Managing Challenging Behaviour

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Chapter 1   Introduction

In general Further Education colleges in the UK, learners have become more challenging in terms of behaviour and teachers have added pressures as the roles and responsibilities of teachers is constantly changing. Teachers are now responsible for monitoring attendance and progress as well as developing individual learning plans ensuring all learners are achieving and meeting all the learning outcomes. In further education learners are expected to be self-directed and should be able to take responsibility for their own learning however, if learners are failing, the teacher is expected to respond and answer to senior management as it has wider implications such as further funding designated to the college.

For the organisation I work for, learners with challenging behaviour are more and more frequently being enrolled at the college, each learner is individually funded by the Local Education Authority with support ranging from £22,000 to £110,000 per year. Due to the funding allocated to individual learners, teachers have increasing pressures to meet targets such as learners completing their courses and passing. Subsequently, classroom behaviour management is a key element that needs to be successful to secure funding by meeting the targets set by the Local Education Authority in return for the enrolment of more learners with challenging behaviour thus more funding for the college. Therefore, identifying a workable and manageable behaviour strategy and policy that can be used consistently in the classroom and across the college is ever more important to get right in order to meet such targets.

In addition to that, is the organisation I work for doing enough to shape the learners and prepare them for adulthood and independence or are the strategies in place just temporary solutions to meet the targets set by the Local Education Authority?

Classroom behaviour management in education has existed since Skinner' 1953 developed seminal work in the use of Operant Conditioning to manage challenging behaviour and to shape learners and their independence. It is argued that positive reinforcement (one of the elements that skinner has identified) has been widely rejected from colleges and universities as it contradicts popular behavioural theory. However, for the organisation I work for positive reinforcement is currently the

strategy to manage challenging behaviour, where learners are rewarded for their good behaviour.

Although positive reinforcement has a vast amount of supporting evidence in the academic and practical field, how can we know it is the most appropriate strategy to be used for certain learners for the organisation I work for? Is there enough evidence for the organisation I work for to boldly implement one strategy to manage behaviour? Does the college have a clear and concise policy on behaviour and is it consistently used?

Research question

When working with several very challenging learners I have yet to see the effects of positive reinforcement and I am concerned that it excludes learners who work well and behave appropriately because it is time intensive. I would like to explore the effects of positive reinforcement in the organisation I work for shaping the question; should positive reinforcement be the only strategy to manage challenging behaviour? The importance of this question is to find out whether positive reinforcement is effective for the organisation I work for or whether there are more successful ways to manage challenging behaviour. Should the organisation I work for use just one behavioural strategy?

Aims and Objectives

- To examine the wider implications of behaviour strategies and policies
- To then draw in and focus on the organisation I work for and explore the success of positive reinforcement
- To identify a tailored strategy to manage challenging behaviour for a class that I teach

Rationale

I have chosen to study this research question to contribute to the policies and procedures of managing challenging behaviour for the organisation I work for. Not only that, I aim to create a tailored strategy that will meet the needs of learners that I teach that is both individualised and collective where all learners are treated equally and fairly. Furthermore, I aim to develop current strategies and make

recommendations to the organisations that will improve existing policies and procedures.

Action research is appropriate for this study as I want to seek practical solutions that will work with my classes in that may develop current positive reinforcement strategies as well as incorporate others strategies as I have yet to see the success of the use of positive reinforcement alone for the learners that I teach.

Definitions and Parameters

Due to the nature of this research question, to define 'challenging behaviour' I have agreed to work with the definition identified by the Learning and Skills Development Agency as the research paper is aimed at the education sector therefore the following definition is most appropriate:

- ➢ behaviour that disrupts routine teaching to an extent that challenges the teacher's resources and the concentration of other learners; this behaviour may not be violent, offensive or dangerous, simply disruptive

- ➢ behaviour that is offensive or violent, interfering with routine activity

- ➢ offending behaviour, including offending in the criminal sense, which bullies or ridicules fellow learners and creates an intimidating environment

- ➢ extreme passivity or non-engagement in learning

- ➢ intermittent patterns of attendance

I aim to limit my study to the learners that I teach and for prospective learners at the organisation that I work for as I believe a localised and tailored approach to this research will be more successful in developing a behaviour strategy than broad research that intends to meet all individuals across various educational organisations.

Chapter 2   Literature Review

Understanding Operant Conditioning

Burrhus Frederick Skinner took a slightly different approach to behavioural theory and believed that the most successful way to understanding behaviour was to observe actions and its consequences (Mcleod, 2007). Skinner was less extreme than John Watson and his works on classical conditioning and the condition of fear where Watson was most notable for the Little Albert experiment which caused great controversy (Beck, Levinson, & Irons, 2009).

