The root of inconsistency in schools; its role in low level disruption and low level disruption mismanagement; and the only sustainable solution.

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Abstract

This report follows a series of practical studies by the author of this report which now comprise part 1 of the Return to Learning strategy. The studies were carried out over an eight month period in a North London state school during 2015/2016 and were based on an acceptance that causes of disagreements between teacher and student existed as a naturally occurring and, in the main, justifiable response to inconsistent actions by the teacher which traditional *student fault* sanctions had failed to address. The most frequently occurring inconsistent action by the teacher stemmed from attempts to resolve unpredictable and unreliable outcomes of traditional methods of identifying student fault.

During the practical study it was found that 91% of inconsistencies that led to - or were caused by - low level disruption events such as behavioural disagreements between teacher and student(s) were removed from lessons through the use of quickly and consistently administered low impact sanctions with a single high level deterrent. During this time students completed work almost one-third faster (31%) than previous years across KS3, with an average increase in attainment level of 0.76 (level 1-8 system) compared to a previous year 0.46 in mixed ability groups (66% increase). In all test group cases students requested the ongoing use of the study as a low level disruption deterrent/solution until low level disruption was no longer deemed a threat to teaching and learning after an average period of seven weeks in use.

This report concludes by providing a full outline of the key principles behind part 1 of the now published Return to Learning strategy for preventing and reversing inconsistency that leads to low level disruption in classrooms.

This report comprises the research used in the formulation of the Return to Learning low level disruption management strategy, part 1.

RTL Return to Learning

Introduction:

In the introduction to Part 1 of our course we describe how traditional behaviour management strategies - intended to resolve low level disruption - create ideal environments for making it worse. The aim of this report is to show how inconsistency in existing behaviour management strategies - including discussion/counselling based approaches that invite consistency - is a significant cause of low level disruption in schools. It aims to show how that inconsistency can be reversed; how low level disruption can be removed from classrooms as a result of this reversal; and how the outcomes of a school's academic and pastoral programmes can benefit considerably from this removal.

Only by observing consistent demonstrations of good behavioural expectations - every minute of every lesson - can students move from low value behaviour types (such as avoidance and deflection) that cause and sustain low level disruption to high value behaviour types (such as acceptance and compliance) that create and sustain a much higher level of learning.

This is achievable in any school, regardless of existing Ofsted judgement.

Contents:

Fair use disclaimer
The author's use of all research sources in this report is transformative, educational and narrative in nature and does not seek to make use of, or benefit from, the 'heart' of any of the publications cited.

1 Defining low level disruption in classrooms

Taking the definition of 'disruption' as 'disturbance or problems which interrupt an event, activity, or process', examples of low level disruption in classrooms are defined in Ofsted's 'Below the radar' report [1] into low level disruption as:

> 'Talking unnecessarily or chatting
> Calling out without permission
> Being slow to start work or follow instructions
> Showing a lack of respect for each other and staff
> Not bringing the right equipment
> Using mobile devices inappropriately.'

This list is added to in a report [2] carried out by Policy Exchange, an educational charity and think tank:

> 'Leaving a lesson without permission
> Talking over a teacher
> Not doing work set'.

An article written by Thomas Rogers for the TES helps put both into context [3]:

> 'In teaching, you can get the class from hell, the class from heaven or the many classes in-between, but all of them have the capacity to master the art of low-level disruption. They slip "under the radar" of grand sanctions, they never do "enough" to warrant a class report or for parents to be called in, but every lesson with them is really hard work.
> It's little conversations here and there when you're talking: too many for you to deal with in the moment. It's shouting out when you're trying to explain, not from one or two but from nearly all students, meaning warnings are scattered around the class rather than targeted at any one individual. It feels like they get away with it every lesson and you just go away feeling shattered for following the school disciplinary policy to the letter.'

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1 *Below the radar: low-level disruption in the country's classrooms,* Ofsted (2014) see p.4
2 '*Persistent poor behaviour in schools and what can be done about it.*' Williams, J., (2018) see p.20
3 https://www.tes.com/news/low-level-disruption-6-ways-stop-rot

That other sources identify a watered down version - this one by government authorised providers of training to Early Career Teachers (ECT) [4] - introduces the level to which inconsistency can be seen at the highest level of education management:

> *"Ms Silva feels she can secure positive behaviour from most pupils most of the time. However, she occasionally finds a few pupils are not following her instructions or are being disruptive in subtle ways. For example, having whispered conversations during a silent task, or turning around to talk to others when she is not looking. Ms Silva worries that, over time, others will begin to follow suit. How can she address this low-level disruption?"* ('Teaching Challenge' for Low Level Disruption from the 'Ambition Institute''s Core Induction Programme of the Early Career Framework)

For the purposes of this report Ofsted's findings - which draw on evidence from 'inspections of nearly 3,000 maintained schools and academies between January and early July 2014' and 'includes evidence from 28 unannounced inspections of schools where behaviour was previously judged to require improvement' (Ofsted, p.4) - are deemed the more reliable reflection of low level disruption at a national level.

2 Problems caused in classrooms by low level disruption

Ofsted's report describes 'Close to three quarters of those secondary teachers surveyed said that low-level disruption was a major problem, having medium or high impact on learning.' (Ofsted, para. 10.) A YouGov survey, included in the Ofsted report findings, puts a figure on the outcome of this impact at 38 days of lost learning time per year (Ofsted, p.4).

