



DAVID DIDAU

3: BEHAVIOUR

THE LESSONS HE'S TAUGHT HAVE CERTAINLY EDUCATED DAVID DIDAU ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF ESTABLISHING FIRM ROUTINES AND SETTING CLEAR EXPECTATIONS IN THE CLASSROOM...

Most of what makes classrooms work is invisible. The here and now of lessons and classrooms is dependent on the routines and relationships that have been forged over time. If you're clear about what is, and is not acceptable behaviour; firm and fair in applying consequences and provide meaningful feedback on how pupils' can improve, it almost doesn't matter what you do in a lesson: children will learn.

But that's by no means the complete picture. One of the most damaging and appalling lies circulating around schools is this: if you plan your lessons well, children will behave. And if your lessons are not 'fun and engaging' they won't. This patent untruth has crushed the spirit of many a bright young teacher, and it needs to be challenged.

The primary responsibility for behaviour rests with the school, not the teacher. Of course teachers must bear some of the responsibility for the behaviour of pupils in their classes. And of course having a well-planned lesson helps. But without watertight systems, classroom teachers are put in an untenable position.

Do any of these apply to your school?

- Pupils swear at teachers.
- Supply teachers and NQTs are hazed and hounded.
- Teachers send pupils out of classrooms for poor behaviour only to have a member of SLT bring them back in and undermine their authority in front of the class.
- Teachers are asked to set and administer all detentions and follow up all the misdemeanors witnessed in the name of 'improving relationships'.

If so, you work in a bad school.

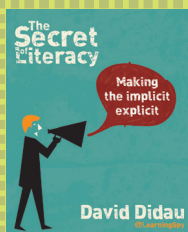
Your school has a responsibility to ensure that you don't have to put up with abuse, but in return you have a responsibility to uphold even the most trivial and inconsequential of school rules. One of my bugbears is teachers who 'can't be bothered' to enforce uniform rules because they don't really see how a pair of trainers can affect learning. These rules are there for everyone's protection. Pupils need to know that they will be upheld consistently. I'd much rather set the bar at doing up top buttons than throwing chairs around. Teachers who are too cool for these rules actively undermine all their colleagues, and have a special corner of hell reserved just for them.

Routines & relationships

Arguably, the first and most important job of a teacher is to establish classroom routines, which enable children to learn in safety. Time spent embedding these routines is time well spent. If you have a rule, stick to it. If you allow children to speak over you,



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sit where they choose or wait for someone else to get their book once, they'll learn that it's acceptable to do it again.

The expectation that there is no slack time and that lessons begin the moment students arrive is a hugely important message. Waiting for stragglers just signals that turning up on time isn't important. I'm obsessive about tightening up entry routines; if we can shave a minute or two off the time it takes to sit in our assigned seats and have our books open and pens poised, I'm a happy man.

Once clear and sensible routines are in place, there is space for positive relationships to form. Getting to know pupils takes time and many secondary teachers will only see pupils for a one solitary hour a week. How on earth can we get to know the kids we teach when we see so little of them? The first step is to know and use their names; if I use a pupil's name, I will get to know her. It's inevitable that the gobbier a pupil is, the quicker you will get to know them. But there are some fairly obvious things you can do to get to know the others. For this reason alone seating plans are worth their salt. Without them I'm likely to descend to gesturing weakly at a sea of faces and saying, 'Yes, you.' But having a printout of my plan to hand ensures that I can direct questions at individuals confident that I know whom I'm addressing. Everything else will start to fall into place and you can join the dots of their lives.

Talking to colleagues is a great way of getting the low-down on kids, but parents are a more overlooked avenue. I always endeavour to make three phone calls everyday. Some in response to incidents (positive as well as negative) that crop up in lessons, others as I work my way through the class list. Parents love teachers taking an interest – but simply complaining about their offspring is not normally a successful strategy. I focus all discussions on progress rather than behaviour. Few are the parents who are completely uninterested in their children's academic progress and, even if they're powerless to help, they still want to know.

You can also get to know pupils through their work. Not only can we learn about their effort and ability, we are afforded privileged access into our pupils' minds. Writing tasks can be opportunities to explore fears and worries; I've read some harrowing accounts of the death of parents, cases of possible abuse and the struggle for identity.

BOTTOM LINE: if you're consistent, predictable and fair, attitudes to learning *will* change. It doesn't matter if some lessons are awful. Sometimes keeping them in their seats and not swearing at each feels like an achievement. But, this is a marathon not a sprint. Pupils need to learn that they will do better than they ever thought possible and leave with the best results they're capable of achieving.