Skinners theory was based on the work of Edward Thorndike and in particular his theory on 'law of effect' (Mcleod, 2007). Skinner coined the term 'reinforcement' as the basis for his behaviour theory with the idea of behaviour being repeated therefore reinforced thus strengthening this type of behaviour and behaviour that is not reinforced tends to fade away therefore being weakened (Skinner, 1970). Skinner called this behavioural theory 'Operant Conditioning' and identifies three responses that follow behaviour:

1. **Neutral operants** –responses that neither increase or decrease the likelihood of behaviour being repeated
2. **Reinforcers** – responses that increase the likelihood of behaviour being repeated both positive and negative
3. **Punishers** – responses that decrease the likelihood of behaviour being repeated thus weakening the behaviour

The use of both negative and positive reinforcers strengthens behaviour for example in the classroom learners can be rewarded for good behaviour (positive reinforcement) but also inappropriate behaviour can be reinforced by an unpleasant experience (negative reinforcement) such as an assignment a learner does not want to do. Therefore the consequence of escaping the unpleasant experience ensured that this behaviour would be repeated again (Evertsonn & Weinstein, 2006).

Criticisms of Operant Conditioning

However, one should be aware of the negative reinforcement trap coined by Patterson (1980) which can be present in the classroom, an example of this is if a learner is disruptive or has negative behaviour this may be because the learner wants to avoid the task set in the classroom which they deem to be an unpleasant experience as described by Maag and Kemp (2003). For instance, a learner may not enjoy writing reports although it is compulsory in order to achieve the criteria set in the qualifications framework. When presented with the tasks the learner then behaves inappropriately disrupting others, as a consequence the learner is sent out of the classroom as the behaviour is impacting the class. The teacher has then removed the aversive stimuli (task) therefore negative reinforcement of the inappropriate behaviour may occur since the learner has then avoided the task set even though it could only be temporarily thus leading to a cycle of inappropriate and disruptive behaviour.

Strategies to manage challenging behaviour in the classroom

Positive reinforcement is a common strategy agreed by education establishments to be used in the classroom and in particular has been implemented at the organisation I work for as opposed to using punishments. Positive reinforcement is similarly known as a reward system to practicing teachers who may not understand the behavioural theory behind it called 'Operant Conditioning'. A reward system can be collectively used as a class or individualised simply where one learner with challenging behaviour could be paid £3 if they have attended a class and a bonus of £1 if they have met the learning outcomes identified in the lesson plan. However, one of the issues of such reward systems or positive reinforcement is the effect it may have on learners who behave and learn appropriately and are not part of this individualised reward system. Learners may see the disruptive learner earn rewards for being good yet not receive any rewards themselves for their behaviour even though they are praised and encouraged for their behaviour which can lead to learners feeling they are being treated unfairly.

Nevertheless, punishments in a college or a school are still very powerful as it works for about 95% of students attending public schools (Maag, 1999). However, consequences that have been set out do not work for 5% of learners who display the most challenging behaviour. Due to the nature of the organisation that I work for as a teacher, I expect to meet and I am required to teach the 5% of learners with the most challenging behaviour hence the positive reinforcement strategy being implemented as opposed to any punishment but should this be the only strategy or a combination?.

Wider implications of successfully managing challenging behaviour

Although there is a vast amount of evidence that supports the success of positive reinforcement over punishment and in particular the 5% of learners who are most challenging it seems that there is room for much improvement and it is not as successful as it could be at the organisation I work for.

According to Ofsted (2005) in general Further Education in the UK the most challenging students tend to have EBSD (Emotional Behavioural and Social Difficulties) and the issues they have highlighted is that systems are not always followed across faculties therefore there are inconsistencies in behaviour management and unclear boundaries to those learners with challenging behaviour. Even though there is a vast amount of research on behaviour management the subject is consistently mentioned by teachers as an area which they would like more training in (Maag, 1999). This perhaps reinforces the issue Ofsted have highlighted with the lack of consistencies in the policies created by FE colleges. Ofsted (2005) made a recommendation in the article 'Managing Challenging Behaviour' that there needs to be good quality written guidance for staff such as handbooks to make new staff aware of the expectations of the college and come to terms with the standards quickly. However, Ofsted also noted that thorough inductions need to be carried out and expectations continuously reinforced with a positive ethos maintained.

The Learning Skills and Development Agency (2007) cites Gribble (1993) who identifies the importance of the shift from an authoritative to a democratic approach

and Rogers (1994) who identifies the importance of mutually agreed rights, responsibilities and roles. It is a combination of both of these strategies that can be most useful when working with learners with challenging behaviour such as staff and learners negotiating classroom expectations and rules of behaviour, by this learners and teachers are making their expectations explicit and agreeing openly to what they regard as inappropriate and unacceptable in the classroom.

The changing sector

There are environmental factors to take into consideration, it has been noted by Ofsted (2005) that a high proportion of general further education colleges have few displays of learners work and that buildings are in a poor state or repair with little recreation facilities and impersonal corridors, Ofsted subsequently concluded that it is these *inadequacies* have an adverse effect on students' attitudes and behaviour. One of the reasons for this could be regarded as political as the public sector is going through some drastic changes with many cuts to budgets thus providing further education colleges with constraints and lack of funding to pay for repairs and staff redundancies.

However, it could be argued that there is another reason to why these inadequacies exist since the Ofsted paper was written in 2005 before the downturn in the economy and the cuts that have been presented by the conservative party in 2010/11. Perhaps one of these reasons could be the poor allocation of funds to support a learning environment made by poor decisions by senior managers. Nevertheless, these comments are mere assumptions to why the inadequacies happen as yet there is not sufficient research published to determine why they exist thus suggesting a gap in this research area.