A breakdown of this impact is provided by Policy Exchange:

> 'At its most straightforward, [low level disruption] directs a teacher's time and attention away from teaching and onto dealing with bad behaviour. It distracts pupils and deflects concentration from the task in hand.
> Teachers find dealing with low level disruption and disorder time consuming and exhausting.
> Teachers find being prevented from teaching to be a frustrating experience.' (Williams, J., 2018, p.33)

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4 https://www.early-career-framework.education.gov.uk/ambition/ambition-institute/self-directed-study-materials/1-behaviour/5-low-level-disruption/

A report by the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) highlights the disruption caused from a child's perspective [5]:

> '"The teachers have got to go and sort them out, and then you have to sit there and you're not learning. Some people are doing it to get attention, and while the teacher is going over to help them we lose out..."' (p.17)

It is likely that this 'sorting out' - usually through some form of verbal counsel - accounts for as much if not more time being taken away from teaching and learning than the low level disruption event itself.

These occurrences are persistent. 'Three quarters of teachers say they commonly experience disruption in their own school' (Williams, p.6), a situation which leads to wider reaching problems for the teaching profession:

> 'Persistent disruption has a negative impact on teacher retention. Almost two-thirds of teachers are currently, or have previously, considered leaving the profession because of poor pupil behaviour.
> Persistent disruption has a negative impact on teacher recruitment. Almost three-quarters of the teachers we polled agreed that potential teachers are being put off joining the profession by the fear of becoming victim to poor behaviour from pupils.' (Williams, J., 2018, p.6)

This in turn poses wider reaching problems for society:

> 'Not dealing effectively with low level disruption and disorder may have further consequences for the children concerned who are not taught appropriate boundaries. At worst, children who are not challenged when they demonstrate low level disorder may come to be involved with more serious, potentially criminal, bad behaviour.' (Williams, J., 2018, p.33)

In the next section we look at how schools are equipped to prevent, manage and resolve low level disruption.

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5 *Office of the Children's Commissioner: Children and young peoples views on education policy* Chamberlain, Tamsin and Golden, Sarah and Bergeron, Caroline (2011)

3 How common school systems currently manage low level disruption

Nelson, M.F. (2002) breaks down five school disciplinary strategies [6]. Within these examples Canter's 'Assertive Discipline' (1987), as summarised on the 'Assertive Discipline' entry [7] below, would appear to reflect the aspirations of most secondary school behaviour management strategies:

'Usage:
- Dismiss the thought that there is any acceptable reason for misbehaviour.
- Decide which rules (4 or 5 are best) you wish to implement in your classroom.
- Determine negative consequences for noncompliance.
- Determine positive consequences for appropriate behaviour.
- List the rules on the board along with the positive and negative consequences.
- Have the students write the rules and take them home to be signed by the parents and return an attached message explaining the program and requesting their help.
- Implement the program immediately.'

Additionally the 'principle teachings' of Canter's assertive discipline are also recorded:

- 'I will not tolerate any student stopping me from teaching.
- I will not tolerate any student preventing another student from learning.
- I will not tolerate any student engaging in any behaviour that is not in the student's best interest and the best interest of others.
- Most importantly, whenever a student chooses to behave appropriately, I will immediately recognise and reinforce such behaviour.'

In addition to this, a list of legally enforceable negative consequences for 'non-compliance' is provided by the government [8]:

- 'a telling-off
- a letter home
- removal from a class or group
- confiscating something inappropriate for school , eg mobile phone or MP3 player
- detention.'

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6 '*A Qualitative Study of Effective School Discipline Practices: Perceptions of Administrators, Tenured Teachers, and Parents in Twenty Schools*', Nelson, M.F. (2002), see p18-23.
7 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assertive_discipline
8 https://www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions

To this the author adds from UK experience:

- internal behaviour reports
- inclusion (alternative provision) for persistent offenders
- 'zero tolerance'
- verbal warnings prior to any of the above
- procedures for recognising and reinforcing positive behaviour such as the 'Establish Maintain Restore' (EMR) framework. [9]

Schools will also have dedicated staff responsible for the overall management of pupil behaviour in the school (e.g. across key stages and year groups) and ways of recording data for sharing between staff, parents and relevant bodies external to the school.

These measures combined - as both preventative and restorative strategies - appear to show schools being well equipped to deal with low level disruption. However, two final examples describe the extremes between which much of the above is interpreted:

> 'A study undertaken in primary schools that advocated ignoring poor behaviour. [10] in which Professor Tamsin Ford, of the University of Exeter Medical School, summarised: "If the teacher lets go of the tug of war rope and just ignores it then there's no fun carrying on and it will just stop."'

> '[A secondary school describing its 'behaviour for learning' policy as] purposely complex, with many layers. Each layer is another opportunity to address and then change behaviours for the better.' [11]

How well staff interact with such wide ranging measures is discussed within the next section.

4 How effectively do these systems manage low level disruption?

That 'One fifth of the teachers surveyed indicated that they ignored low-level disruption and just 'tried to carry on', (Ofsted, 2014, p.5) implies that some of those systems have failed completely.

9 EEF: EMR (Establish Maintain Restore) from https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/ Publications/Behaviour/EEF_Improving_behaviour_in_schools_Report.pdf (p.10)
10 https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/teachers-behaviour-classroom-students-mental-health-school-exeter-university-school-children-a8451656.html
11 School site available on request.

