The Challenge of Challenging Children

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Why are we interested in behaviour?
Understanding the Problem

• “It must be recognized that the area of pupil behavior is highly sensitive. It challenges teachers’ sense of their own professional competence and both teachers’ and parents’ self-esteem. Emotions often get in the way of constructive planning”

• Peter Gray and Sue Panter, Support for Learning, Vol 15, No 1.
Where do the feelings come from?

- Us?
- How do we manage them?
- Strategies?
- What works for you?
- Remember you can only change yourself, not another person
What do you choose to pay attention to?
In your control?
Draining or energising?
Focus on highlights?
Unconscious Defence Mechanisms

• A sign that a child cannot manage their overwhelming feelings and have not had experience of an adult who can do that
• Can give us an indication of how a child is feeling
• Can be thought about and named if appropriate
• Can help us to feel better about ourselves and our actions

• **Tip**: Remember ‘It’s not meant for me’
Transference

• Where feelings and attitudes from a relationship with main carers in the past are ‘transferred’ and re-experienced in a later relationship, for example, a teacher.

• Implications

• A child’s seeming inexplicable reaction to a member of staff may be triggered by who they are reminded of. We can be caught in the counter-transference.
Counter-transference

Ever had the desire to adopt ....

- to murder ....
- to hit ....
- to rescue
- to give up
- to run away?
Behaviour has a meaning

“\text{A child’s current behaviour often reflects an essentially sane response to an untenable set of life circumstances.}’

\text{Bray 1997 (Quoted in Visser, J and Rayner, S (1999) Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties : A Reader. QEd.)}
Mind your language

• Tell students what you WANT them to do
• Separate descriptions of behaviour from your interpretation of behaviour
• Acknowledge objections and feelings, it is not the same as agreeing with them
• Replace ‘but’ with ‘and’
• Use open-ended questions to discuss a problem, avoid ‘why’
• Avoid sequencers in instructions, give action words in the order you want them done
Some tips

- Build in time to acknowledge feelings
- Find a positive intention and acknowledge it eg ‘You are very funny, you can be funny without being unkind’
- Set an expectation with your language ‘Juan, move over there, thanks’
- ‘Anita, you are not unkind, so I don’t know why you are being unkind today’
- Focus on need ‘You don’t need to do that in here’
- Praise those who are doing the right thing ‘Great, this table is ready, who else is ready?’
- Keep the focus on learning, bring it back to the task ‘Is there a problem with number 2?’
- Ignore secondary behaviour
- Label the act, not the child ‘That was unkind.. not.. You are unkind’
- Give a future focus ‘How can we make sure this doesn’t happen again… what needs to be different?’
A final thought........

‘We cannot solve the problems of today with the same level of thinking that created them.”

- Albert Einstein
Want to know more?

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