According to the Learning Skills and Development Agency (2007) other factors that are changing the sector are job insecurity, targets to be met and changes in conditions of service thus exacerbating behaviour by lack of time and communication between learners and staff which needs to be addressed in order to successfully implement a behaviour plan/strategy that works.

It can be argued that teachers are paid regardless of whether students display inappropriate behaviours as their workloads are not based on how effective they manage behaviour or how much students learn as identified by Maag (2001). This may be true on a wider scale but for the organisation I work for where learners are individually funded to attend and achieve, teachers have targets to meet and the terms and conditions of funding states that if the student does not pass the course enrolled on then the full funding will not be received (which is always at the end of the academic year).

Conclusion

It is evident from this literature review that a combination of negotiating expectations with learners, positive reinforcement, shifting from authoritative to a democratic approach and organisational policies and strategies that are consistent and explicit are all elements to successfully manage behaviour. This finding questions whether the organisation I work for are meeting these recommendations made by the Learning and Skills Development Agency, Ofsted and influential behaviour theorists and if they are not then following up these recommendations then what can be done to develop current policies and procedures?

However, it is also asks the question whether organisations and individuals such as support staff and teachers as well as senior management understand the full purpose and elements of 'Operant Conditioning' and whether or not further staff training and development needs to be implemented to measure the level of understanding of Skinners behaviour theory.

On a wider scale, it seems that the responsibility of a successful behaviour strategy relays back to the organisation and their policies that are outlined and if that is successfully then naturally the behaviour strategy will be successful. Questions that have arisen from this review are: are teaching staff having appropriate inductions? Are behaviour strategies consistent across faculties? Do organisations offer the opportunity to tailor and incorporate other techniques in order to manage individual

behaviour as well as treating or learners equally? And finally, are teachers given enough time to communicate with learners in order to support the organisations behaviour strategy?

Chapter 3   Methodology

I will be using a range of research methodologies that I have deemed appropriate for the purpose of my action research. The methods are as follows:

Observations

I will be carrying out several observations initially of the interactions and behaviour of staff including mentors and lecturers as well as the learners I have selected to observe who are currently on a reward system (positive reinforcement). This form of research is qualitative with an informal approach, I have decided that this is the most beneficial as an informal approach can provide more truthful insight into the interactions. To minimise the risks of being biased I have decided to observe the various people to gain a balanced view:

1. A challenging learner currently on a reward system
2. The learner's mentor and their relationship/interactions and strategies in place
3. An observation of a teacher and their relationship/interactions and strategies in place

I will record and monitor these observations with an appropriate form that I have created.

Semi structured interviews

I will be carrying out semi structured interviews to collect qualitative data, interviewees will be students, mentors and teachers to find out how they feel about using 'positive reinforcement' and whether or not it can be successful I have chosen semi-structured interviews as they are flexible and I will be able to expand and ask more questions depending on answers. Furthermore, I will be taking an informal approach as I feel that I can get a truthful insight as participants will be relaxed and less pressurised to answer questions.

Class records/incident logs/emails

Since the beginning of the academic year 2010/11 I have been monitoring and logging emails, incident logs and records to ensure I can carry out a detailed analysis of the behaviour management strategy and the use of positive reinforcement. These records can enable me to support research I have found through my other methods that I have identified.

Questionnaires

I will be carrying out questionnaires for teachers and support staff at the organisation I work for to collect quantitative data. The purpose of this is to explore and identify any consistencies or inconsistencies related to managing challenging behaviour. This research can identify areas for further research and/or allow me to make recommendations in terms of the behaviour policy for the organisation I work for.

In addition, with the methodology I have identified I will be following the principle of triangulation which in order to observe all aspects from teachers, support staff and students (Waters-Adams, S, 2006).

Observation of interactions

Analysis of students work/behaviour   **Interview with students**
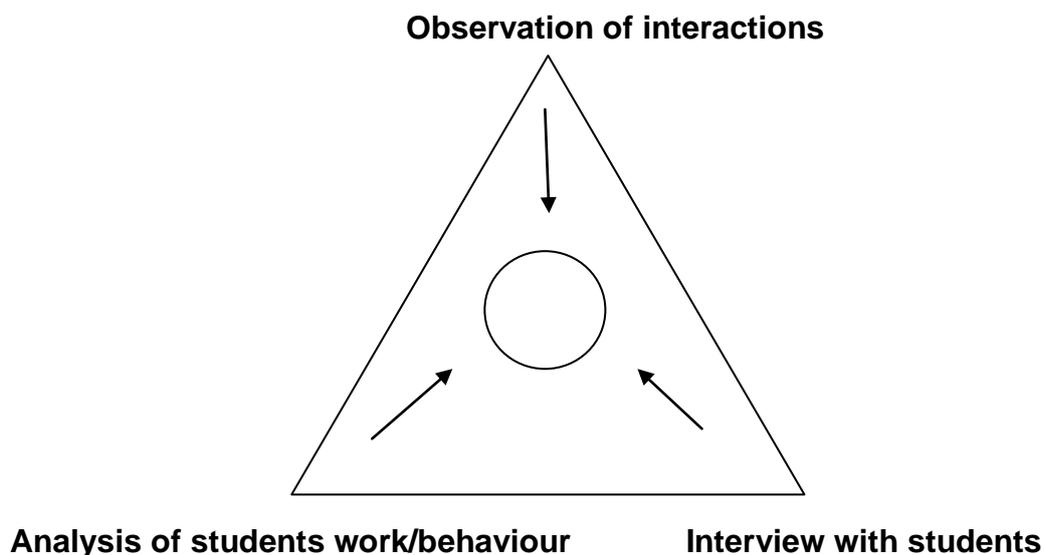
Chapter 4   Results