How such failure has occurred is likely to be due in large part to inconsistency which is reported at all levels of education management from teacher training all the way through to school leadership:

> 'Over half of the teachers surveyed said that their school's policy on behaviour was helpful, but only around a third said that it was applied consistently across the school. Inconsistency in applying behaviour policies also annoys pupils and parents. For too many pupils, having a calm and orderly environment for learning is a lottery. Four-fifths of the parents surveyed wanted the school to communicate its expectations around behaviour clearly and regularly. Many parents wanted a more formal and structured environment in the school that would give their children clear boundaries for their behaviour.' (Ofsted, 2014, p.5)

> 'Behaviour management policies are interpreted and applied inconsistently. A majority of schools have behaviour management policies in place but teachers say that in relation to many incidents of disruption, the consequences specified are mostly applied occasionally, rarely or never.
> Initial teacher training leaves many new teachers unprepared to manage pupil behaviour. 44 per cent of teachers polled said their training did not prepare them well for managing pupil behaviour. 40 per cent of teachers said that they felt unable to access adequate ongoing training on behaviour management.
> Teachers are not always confident they will have the support of senior staff when they discipline a pupil. Only 27 per cent of teachers polled claimed to be very confident that they would have the support of senior staff in their school. A majority of teachers expressed reluctance to talk about behaviour management difficulties in case other members of staff thought their teaching ability was poor.
> Teachers are not always confident that they will have the support of parents when they discipline a pupil. Only 23 per cent of teachers polled felt parents fully respected a teacher's authority to discipline their child.' (Williams, J., 2018, p.6)

> 'Ofsted inspection reports on schools with behaviour that is less than good often highlight the fact that standards of discipline vary within the school. This is partly because some teachers lack the skills to enforce consistently high standards of behaviour. However, some of the teachers surveyed laid the blame on their senior leaders. These teachers believed that some leaders are not high profile enough around the school or do not ensure that the school's behaviour policies are applied consistently.' (Ofsted, 2014, p.6)

> 'Three in 10 secondary teachers said that their headteacher supported them in managing poor behaviour.' (Ofsted, para. 27)

'Children and young people were generally more positive about their teachers' ability to help and support pupils, than their ability to deal with disruptive behaviour.' (OCC, p.7)

'In terms of teachers' ability to deal with poor behaviour, children and young people were again more likely to report their teachers doing this 'sometimes' rather than 'always'. Almost a quarter felt that their teachers were 'always' good at getting their class to behave (23%) and, when pupils do disrupt learning, teachers take action (23%) and about a further half felt they 'sometimes' did these things (55 and 54% respectively). Disruption to learning from other pupils was a concern - at least 'sometimes' - to about four in five (82%) children and young people, reflecting the observations from focus group participants … that they did not like other pupils disrupting their lessons.' (OCC, p.19)

How this inconsistency might affect school operations is discussed in the next section.

5 Understanding inconsistency and the outcomes of inconsistency

Eric Holtzclaw, a company strategist writing for Inc.com, highlights five important reasons for consistency, each of which can be applied to school life: [12]

1 Consistency allows for measurement.
2 Consistency creates accountability.
3 Consistency establishes your reputation.
4 Consistency makes you relevant.
5 Consistency maintains your message.

Joseph Folkman, a behavioural statistician, studied the performance of 100,000 business leaders rated on five items to compile a 'Consistency Index' [13]. Each can be be applied to classroom/ school leaders:

'A consistent person:
Is a role model and sets a good example.
Avoids saying one thing and doing another.
Honours commitments and keeps promises.

12 https://www.inc.com/eric-v-holtzclaw/consistency-power-success-rules.html
13 Joseph Falkman: https://www.forbes.com/sites/joefolkman/2019/10/17/your-inconsistency-is-more-noticeable-than-you-think/?sh=83135453d507

Follows through on commitments.

Willing to go above and beyond what needs to be done.

This is the kind of person that is predictable and reliable. Others would make bets on this person because their performance is consistent.'

Folkman continues with a list of effects that inconsistency causes:

'Their judgment was not trusted in making decisions.

They were not trusted by their teammates.

They did not follow through on objectives and tended to get distracted.

Often failed to achieve agreed-upon goals.

Resisted taking steps to improve.

They didn't co-operate well with others.

They failed to anticipate problems until it was too late.

In general, these people seemed to be perceived as not caring about outcomes at work and lazy about their job in general.'

A final statement indicates the low tolerances that enable inconsistency to spread:

'It appeared that a little bit of inconsistency had a profoundly negative effect on almost every other competency and behaviour.'

We can now look at how far-reaching these examples might be in schools.

Inconsistencies in everyday patterns of school rules (Thornberg, 2007) [14] describes the difficulties in establishing behavioural expectations:

' … implicit rules, i.e., unarticulated supplements or exceptions, can, at least in part, explain inconsistencies in teachers' efforts to uphold explicit school rules … Nevertheless, rule inconsistency and unarticulated implicit rules appear to create rule diffusion, which, in turn, creates a prediction loss among students. They cannot always predict what will be appropriate behaviour in particular situations, and how teachers will react to their behaviour.' (p.2 abstract)

The education journalist Laura McInerney describes the impact of this difficulty [15]:

'Three amazing (and unexpected) things happened from this process: First, the initial question on the sheet asked pupils to write why they were in detention. I reckon about 60%

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14 https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:18289/FULLTEXT01.pdf
15 https://lauramcinerney.com/ms-mcinerneys-book-of-consequences-detention-system/

of kids said something different to the reason why I had put them on detention. Sometimes they even admitted things I hadn't seen. As someone who prided myself on being a clear communicator I found this disheartening, and was always glad of an opportunity to put students right on the reason for a detention as, in the heat of being told off, it does seem that students stop hearing or we stop explaining clearly – maybe a bit of both.'

Thornberg confirms variations on these themes with school policies also introducing inconsistency:

'One of the teachers tells me that, as a consequence of lack of time, she now and then forgets to manage conflicts that she has told the students she would do later. Some teachers also report that they sometimes experience conflicts among values in different situations, are critical of some of the rules in the school, and experience a conflict between subject teaching and morally educating the students. They also talked about temporally personal deficits, e.g., that they sometimes are tired, off balance, or have a 'bad day'. It is very likely that all these factors can, in part, explain why teachers at times behave inconsistently regarding students' rule transgressions' (Thornberg, 2007, p.13)

Citing Duke, D. L. (1978) *Adults can be discipline problems too! Psychology in the Schools*, (522-528) Thornberg provides two further areas of concern not previously mentioned:

' … (c) insensitivity to students, e.g., exhibiting little patience for students' concerns and the 'teach the best, forget the rest' philosophy ... and (f) inadequate administration of disciplinary policies. Several teachers in the study admitted to being inconsistent, and justified their behaviour by saying that there were too many school rules for any individual to enforce effectively. Nearly 70% of them acknowledged that they actually did not know how many rules there were.' (p.4)

These examples (c and f) in particular introduce the cyclical nature of education: (c) brings into question the validity of the modern day example referred to in [10] (ignoring low level disruption) and (f) similarly with [11] (purposely complex behaviour management systems). Between staff trained in different generations - particularly between those in positions of responsibility and their mentees - a new strain of systemic inconsistency might be created. This recycling of ideas that have been previously discounted indicates a scarcity of new ideas.

