

Behave YOURSELF

TS columnist **Phil Beadle** has been working with a fellow educator on a new title – and it's certainly taught him a thing or two...



It is 2008 and my mate Rob has convinced me to play a role in rescuing a set of English results in a school in Wandsworth. The head teacher has done a 'Could you just ...?' number on me. He has a class that he teaches – blow me, a head teacher who teaches – and wants to give them a special experience. "Could you just give them something really, really outstanding? They deserve it. They're special!"

What he hasn't told me is that their very 'specialness' is located in their powers of subversion; they are most displeased at not having their normal teacher and turn me over ... and over ... and upside down ... again ... and again. At one point during the debacle he comes in to see how we're doing, and both the class and their flimsy-excuse-for-a-teacher turn around, united for a brief second in utter relief. Me, because I'm being rescued; the class, because the person they most trust in the world is now in the room. This is the first of many times during my months in the school that I notice that the kids, who are often ungenerous in their summary assessments and can be acerbic about even the most dedicated professional, speak with one voice about the head: he inspires their utter devotion.

How and why was this the case? Was he down with the kids? No, not at all. He was actually really, very strict. But he was strict with a lightness of touch; he had an assuredness with behaviour I'd never seen before. He appeared never to lose a single battle; every time he entered a dialogue with even the most angry of students, both he and the young person would leave that dialogue smiling.

His name was (and remains) John Murphy. He'd spent years as the head of a residential school for students with EBD, having taken it out of special measures and what he was doing – quite simply – was applying the lessons he'd learnt in an EBD school in the mainstream. And they worked. And they worked brilliantly. And they could work for everyone. It became increasingly obvious to me that mainstream teachers, with their busy-ness, their reports and their crammed pigeonholes were missing a trick.

We have colleagues working in EBD schools who are complete experts in dealing with extreme versions of the behaviour we struggle with day-to-day, and they will teach us how to deal with this behaviour if only we are humble enough to ask for their help.

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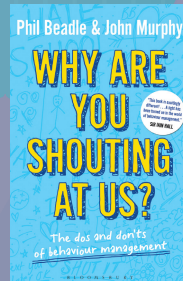
ABOUT THE EXPERT

JOHN MURPHY IS THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION FOR OASIS COMMUNITY LEARNING AND HAS BEEN A SCHOOL LEADER, CONSULTANT AND COMMUNICATOR WITH OVER 22 YEARS EXPERIENCE. HE HAS LED SIX SCHOOLS THAT HAVE BEEN ON FAILING STATUS OR FACING CHALLENGING CIRCUMSTANCES, AND IS INVOLVED WITH A RANGE OF SCHOOLS AND NATIONAL CHILDCARE ORGANISATIONS, PROVIDING QUALITY ASSURANCE, EDUCATIONAL AND BEHAVIOUR CONSULTANCY.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PHIL BEADLE IS A TEACHER, AUTHOR, BROADCASTER, SPEAKER, JOURNALIST, AND REGULAR TV COLUMNIST.



'WHY ARE YOU SHOUTING AT US? THE DOS AND DON'TS OF BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT' BY PHIL BEADLE AND JOHN MURPHY (£16.99), WILL BE PUBLISHED BY BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION IN JANUARY 2013.

Fast forward

It is now 2013. Five years after our first meeting the book that contains the information that John, now national director of academies for Oasis Community Learning, has used to transform the attitudes to learning in some of the most recalcitrant of environments is now an artefact that exists somewhere other than in our heads. It is the best and most valuable thing that I've ever written; it will transform any reader's ability to manage behaviour and it is, in truth, the transcription of the thoughts of another man; a man who still refuses to acknowledge that he has any special abilities in this area.

I ask John about how managing the EBD School transformed his own views and what single piece of advice he would give any teacher struggling with behaviour. "Firstly, never make assumptions about students and their lives," he responds. "You have to discover what experiences the students have gone through and how they need to be emotionally scaffolded to even attempt to take risks in their learning. It is vital that you do not make assumptions about students, but that, moreover, you carefully observe their behaviour and attempt to see the world through their eyes. For some students it will be a massive accomplishment merely attending school, for others the accomplishment might be that they are in receipt of our praise for focusing on their learning for more than ten minutes. Life at the EBD school taught me that compassion isn't a word it is a practice, and to understand that all students have different starting points."

However, he actually also queries the very idea of managing behaviour. "Up to the point I became a parent I viewed behaviour management in terms of 'control' and thought it was a teacher's job to 'manage' his students. But on becoming a father I began to fully understand that working with young people is about guiding students to make the right choices in their lives, so that they understand the consequences of their behaviour in as rounded and mature a way as possible."

Self assessment

So, what is the key problem that teachers have in terms of managing behaviour? "The biggest challenge is supporting teachers to understand how it is often their behaviour that triggers poor behaviour in their students, and that a teacher's first responsibility if she wants to control a class's challenging behaviour is recognising her own." This is uncomfortable stuff. John asks teachers to perform a Behaviour Impact Analysis on themselves, as it is unreasonable to ask someone to change their behaviour if you are unable to change your own. I have done one of these and it is unpleasant being asked to confront your own inadequacies, but, if you have the guts, it leads you – after a few dark nights of the soul – to becoming a better professional.

And it is this word, 'professional', that I think distinguishes John's thinking. Teachers with experience in the EBD schools manage behaviour for a living; they are professionals at it. In the mainstream it is merely a constituent part of the job. Through the three-year process of constructing *Why Are You Shouting at Us?* – it took us that long because we think this is an important book, and we wanted to get it right – I've bounced up against the vital truth of the effect attitude has on behaviour and that behaviour has on attitude; how the management of an incident is probably decided before you've even opened your mouth; how tone of voice is more important than what you say, but that once you form words there are words that work and words that don't. I've learnt exactly why being funny is the greatest gift a teacher can possess, why what sometimes feels like being submissive is actually a powerful expression of your own competence and finally, at long last, why every experienced teacher told me during my NQT year not to take it personally. I always wondered.

The answer, in case you were speculating, is that you are not to take it personally because you are a professional. And taking it personally is not what professionals do.