Questionnaires

15 members of staff both assistants and teachers responded to the following questionnaire:

1. *What is your job title?*
2. *How long have you been working for this organisation?*
3. *Do you know who the mentors are for your learners?*
4. *What is the extension number for the mentor office (Please do not look in the directory)?*
5. *Who is the head of the mentors (Please do not look this up)?*
6. *Can you name the Educational Psychologist?*
7. *Do you know the college's behaviour plan/strategy and where you can access it?*
8. *Do you feel the college provides a safe, positive and appropriate environment for learners (classrooms, corridors, resources, extra-curricular activities)? Please explain your answer.*
9. *Is there a significant difference in the environment for learners and the environment for senior management? Please explain your answer*
10. *Which do you believe will be most successful in managing challenging behaviour:*
    A. *Individualised behaviour strategies*
    B. *collective behaviour strategies*
    C. *Combination of both*
11. *At present, do you know of any consequences of challenging behaviour? Please describe your examples.*
12. *Do you believe 'positive reinforcement' is a successful strategy to manage challenging behaviour?*
13. *Are teachers, management and support staff consistent across the college when addressing challenging behaviour. Please explain your answer*
14. *Are any of your students on a 'reward scheme'? If yes, please describe rewards.*
15. *What improvements can the organisation make to manage challenging behaviour?*

I have split the data into 3 themes in order to analyse:

1. **Access to information**
2. **Environment**
3. **Managing behaviour in the classroom**

1. **Access to information**

Of those asked 10 were teachers and 5 were teaching assistants.

Job role	Length of Service	Do you know the college's behaviour plan/strategy and where you can access it?	Do you know the extension number to the mentors?	Do know who is the head of mentors?
Teaching Assistant	10 years	No	No	No
Teaching Assistant	7 years	No	No	No
Teaching Assistant	7 years	No	No	Yes
Teaching Assistant	10 years	No	No	Yes
Lecturer	7 years	I have a paper copy	No	Yes
Lecturer	10 years	I have seen a paper copy somewhere	No	Yes
Lecturer	20 months	No	Yes	Yes
Lecturer	22 months	No	No	Yes
Lecturer	20 months	I think so	Yes	Yes
Lecturer	10 years	No	No	Yes
Lecturer	10 years	Not sure	No	Yes
Lecturer	3 years	I am not sure we have one	No	Yes
Lecturer	12 years	No	No	Yes
Lecturer	12 years	I have a paper copy	No	Yes
Lecturer	22 months	No	No	Yes

From this data collected I can see that 13/15 members of staff who took part in the questionnaire knew who the head of mentors was and 2 did not know. If communication is successful between teachers, support staff, mentors and senior management then key members of staff should be introduced to one another especially when dealing with challenging behaviour. What is interesting is the 2 participants that did not know were teaching assistants which suggest that they have not been introduced or fully understand the role of the head of mentors.

There didn't seem to be any difference to the length of service regarding information about the college's behaviour policies and plans. As you can see the majority did not know the plan/strategy or where to access it, however, a few participants' highlighted that they have a paper copy or have seen a paper copy. What is more interesting, I asked the Educational Psychologist for a copy of the plan/strategy in which I had a response stating 'she was unsure where it is and will get back in contact with me'.

This result is rather worrying as teaching assistants are there to support students and the teacher, if a serious incident occurred; I worry about their lack of knowledge to take action. Not only that, I found recommendations made by Ofsted and the Learning Skills and Development Agency in my literature review that could rectify this problem.

Environment

When completing the literature review, I found that the environment can determine the behaviours of learners as well as staff; therefore, I thought it was important to explore this in my primary research.
Of the participants' asked, the majority except 3 participants feel the college provides a safe, positive and appropriate environment for learners.
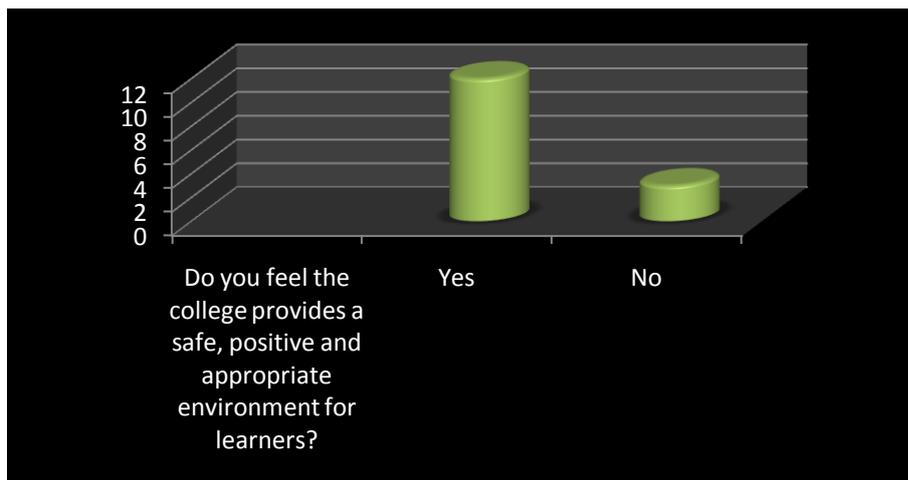