However inconsistency is caused it is clear that Folkman's requirement to 'honour commitments and keep promises' - whether between a school and its employees, or teaching staff and their students - struggles to be met.

Though focused at a higher level than schools, the importance of 'honour[ing] commitments and keep[ing] promises' is reflected in *Deterrence in the Twenty-First Century*, Nagin, D.S. (2013) [16] , the contents of which are equally applicable to rule breaking generally:

> 'The evidence in support of the deterrent effect of the certainty of punishment is far more consistent than that for the severity of punishment. However, the evidence in support of certainty's effect pertains almost exclusively to apprehension probability. Consequently, the more precise statement is that certainty of apprehension, not the severity of the ensuing legal consequence, is the more effective deterrent.'

It would appear from the examples seen so far that transgressions are not only going undetected and unpunished in schools, they are also, as a result, not being deterred.

It follows, therefore, that any previously held assertion that students *alone* are responsible for low level disruption in schools can be dismissed.

In the following section we look at the effects of this inconsistency on students.

6 Dangerous outcomes for students

Perhaps the most concerning aspect of the inconsistency highlighted so far is explained through the very commonly occurring learning process (due to its not being easily switched off) of observational learning theory [17]:

> ' ... learning that occurs through observing the behaviour of others. It is a form of social learning which takes various forms, based on various processes. In humans, this form of learning seems to not need reinforcement to occur, but instead, requires a social model such as a parent, sibling, friend, or teacher with surroundings.'

Narrowing down this broad statement to a school context, *The Nature and Functions of Classroom Rules,* Boorstrom. R. (2014) [18] identifies what students might learn through their interaction with classroom rules:

> ' … classroom rules are not merely the instrumental tools of management they are often taken to be, but rather that they are structures of meaning used by teachers and

16 https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/670398
17 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Observational_learning

students to make sense of the world. Two functions of classroom rules are examined: how they embody a way of life and how they shape instruction and subject matter. As students embrace rules (or reject them, for that matter), they engage not only in short-term behaviours but also in far-reaching ways of thinking about themselves and the world.'

At this point it is worthwhile establishing *what* 'sense' students might be making of the world in light of such inconsistent systems, as well as the kind of 'far-reaching ways of thinking about themselves and the world' which might ensue.

Citing *The Contribution of Parenting Practices and Parent Emotion Factors in Children at Risk for Disruptive Behaviour Disorders*, Jill Ceder provides an introduction [19]:

> 'Inconsistency can be confusing for children. If one day mom yells about something a child does, but the next day she tolerates it, the child learns that adult responses are not predictable. This can cause children to develop aggression and hostility, or complacency and passivity.
> When children face unpredictability, they can become anxious. If children have to develop a large capacity to cope with anxiety at a young age, it can overwhelm their defences, and cause them to solve problems with undesired or inappropriate behaviour.'

Biologist Jeremy Griffith continues the discussion [20]:

> 'The increasingly thoughtful child can see the whole horribly upset world and would be understandably totally bewildered and deeply troubled by it. Eight-year-olds will only be beginning to be consciously troubled by the horror of the state of the world they have been born into, but by nine they will be overtly troubled by it and requiring a lot of reassurance that 'Everything is going to be alright.' In fact, nine-year-olds can be so troubled by the imperfection of the world that they go through a process of trying not to accept that it is true. By 10, this despair about the state of the world reaches desperation levels with nightmares of distress for children. It is a very unhappy, lonely, anxious, needing-of-love time for them. So at 11 some enter a 'Peter Pan' stage where they decide they don't want to grow up; they decide they want to stay a child forever, surrounded by all the things they love, and not ever become part of the horror world they have discovered.' (Para. 732)

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18 https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03626784.1991.11075363
19 https://www.verywellfamily.com/why-does-consistency-matter-in-parenting-4135227
20 '*Freedom; the end of the human condition*' Griffith, J., (2016) https://humancondition.com

Despite such examples directly referring to or implying *parental* inconsistencies, it is worth bearing in mind that time spent in schools accounts for a not insignificant twenty-three percent of a child's life.

7 Where government thinking on low level disruption stops

For many different reasons too few key personnel in education have been encouraged - or are encouraged now - to access a higher understanding of low level disruption in schools.

As a result of this, schools have long been provided with strategies which, at best, provide short term performance improvements for the student or the teacher (such as zero tolerance or counselling) but fail to provide any long term meaningful improvement for either. Over decades this has led to the belief that there are too many variables involved in finding a solution to low level disruption and a sense of hopelessness: that children are becoming - or have already become - unmanageable.

As shown previously, the last decade has seen a significant step forward being made to address this: recognition that students are not the only cause of the problem; that there is fault *in the process of administering managerial procedures;* and that such faults occur through inconsistency.

Yet this significant step forward is now in danger of being used to create a significant step backward: that by somehow *getting* adults to be more consistent - almost exclusively through the addition of more rules - original strategies that did not work previously will now *automatically* work. Increases in performance related criteria throughout education indicate that this is already happening. However, these increases are unlikely to stop 'staff not knowing how many rules there are' and it must be time to consider that the problem lies elsewhere.

