine!
7. **Check** for understanding, just as you would with content knowledge.
8. **Trial** the routine to make sure it is working as intended. Keep a record of when it breaks down and what happened. Stick to the consequences and expectations as intended.
9. **Continue** to reinforce the routine; provide feedback just as you would with learning content knowledge.
10. **Consider** whether the routine is working. Are the students working towards the desired positive good behaviour? Is the disruptive, unhelpful behaviour being minimised?
11. **Revise** (and reteach) as necessary.



Great Teaching Toolkit

Classroom management is a key component of great teaching. Great teachers manage the classroom to maximise opportunity to learn. The classroom management ideas and approaches explored in this eBook are a few of the many that feature in the Great Teaching Toolkit courses; the Behaviour and Culture Programme (for middle and senior leaders) and Maximising opportunity to learn (for classroom teachers).

The Great Teaching Toolkit is a new approach to professional development:

- Use our Model for Great Teaching as your curriculum for professional learning.
- Enhance practice with a range of courses aligned to specific elements of Great Teaching, including the Behaviour & Culture Programme, Creating a supportive environment and Maximising opportunity to learn.
- Get feedback from instruments to inform and personalise teacher learning.

It's professional development...but not as you know it!

References & further reading

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