This result is very positive as it eliminates learner environment as part of the problem when managing students with challenging behaviour. However, I asked the participants' if there was a significant difference in the environment for senior managers as opposed to learners, 100% participants agreed it was different and there were comments such as:

'Management area is clean and warm and free of leaking roofs'
'New parts of the college are nice including senior management areas; the old parts (classrooms) are poor in the college'
'Two totally different environments'
'Senior management have the new building, with new equipment'
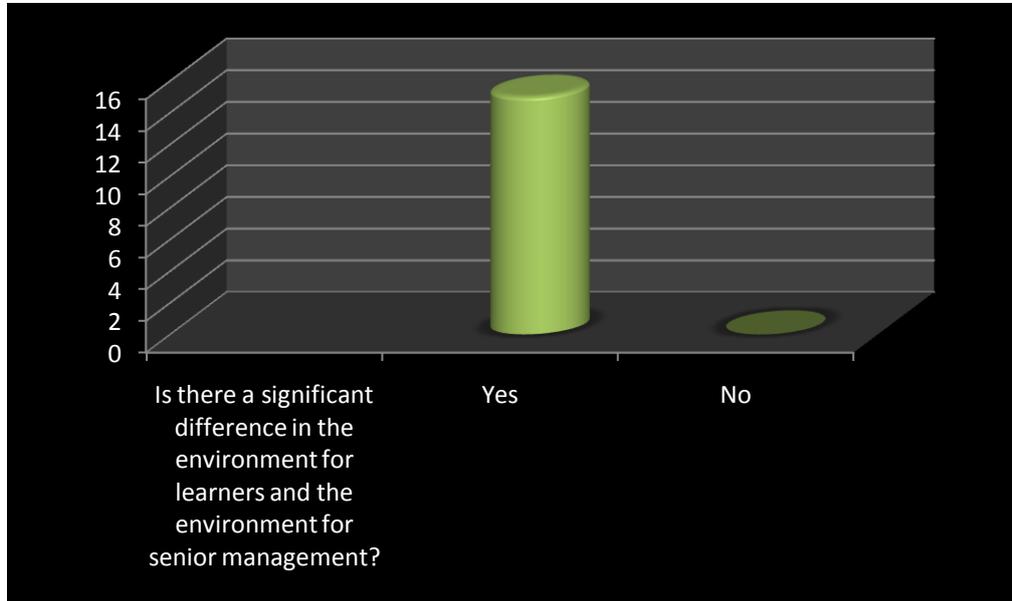
Although the majority believe there is a positive learner environment, the comments about the environment for senior management are very negative. Senior management have a new building (the same size as the older building) which is home to the LRC and 3 classrooms. Many teachers feel that more classrooms should have been made into the plan as in the older part quite often there are two classes in one or you do not have a classroom. Senior management currently have a whole floor, this negativity about the different environments could indirectly result in the management of challenging behaviour with staff feeling like classes and learners not being priority and could lead to low staff morale impacting learners in the classroom.

Managing behaviour in the classroom

My next section is managing challenging behaviour in the classroom, I asked participants whether they thought behaviour strategies should be collective, individualised or a combination. 2/3 of participants selected collective strategies and 1/3 selected both and all believe in positive reinforcement. From this information, it is clear that set boundaries that are consistent throughout the college (9 participants

said it is not consistent) will be successful as a foundation to work by. This suggests one behaviour policy that is explicit can act as a base for managing challenging behaviour and those learners who are extremely challenging will then have an individualised plan developed from the behaviour policy-perhaps in the form of a reward system since all participants agree positive reinforcement works.

Furthermore, a few participants noted that there lack of consequences therefore repeat inappropriate behaviour tends to reoccur. This is questionable and will revisit this in my conclusion.

Semi Structured interviews

I interviewed several students about their thoughts on positive reinforcement and reward systems that are in place for learners who are most challenging.

For	Against	Their advice
You need to bear in mind the type of students and the disability should be approached differently	Can be viewed as discrimination	Encourage when students are doing a good job, let them know when they are not achieving
Students have to be treated differently	encouraging people to be naughty, students' would be furious	'Depends on the type of student but there should be catch up session'
	'I will start being bad'	Take their TV's out of rooms
	You shouldn't be chased to go to the college	See counsellor and mentor' 'the learners with challenging behaviour need to understand why they are there

As you can see from the table I have highlighted important comments from learners at the college I work for. There were mixed reviews overall as a few students made comments that students should be treated differently according to their disability (in terms of reward systems) whereas learners with opposing views suggested they may start being bad as they don't reap any rewards for being good. I asked the students what advice they would give and there seems to be various consequences such as 'taking TV's out of rooms' and attending 'catch up sessions'.