A true step forward from the earlier point is to recognise that there is likely to be more to inconsistency than we currently know - that it is more than a temporary aberration or resolved with more instructions - for something else is clearly awry.

How can it be that adults - who, as children once themselves, should be in an excellent position to understand children (and all the more so with usually very helpful hindsight) - have so lost sight of what it is to be a child that the only outcome is to deem them unmanageable?

To move the low level disruption discussion forward a much more complete understanding of the causes that lead to this lack of - or losing of - knowledge must be reached. Within this understanding a way of identifying a verifiable point in time should be sought during which certain factors combine to cause our current failure to convert our experience of childhood into useable knowledge to better manage childhood.

If it can be imagined that such a moment in time exists on the generic timeline of human life wherein the child led state of mind - still active in classroom low level disruption - transitions to the adult led state of mind - that *fails* to see how classroom low level disruption can be reduced or avoided - then events/factors preceding each might also be identified. Thereafter, those events and factors might be reversed, and a sustainable model provided to replace them and prevent them recurring.

The next two sections identify the factors and events involved and provide a way forward.

8 The predominantly co-operative, selfless child

How differently children and adults view behaviour can be seen in an article entitled *When do detentions work?* [21] which in turn cites Ariely, D. (2013). It begins by describing the perception an adult has of how a child calculates gain from misbehaviour:

> 'A rational explanation for misbehaviour assumes that students calculate:
>
> (1) the benefit that one stands to gain from the crime; (2) the probability of getting caught; and (3) the expected punishment if one is caught. By comparing the first component (the gain) with the last two components (the costs), the rational human being can determine whether a particular crime is worth it or not.' (Ariely, 2013, P.14)'

Whilst the reality sees children presenting a different approach:

> 'Dan Ariely (2013) has tested what influences misbehaviour extensively, focusing on cheating. In one experiment, students completing a task for financial reward saw a peer apparently cheating. If the peer's behaviour wasn't sanctioned, cheating doubled among the rest of the group. (p.198-204). In another condition, the peer (a collaborator of the experimenter) asks the experimenter if the instructions make cheating possible, but does

21 https://improvingteaching.co.uk/2020/03/01/when-do-detentions-work/ citing The Honest Truth About Dishonesty: How We Lie to Everyone---Especially Ourselves (Ariely, D., 2013)

not cheat themselves. The cheating rate decreased. So it's not rational calculation but social norms which makes a difference.'

In this example the student following 'social norms' can be seen to present a level of co-operative, selfless behaviour which follows the path of 'Integrative Meaning', a term defined as 'the ordering or integration … of matter into ever larger and more stable wholes' (Griffith, J., 2016, para. 313):

> '… for a collection of parts to form and hold together, for matter to integrate, the parts of the developing whole *must* cooperate, behave selflessly, place the maintenance of the whole above the maintenance of themselves, ... Put simply … selflessness is integrative—it is the glue that holds wholes together; it is, in fact, the theme of the integrative process, and thus of existence.' (Griffith, J., 2016, para. 320)

Its opposite, competitive and selfish behaviour, operates in defiance of Integrative Meaning, being divisive or disintegrative whereby 'the whole disintegrates, the parts break down into the more elementary building blocks of matter from which they were assembled.' (Griffith, J., 2016 Par. 320).

Though this might appear to provide a natural balance between the two behaviours across society, widespread evidence and experience suggests otherwise:

> '... if the meaning of existence is to behave integratively, which means behave cooperatively and selflessly, why do humans behave in the completely opposite way, in such a competitive and selfishly divisive way?' (Griffith, J., 2016, para. 321)

Although children and adults occupy *predominantly* co-operative and competitive roles between the two *absolutes* of these behaviours (i.e. birth and death) - meaning that they behave more co-operatively or more competitively than not - there is a clear dividing line between the two: children occupy the predominantly co-operative and selfless state, and adults the predominantly competitive and selfish state.

Between the two states lies a tipping point (the moment in time sought) to which those occupying the co-operative state (children) are driven - currently quite naturally - by the decision making of those occupying the competitive state (adults) - who govern and audit their development.

An example of the extensive and largely unseen conflicts this causes and the extent to which a child's condition is 'unmanageable' when reaching the tipping point follows in the next section.

9 The child transitions to a predominantly competitive, selfish state

Within the following extracts a timeline describes a predominantly co-operative, selfless state in the child approaching the tipping point:

> 'By mid-childhood (7-8 years old) the conscious mind is sufficiently able to make sufficient sense of experience to successfully manage and thus plan activities for not just minutes ahead, but for hours and even days—a development that empowers the individual to be both outwardly marvelling at, and demonstrative of, its intellectual power. It is at this stage of active self-management that the results of some experiments in self-adjustment begin to get the child into trouble.'
>
> *(An example of the child receiving a birthday cake and not sharing it is described between these extracts in the original text.)*
>
> 'But despite the nasty shock from all the criticism [of his selfish behaviour] and his desire to not make such a mistake again, the boy, while unable to explain his actions, does feel that what he has done is not something bad, not something deserving of such criticism. In fact, by this stage in the child's mental development, he has become quite proud of the effort he's taken during his early happy innocent childhood stage to self-manage his life, successfully carrying out all kinds of tentative experiments in self-adjustment—drawing attention to his achievements with excited declarations like 'Look at me, Daddy, I can jump puddles', and so on. So the child is only just discovering that this business of self-adjusting is not all fun and that 'playing' with the power of free will leads to some serious issues. Indeed, the frustrated feeling of being unjustly criticised for some of his experiments gives rise to the precursors of the defensive, retaliatory reactions of anger, egocentricity and alienation; some angry, aggressive nastiness creeps into the child's behaviour. Furthermore, in this situation of feeling unfairly criticised, it follows that any *positive* feedback or reinforcement begins to become highly sought-after, which is the beginning of egocentricity—<u>the conscious thinking self or ego starts to become preoccupied trying to defend its worth, assert that it is good and not bad</u>. (Author underlined) At this point, the intellect also begins experimenting in ways to deny or deflect the unwarranted criticism, which, in this initial, unskilled-in-the-art-of-denial stage, takes the form of blatant lying.' (Griffith, J., 2016, para. 726)

