

# BOOK REVIEWS

## MANAGING BEHAVIOUR IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.)

By Jim Docking and Michelle MacGrath

Reviewed by BRÍD LAFFAN, lecturer in the Department of Special Education, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9.

This important and practical book – now in its third edition – has its genesis in a post-Elton Report (British) educational environment. Its stated aim is to help students and serving teachers to benefit from ‘best practice’. As denoted by the title, the book does not limit its focus to challenging behaviours presented by children with conduct disorders or severe emotional difficulties. Instead, it addresses the cumulative stress-inducing effects of frequent, low-level disruption, as experienced by most primary school teachers. Its primary aim is to present policies and practical strategies that improve behaviour in the classroom, the playground and elsewhere in schools. The author’s underlying philosophy of ‘managing behaviour’ in the primary school is humanistic in approach, identifying the problem behaviour rather than the problem child, thus leaving the integrity and self-esteem of the pupil intact. Furthermore, both pupils and parents are seen as an integral part of the development of any school behaviour policy or code.

The first chapter, ‘Effective Behaviour Management’ is essential reading as it illustrates the underlying rationale of the policies and practical strategies developed in subsequent chapters. The author starts by looking at the importance of the language used by practitioners when describing pupils and behaviours. Language used usually indicates the conceptualisation of the problem, and therefore the response to it. As a result, children often get labelled as ‘bad’ or ‘naughty’ when in fact intentionality or boldness is often not present. Docking presents five sets of contrasting ideas that show the distinction between effective behaviour management and ‘controlling’ or disciplining children. These scenarios illustrate the differences between pro-active, holistic, collaborative and community approaches contrasted with ‘coping’, ‘crisis-management’, individualistic and more circumscribed responses. The more positive approaches outlined by the author are in total agreement with effective management ‘best practice’ referred to in the Irish revised *Primary School Curriculum* and in school planning documents and initiatives.

Chapters 2 to 8 can be read in sequence or used separately to address specific concerns of the teacher or the school. Each chapter follows a similar format - pertinent behavioural issues are presented and then followed by practical policies and strategies. Chapter 2 details six main strategies to help prevent behaviour problems. The following list shows the practical nature of these for any teacher or school staff:

- **Classroom rules**

- **Planning lessons to generate purposefulness**
- **Positive beginnings to lessons**
- **Communicating confidence and enthusiasm through body language and use of voice**
- **Engendering work involvement**
- **Classroom layout and pupil grouping**

Furthermore, key concepts that presently generate a lot of discussion in Irish education, e.g. differentiation of tasks, grouping, transitional tasks, feedback to students, and classroom discussions are all addressed in a practical, user-friendly manner.

Chapters 3 to 5 continue to address behaviour management policies in the primary school. Chapter 3 is concerned with the reinforcement of good behaviour, mainly through the use of praise. Docking looks at the negative and positive factors associated with praise as a management technique while highlighting the absence of praise in a lot of classrooms. In Chapter 4, key aspects of the new SPHE programme are addressed under the title 'Developing Good Behaviour'. The emphasis is on pro-active, positive approaches that enhance the integrity and of the child while promoting self-knowledge and personal development. The key aspects include the following: communicating positive expectations, promoting self-esteem, promoting feelings of confidence and competence, and managing cooperative learning. The last of these, collaborative learning, sets out the necessary group training opportunities for successful learning. 'Responding to Behaviour Problems' (Chapter 5) probes the different uses of two common consequences of disruptive behaviour: a) reprimanding; and, b) punishment. We are given a practical guide to the pros and cons of both and also to the use of alternatives. The chapter concludes with the development of a behavioural Individual Education Plan (IEP) as a graduated management approach.

The final three chapters are very useful in the context of a whole-school setting, either in developing/revisiting a school behaviour management policy or in responding to issues that arise in the school or playground. Chapter 6 details a systematic approach to developing a whole-school behaviour policy. The next chapter looks at behavioural concerns at playtime or lunchtime, and the final chapter addresses the problem of bullying. One method of combating bullying mentioned, 'Shared Concern', has already been used effectively in some Dublin inner city schools to address bullying.

Is this book essential reading for a school staff? 'Yes' is my honest opinion. It provides an excellent overview to the area of effective classroom and school behaviour management. It is very practical in approach. It includes parents and pupils as essential elements in the process. Furthermore, the author uses research results practically (personal research from British schools and cited from other sources) to illustrate policies and strategies proposed.

The only negative aspect I found was its format – fairly dense text, under-using graphics or pictures. In my opinion, the complete guide for any school staff/teacher would be this book plus a copy of *A whole-school approach: Behaviour management* by Bill Rogers

(Sydney: Ashton Scholastic, 1995). A combination of both of these books would be the perfect match – offering underlying philosophy, relevant research results, very practical strategies and good graphics!

**MANAGING BEHAVIOUR IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), by Jim Docking (revised and updated by Michelle MacGrath), is published by David Fulton Publishers, London, 2002, and costs Stg.£16.00.**