From this information, it is clear that there should be some form of individualised behaviour plan as well as a college wide plan. Not only that, but there should be consequences when behaviour plans are not being met where currently there isn't it is just loss of rewards.

Observations

The following document is a reward system put in place for a learner that I teach with challenging behaviour, this reward system is individualised and the learner is paid where the amount is determined by the tasks completed.

I have been observing the learner on the current reward system as well as interactions/relationships with the learners mentor and other teachers. From my initial observations with the other teacher, I found that what he regarded as appropriate behaviour is not what I agree with or implement in my classroom. I found that it is acceptable for the learner to swear and to leave the class one hour early for football, the learner did not display as much inappropriate behaviour as he did with me but he did not achieve any of the learning outcomes set by the teacher, in which the teacher had not picked up on and signed his timetable anyway. This immediately identified inconsistencies in managing behaviour which could essentially impact the learners behaviour overall, if consistent strategies were in use perhaps it would be more structured and clear for the learner therefore behave more appropriately.

When observing the learners relationship with the mentor it seemed very positive, however, I feel that the learner does not inform the mentor of the whole truth of what

happens in the classroom as on several occasions the learner had twisted his story. Overall, both the learner and mentor have a good relationship where the mentor is clearly approachable.

I observed the learner for the first week of the reward system in my lessons, in which he performed outstandingly and completed all the learning outcomes and was being less abusive towards members of staff and students. This was very positive and I congratulated the learner, I then asked the learner, will he keep up the good behaviour in which he replied 'only if they keep paying me', I asked and if they didn't pay you 'then I won't bother'. When hearing this, I felt very disappointed as he proved that he could concentrate, work hard and act appropriately and it was at this point I felt that this can only be a temporary measure. The following week, I intended to observe the learner, however he has not attended any lessons therefore has not been paid according to his reward system.

From my observations, I have found that the learner had an incentive to attend lessons and complete work but when he decided not to attend he did not lose anything as he never had the money in the first place. Furthermore, I think it is fair to make an assumption that he could be testing boundaries as he could be thinking 'will they increase the rewards?' Although he was being paid to attend he was not losing anything for not attending and I am convinced it would be different if he had to pay for not attending.

These observations are slightly worrying as further education is a choice for young people and mature adults to better themselves by gaining new skills and knowledge or even changing career direction. The actions of the above learner somewhat defeats the purpose of further education.

Reward System

As part of your placement at college we will:

- Offer you support from teachers, mentors and care, including teaching, emotional support and monitoring of hygiene and night time routines
- Support you to manage your feelings and behaviour
- Support you during a weekly meeting to discuss your week

- Help you to stay healthy and safe
- Make clear all the policies and procedures of the college
- Maintain regular contact with your parents

To work with us to make your placement successful you will be expected to:

- Attend all mentor sessions with your named mentors
- Ask staff for help if you are having any difficulties or feeling unhappy
- Be polite to all staff
- Take part fully in your lessons

    o Attend your lessons on time
    o Follow the classroom rules regarding appropriate behaviour
    o Do as the teacher asks in lessons

- Take showers regularly as stated in your care plan
- Hand in your Laptop at 11.00pm each evening, unless you have earned reward time on a Friday or Saturday
- Attend your weekly meetings on Monday at 1.15 pm in office and e mail updates home with mentors

    o It is important for you and college staff to share and celebrate your positive achievements
    o It is also important for you to tell us your thoughts about any difficulties you may be experiencing
    o You have to commit to solving any problems to help make your time at college successful

This agreement will be reviewed regularly and support strategies will be withdrawn when they are no longer necessary. This will be because you are successfully achieving the stated goals, and taking the next step to managing yourself successfully independently.

Signed:
College staff:
Date
Reward Structure.

Personal care:

You have agreed showers on a Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

Your shower on Tuesday will earn an ELP on site for Friday night and the opportunity to keep your laptop to 1.00am

Your shower on Thursday will earn an ELP on site for Saturday and the opportunity to keep your laptop to 1.00am.

Your shower on Saturday will earn group trip out to the local social club up to 9.30pm. After that time you will need to be supported by staff.

Sleeping patterns

You are required to hand in your laptop at 11.00pm each evening unless you have earned an ELP (Friday and Saturday only) and then be relaxing and getting ready for sleep in your room.

If you have been unable to meet this agreement by Friday 17th June, your parents have agreed to take your laptop home.

Attendance at lessons and other timetabled activities:

You have 36 scheduled activities/tasks during the week.

This includes all your lessons including enrichment, 2 mentor sessions, a weekly meeting, a room tidy every evening at 7.00 pm and the requirement to hand in your laptop.

For each of these activities successfully completed you will earn 50p.

This means that you can earn £3.50 - £4.00 each day, a total of £18 per week.

If you manage to achieve 80% or above of your weekly achievements you will earn a bonus £7 each week, this will be reviewed and agreed at your weekly meeting on a Monday at 1.15 pm.

These things are to help you stay healthy and safe, to ensure you meet the requirements of the college and funders, to help you achieve your academic and social goals and to help re-establish a good sleep pattern.

All these things have been discussed and agreed with you, your parents, social worker and connexions.