The conflict caused by an individual's co-operative selfless thinking *and* competitive selfish thinking, and the criticism each receives - the 'human condition' - has already taken shape and develops into adolescence:

> 'Throughout childhood … the frustration with being criticised for searching for knowledge continued to increase until, in late childhood, the child's exasperation and resentment caused him to angrily lash out at the 'injustice of the world'. What happens at

the end of childhood is that the child realises that physical retaliation doesn't make any difference and that the only possible way to solve the frustration is to find the reconciling understanding of *why* the criticism he is experiencing is not deserved … So in the final stages of childhood it was not only the issue of the imperfections of their own behaviour that so troubled children, but also the issue of the imperfections of the human-condition-afflicted world around them—a psychological collusion that sees children mature from frustrated, extroverted protestors into sobered, deeply thoughtful, introverted adolescents.' (Griffith, J., 2016, para. 740)

'… the extreme distress experienced by an adolescent confronting the issue of the imperfection both of the world at large and within themselves became so great it led to a state of such unbearable depression that it forced the adolescent to <u>resign to living in denial of the issue of the human condition and to never again thinking about anything that brought that issue into focus</u>, which … was almost all thinking—an agonising process that resulted in the psychotic (psyche/soul repressed) and neurotic (neuron/mind repressed) state of extreme alienation … with this stage being the one that school teachers described as "the most difficult to teach. The adolescents seem to be at complete odds with what is expected of them."'(Griffith, J., 2016, para. 742)

10 When adults lose sight of what it means to be a child

This stage of adolescents being 'at complete odds with what is expected of them' describes the moment in time sought: the moment when 'our current failure to convert our experience of childhood into useable knowledge to better manage childhood' occurs.

It is the end of the 'childhood' state - during which co-operative selflessness occupied most decision making - and the beginning of the 'adult', predominantly competitive and selfish decision making state. In order to reach this stage, denial of the behaviour, resultant criticism and internal conflict that led to it must also take place.

In the adolescent this denial is just beginning and will take five or six years to mature. Perhaps unsurprisingly within this same five or six year period is also the social and legal acknowledgement of adulthood: defining the beginning of a 'new life' - of self-management (independence) and responsibility, e.g. leaving home, getting a job, etc.

Thus, it can be seen that only by creating a severely impaired view of childhood/adolescent behaviour and the outcomes of behaviour management on childhood/adolescent behaviour can the foundations of adulthood - as it is currently defined - be formed. This might also be described

as the beginning of the end of 'the race between self discovery and self destruction' (Griffith, para. 903)

As the denial phase matures the competitive selfish stage begins, which the teacher - on the other side of our moment in time - has already reached. It is important to recognise that - by its very definition - denial did not *stop* the conflict experienced during childhood which is now able to cause/merge with new conflicts - created by responsibility and independence. It is therefore during adulthood where internal conflict - and the search for relief from it - *increases*:

> '… unable to refute the negative view of themselves with understanding, the resigned person [entering adulthood] could only counter the negatives by focusing on, emphasising and developing whatever positive view of both the world and themselves they could find. In particular, they became preoccupied finding ways to feel good about themselves by competing for power, fame, fortune and glory.' (Griffith, J., 2016, para. 742)

Denial is now serving two purposes; attempting to protect the new life from childhood conflicts re-emerging and, by stopping them from re-emerging, ensuring that they will never be resolved.

All of these stages of confrontation and conflict from childhood to adulthood are very effectively described in a passage from *The Chimp Paradox* by Steve Peters [22] along with an elegant analogy of the problem - inconsistency - it causes:

> 'How many times have you talked to yourself, reassured yourself or had battles within your own head? Often you have thoughts and feelings that you do not want and even carry out behaviours that you know at the time are not really what you want to do. So why are you doing this? How can it be that you do not have control over what thoughts or emotions you have and what behaviours you carry out? <u>How can you be two very different people at different times?</u>' (Author underlined) (p.9 Kindle version)

It is now possible to see how schools themselves contribute to the widespread inconsistency in teaching staff and school leaders. Preparing students for the world of work - through the gaining of qualifications - directly introduces the competitive search for 'power, fame, fortune and glory', thus challenging greatly the likelihood of successfully, simultaneously preparing students for 'life' through co-operation and selflessness: the 'two very different people different at different times'.

Whether as students, teachers and school leaders or collectively as organisations the battles in our heads involve the simultaneous managing of two opposing states of mind; one a co-operative selfless state, the other a competitive selfish state; and with denial of the criticism each provokes in

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22 Peters, P. S. (2012). *The chimp paradox*. Vermilion.

the other the only currently available resolution, it is sustained and often compounded in an endlessly repeating cycle.

This is the root of inconsistency which exists at all levels of a school's structure, causing low level disruption in children and its mismanagement by adults.

The reversal of inconsistency in low level disruption management and the delaying or eradication of its effects on children - i.e. outcomes that currently hinder social/academic development - are described in the next two sections.

11 Agreeing a way forward

That such information has only come to light recently does not make it easy to establish whether this conflict and its outcomes are natural to human life or even inevitable.

Yet it should be clear from the many examples cited that pioneering schools can contribute greatly to the process of finding out, not least as the only social structure with all necessary components to establish a resolution under one roof.

Primarily this includes:

- to what extent inconsistency and the conflict it causes can be reduced, and
- to what extent childhood and adulthood can benefit from this reduction.