We will meet again at 9.00am 6th July with your parents to review how things have gone.

Weekly timetable.

Date:

	9.00		10.30	11.30		1.30		3.00	4.00		7.00pm	Laptop	Reward issued
Monday	Music		Music		Wkly mtg 1.15	Media		Media	Media		Room Tidy		
Tuesday	Music		Music			Media		Media	Media		Room Tidy		
Wednesday	Media		Media	Media		Enrichment		Enrichment			Room Tidy		
Thursday			Mentor	Personal fitness		Media		Media	Media		Room Tidy		
Friday	Maths		Mentor	English		Enrichment		Enrichment			Room Tidy		

Chapter 5   Conclusion

During this research project I have learnt about features of action research and how to implement features of action research into a project. Action research is completed by action; action taken that can solve a problem that a practitioner can encounter through his/her work. Action research is a reflective progressive process that finds a solution and can be in the form of two aspects: to understand the practice better and to sort out a problem and what is essential is for both approaches to be 'honest' and 'rigorous' (Waters-Adams, 2006). The purpose is to solve problems and improve the way we practice or address issues.

There are four steps to the action research cycle: Plan, Act, Collect and Reflect (O'Brien, 1999).

Fig 1.
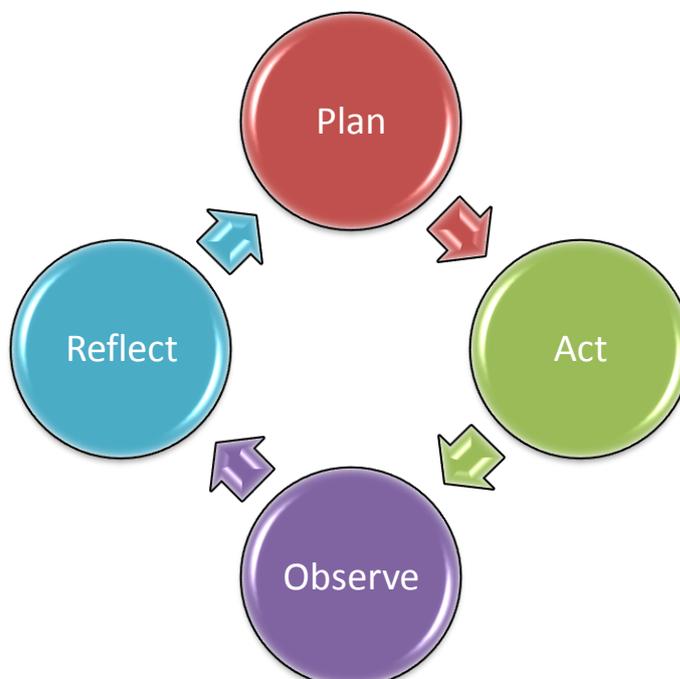
The purpose of planning is to identify the problem or issue to be addressed and plan to find ways to act upon this problem. Once planning is complete you then implement an action that you have decided upon where you then observe to collect your findings. Findings can be collected in the form of monitoring records, observations,

questionnaires and interviews. Once evidence has been collated it is then at this point that you study your findings and reflect upon what has been found out. This enables you to analyse and address solutions and even start the action research cycle again if the problem has not been resolved. In teaching, action research is the most appropriate since teaching is practical and offers an opportunity to address issues in various ways to find a solution.

Action research is a continuous process and needs to be carried out as the project is happening. The implication for action research is that it is time consuming and as it is participatory it may be difficult for people to join in. I found with the questionnaires that I sent out, only a small percentage replied, I feel that this is because of the lack of understanding of action research therefore are unlikely to participate. In addition, the final implication is that action research needs to start off by answering small questions in order to address the wider issues that have been identified in your practice, this suggests that if you are not used to carrying out research and it has not been carried out at the organisation that you work for then it will take a very long time to build up an effective research cycle according to the model identified to address the wider issues.

Ethical and Political Considerations

As my action research focuses on developing a consistent behaviour strategy I have carried out interviews, observations and questionnaires. Participants for my questionnaires and the organisation that I work for are to remain anonymous due to negative consequences depending on the outcome of the questionnaires filled in by participants. Not only that, I wish for the author's name (my name) to remain anonymous too once it is published online, the reason for this is because the nature of the project highlights possible failings in the policies and procedures at the organisation I work for and if a member of staff came across this paper then they will know what organisation I work for and I may receive negative consequences from senior management and the mentors department with regards to the behaviour strategy.

In addition to that, I have guaranteed confidentiality of all participants and the organisation; these include students that I have carried out semi-structured interviews with, meaning that I will not disclose any details such as course, age, college and names which will allow participants to respond honestly.

Furthermore, all participants' are voluntary and fully understand the purpose of the project. In terms of the reward system included in the research, there are no details in which any organisation or individual can recognise in order to keep it anonymous and confidential.

In terms of political considerations, I have not disclosed detailed information about the funding of individual learners and a breakdown of the where the budget is allocated although it could be seen as a key aspect of the wider implications to managing challenging learners. Funding is distributed by the Local Education Authority and it could be detrimental to further funding if further information is disclosed as it will break the LEA's confidentiality agreement.

Conclusions and Recommendations

My research question was: Should positive reinforcement be the only strategy to manage challenging behaviour?

From the research gathered the answer to this is no. However, it is not as straight forward as it seems with regards strategies to managing behaviour. Firstly, there are wider issues to address for the organisation that I work for. From my questionnaires, it is clear that there is no consistency in managing behaviour and more importantly accessing information on the organisations policies and procedures that even one of the educational psychologists struggled to respond to. This is one of the recommendations that I intend to make: an explicit and robust behaviour plan/strategy that is accessible must be created. This appears to be a top down issue to address and once this has been implemented that it lays a foundation for all teachers and support staff to work from.

Furthermore, this recommendation is also in line with the research that I found when carrying out a literature review, for instance in my literature review I concluded that a combination of negotiating expectations with learners, positive reinforcement and organisational policies and strategies that are consistent and explicit are all elements

to successfully manage behaviour which also supported the recommendations made by Ofsted and LSDA.

In terms of positive reinforcement, there was excellent feedback from teachers, teaching assistants, observations and students therefore positive reinforcement is clearly effective in classrooms however, to what extent was questionable. In addition, from my action research it is clear that it should not be the only strategy and that there should be consequences when inappropriate behaviour is being carried out as identified by my semi structured interviews. In terms of a behaviour plan/strategy 2/3 of participants' selected collective strategies and 1/3 selected both collective and individualised. This supports my recommendation of a robust behaviour plan to work as a foundation to manage challenging behaviour that is consistent. In terms of individualised strategies this supports the organisations implementation of rewards systems for certain students, however it was questioned that there was nothing to lose if the learner did not complete the tasks to gain rewards.

My second recommendation is to tweak individualised strategies such as reward systems, such as if a learner earns £3 for attending lessons and doesn't earn £3 for not attending, perhaps the learner should pay £3 for not attending as the learner has nothing to lose in the current reward system. The reason for this, is that many students in the semi-structured interviews carried out made comments that they will start being 'naughty' to gain rewards as they gain nothing for behaving appropriately and turning up to class on time. As reward systems are known to other students it could have negative impacts if there are no consequences to inappropriate behaviour.

If this seems too hard hitting (a learner might not be able to pay), perhaps if the learner does not meet the learning outcomes set in class time because of inappropriate behaviour then they are required to attend a compulsory 'catch up session' which is managed by a learning mentor in which the learner must complete all learning outcomes in this time. This counteracts the 'negative reinforcement trap' as identified in my literature review as a learner maybe disruptive in class to avoid doing the assignment, however, the learner will have to attend a compulsory 'catch up' session as a consequence to complete the assignment in which the learner tried to avoid. I feel this strategy will be very effective; nevertheless, a trial period will have to be carried out to measure its success and whether it should be permanently implemented.

In terms of environment, I intended to gather information of opinions of teaching and support staff at the college. I chose to investigate this as I found in my literature review that environment can impact behaviour of students. I found that staff believed the college promoted a safe and positive environment, however, I found that staff were not happy that the organisation has 'two totally different environments', Many comments about were made about lack of classrooms (quite often there are two classes sharing one room or there is no classroom at all) whilst senior management have a new building with only 3 classrooms available to teach in. There are a lot of wasted rooms where offices to cater for one person are the same size as classrooms which could essentially be doubled up. The reason why they cannot be used is because there is no disabled access if the lifts breakdown or if there is a fire. My recommendation to the organisation is to ensure that it is accessible to disabled learners so that rooms can be available to use as classrooms. This negative feeling that staff have about these different environments can indirectly impact behaviour of learners, staff may have low morale which is picked up by students.

Evaluation

For this action research, I tried to remain balanced when carrying out questionnaires, interviews and observations. I felt that my approach when carrying out my action research was very good, I feel that I have excellent communication skills and I was able to create a natural environment where participants didn't feel any pressure and were confident they could respond honestly.

In terms of my research, it is not quite complete; I have only answered small questions in which I gathered information from staff and students at the organisation I work for. There are several cycles of action research to go through:

- Implement an accessible behavior plan/strategy that all staff and students are aware of

- Implement individualized strategies where there are consequences when tasks have not been completed

- Trial 'catch up' sessions to find out whether it can be effective in managing challenging behavior as well as meeting targets set by the college, funders and social workers etc.

In addition to that, I feel that the questions I asked for my questionnaire could have been better, I posed open questions allowing respondents to write in explanations and their views but I also think that I needed more closed questions as quite often I received answers such as 'I think so' which meant I struggled to complete a statistical analysis on that question as 'I think so' could be open to interpretation.

Moreover, I found with action research that there are many constraints such as time. If I had more time and analysed the behaviour of one student over a 2 year period following the action research cycle, I feel that I could have had stronger support in order to follow up my recommendations.

I plan to carry on with my action research in order to successfully find a strategy to manage challenging behaviour as I feel that I can improve on the questions that I posed, this would require me to carry out research into questionnaire design and find out the most appropriate questions to ask. Furthermore, I feel that I could have benefitted from facilitating a focus group where mentors, students, support staff and teaching staff could attend and discuss their views on a reward system currently in place. I feel that this could have created a debate and I would have got some useful research from this therefore making my research more viable than it is now.

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