What is certainly clear is that existing assurance and control measures involving increasingly complicated rules and regulations, and monitoring/counselling to increase compliance with these measures, are not only inadequate but encourage greater inconsistency. Better understanding of how criticism/conflict and resulting inconsistency are caused in all parties involved in education (i.e. adults and children), and the establishing of better management systems that help reduce them and their effects, is the only sustainable way forward.

In the early stages this means significantly reducing the need to refute conflict-inducing criticism *when the process of identifying issues which lead to criticism is inconsistency led.* To achieve this *a teacher demonstrating consistency of behavioural expectations* (i.e. prior to criticism becoming necessary) should be preferable to *a teacher discussing inconsistency of behavioural expectations in their students* (i.e. once criticism has been delivered). This is the only appropriate way for schools to move away from strategies that fail to reduce inconsistency and invite further inconsistency through poor design or poor management that lead to excessive workload and/or excessive stages involved in the completion of that workload.

In short it is for schools to accept that strategies which legislate against inconsistency rather than resolve inconsistency usually increase inconsistency.

Therefore, in order to reduce criticism and conflict by reducing inconsistency, *substantially* reduced teacher workload must be prioritised within the overall aim of any strategy aiming to succeed in stopping low level disruption, with a fast, fair, consistent and sustainable process the optimal goal.

12 Three stages to reversing inconsistency and managing low level disruption sustainably

12.1 *Turning inconsistency into consistency*

For change to bring about any benefit it must move all staff and students much closer to fully achieving the character traits outlined by Folkman (see [13], list 1). This should begin with teachers reducing anxiety in students - caused by teacher inconsistency and resulting student/ teacher external/internal criticism - through demonstrating consistent behaviour management - and, thus, developing better behavioural expectations in students more reliably - in the classroom. This will, in turn, reduce anxiety in teachers themselves, enabling further reductions in inconsistency.

For clarity - in order to maximise the reduction of external/internal criticism in both students and teachers - all sources of inconsistency previously mentioned in this report should be reduced, namely:

- Unarticulated implicit rules
- 60% of students not knowing why they were reprimanded
- Students seeing infractions that the teacher didn't see
- Not remembering to follow up sanctions
- Conflict among school values
- Staff critical of school rules
- [The outcomes of] tiredness, being 'off balance', having a 'bad day'
- Insensitivity to students
- Staff not knowing how many rules there are.

In reversing these inconsistencies Folkman's earlier assessment can be modified: that *consistency* [through reducing criticism and resulting conflict] can now create a *profoundly positive* effect on every other competency and behaviour.

Such an effect can be seen through the re-building of all existing teacher powers following the achievement of consistency in classrooms [23], ensuring that no school's existing academic or pastoral commitments are harmed and are in fact much improved.

Achieving this consistency in classrooms requires, firstly, ceasing the use of medium/high level disruption sanctions for low level disruption events which require considerable discussion to enact and, in the process, invite a high level of inconsistency between teachers and students. [24]

Secondly, to establish an environment in which teachers can demonstrate behavioural expectations consistently (see part 1 of the Return to Learning strategy). With teachers demonstrating consistent behaviour in the management of low level disruption, students can learn behavioural expectations in accordance with social learning theory, as Amanda Hermes summarises [25]:

> 'Social learning theory focuses on learning that occurs within a social context, meaning that people learn from observing, imitating or modelling others.' (para. 2)

Encouraging students to learn good classroom behaviour from each other - only achievable through consistent *demonstrations* of behavioural expectations from the teacher - creates the opportunity for time consuming teacher interventions used to maintain good behaviour such as discussion or counselling to be further reduced and for students to 'self-manage' their behaviour. (Though it might appear that discussion/counselling is being sidelined, it is in fact its *over-use in the management of low level disruption* that is being sidelined, due to the teaching and learning time it usurps.)

Such 'self-management' can also be applied to a third process: further time saving measures in the form of rewards for good behaviour that can similarly be made non-verbally. According to Margaret Delores Isom, professor of criminology at Florida State University, reinforcements or rewards can be concrete objects or praise:

> 'or more abstract things like a reduction of tension or increased self-esteem.' (para. 3)

As students learn to self-manage their behaviour so they learn to recognise the benefits of self-managing their behaviour, becoming less reliant on external or physical reward.

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23 https://returntolearning.com/course-content (see lecture 13)
24 https://returntolearning.com/course-content (see course introduction Part 1)
25 https://healthfully.com/238281-social-learning-theory-in-children.html

All three can be seen when viewing the Return to Learning strategy as a whole:

> [Stage 1: Repair] Dividing line between existing low level disruption management and better low level disruption management. Delivers: The reversal of low level disruption in classrooms - quickly, fairly, consistently and sustainably - through; demonstrating consistent and constant behavioural expectations; automatic rewards of reduced anxiety, raised self-esteem and better concentration. (Time gains for Part 2 study)

> [Stage 2: Upgrade] Enhanced reward system through high level teaching and learning curriculum. Delivers: comprehensive, easy to implement conflict resolution programme (tiered for KS3 - KS5); access to 'Teaching for the Real World/Masterclass Teaching' Programme; support for students to self-manage their behaviour sustainably.

In conclusion to this section, by:

> (1) eliminating inconsistency through the significant reduction of the number of stages needed to enforce discipline (e.g. seeing teachers demonstrating consistency rather than addressing/discussing the outcomes of inconsistency);

> (2) reducing criticism and conflict by enabling students to observe independently these behaviour management types without the need for explanation (e.g. positive use of peer culture/social learning theory supported by increased teacher consistency); and

> (3) distributing behavioural reinforcements such as reduced tension or increased self-esteem (rather than concrete objects or praise which usurp learning time and create inequality),

a self-managing and extremely efficient low level disruption management system that operates almost entirely on fast, fair, consistent and sustainable methods of non-verbal communication can be created.

12.2 *A new method of delivery*

In order to deliver the above outcomes an optimal level of engagement with opportunities for maximum compliance is also required.

In Ofsted (2014) feedback from a teacher claims that 'Pupils are not prepared to listen unless they are entertained' (p.9). Despite the implication that children are incorrect to expect to be entertained whilst learning, Peters' Chimp Paradox (see [22]) uses precisely that approach to bring an extremely elusive and deeply complex 'battle' under control in adults and children alike. This control is not achieved using scientific language aimed at a high functioning adult,

but using language a child might understand: that at the centre of the problem is a frequently fun loving - and equally often misguided - 'chimp'.

Such an approach enables what Plass J. L., et al., refer to as 'Graceful Failure' [26]:

> 'Rather than describing it as an undesirable outcome, failure is by design an expected and sometimes even necessary step in the learning process [citation]. The lowered consequences of failure in games encourage risk taking, trying new things, and exploration. They also provide opportunities for self-regulated learning during play, where the player executes strategies of goal setting, monitoring of goal achievement, and assessment of the effectiveness of the strategies used to achieve the intended goal.'

In almost all areas of teaching and learning the 'gamification' of learning is well known and used whenever feasible. Graceful failure reduces the onset of internal criticism, e.g. 'I don't understand', 'I'm not clever', avoiding conflict that would otherwise replace intended learning and leads to disengagement. When applied to behaviour management the same internal criticism can be reduced when challenges are made to poor behaviour.

In making such a system easy to implement and require minimal maintenance, it can be made feasible in the majority of classroom based lessons.

12.3 *Redefining social norms to sustain conflict free learning*

This feasibility must extend to every stage of the transition to reducing inconsistency, and in particular reducing inconsistency whilst improving upon existing academic/examination commitments.

Yet considerable encouragement should be taken from students being able to switch allegiances according to social norms (as described in [21]), in this case from rejecting inconsistency to accepting consistency.

This leaves the second stage - the shaping of the *right* social norms in which the majority of students would want to participate, see fairly executed, and benefit from personally and consistently - in the hands of teachers.

It should not be difficult for educational professionals to imagine the substantial benefits to teaching and learning as a result of removing low level disruption from lessons through the removal of inconsistency led criticism and conflict, including all resulting discussion and time needed for administering sanctions. In terms of pupil attainment, using a Low/Secure/High

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26 *'Foundations of game-based learning',* Plass J. L., Homer B. D., Kinzer C. K., (2015)

levelling system in KS3, an average student attainment increase was recorded in mixed ability groups of 0.76 (e.g. 5L to 5S is 0.33) during testing from a previous year average of 0.46. In terms of time savings, average coursework tasks were completed (to the aforementioned higher standards) almost one-third faster (31%) across KS3 and KS4. (Ofsted's 38 'lost' days accounts for a 20% increase in *time* savings through the removal of low level disruption events, not the resulting benefits to teaching and learning (see below).)

Yet there is much more for the student and teacher to achieve beyond mere calculable data outcomes. An overview of the Return to Learning strategy describes them as follows:

> (1) During the first use of part 1 of the strategy students and teachers will notice the potential for levels of concentration to increase significantly through the removal of inconsistency. By the end of the first lesson these increased levels will already have begun to be realised.

> (2) During the period of time described in (1) - indeed critical to achieving the increased levels of concentration described therein - reduced anxiety and increased self esteem for both staff and students increase as challenges to behaviour are made quickly, fairly and consistently, continually adding to the removal of criticism, conflict and inconsistency.

> (3) By the end of week 6 - as part 1 begins to be phased out - higher level academic study programmes should be rolled out (see parts 2 and 3 of the Return to Learning strategy for full details) as students not only complete tasks to a higher standard, but also with greater efficiency. Equally, developments to the pastoral care curriculum should be rolled out (see part 2 of the Return to Learning strategy for full details) as students opt to utilise these new skills beyond the classroom.

Not only do these stages add significantly to the rewards system, they become the new social norms:

- students performing at levels that match or exceed perceived student capability
- staff performing at levels that match or exceed perceived staff capability.

In short, an opportunity for teachers and students working co-operatively to finally realise their full potential.

This 'full' potential is only sustainable through the incorporation of more life-affirming study into the curriculum, meeting the needs of the co-operative state rather than solely focussing on examination study and developing only the competitive state. It will secure a self

managing system that continues the avoidance of conflict during lesson time organically, and might be extended to introduce the study of mind management as a subject in its own right, valued in all areas of society.

Over time a mathematically verifiable improvement to mental health in both students and teachers of up to 23% is available. This is the percentage of the school year students/teachers spend in school which is now an almost entirely conflict free environment. As the co-operative curriculum develops in part 2 of the strategy this figure will increase through natural assimilation into life beyond the classroom as students and teachers discuss the ideas with family and friends, as well as natural increases over a longer period of time as children carry less conflict into *their* adulthood.

Of course care must be taken to ensure that outcomes of all negotiation leading to new and better social norms must continue the theme of *demonstrable consistency* and not re-introduce poor design (e.g. 'purposely complex' systems) or poor management into the process. Observing and learning from consistent school management *being demonstrated* and benefitting from the significantly reduced conflict and considerably increased learning focus that such management produces must always remain the priority.

There should be no doubt that all students - no matter their background - want to learn. It should also be clear that face-to-face interaction in schools - i.e. where inconsistency that prevents learning can be *seen* to be overcome - is the best place for that learning to take place. With an appropriately managed and sustainable learning environment now possible, optimal education standards can become the social norm.

All of this can be achieved within the resource capability of any standard secondary school, regardless of existing Ofsted judgements. The Return to Learning strategy (Parts 1 to 3) describes the simplest and most effective way of delivering it.

For further details visit: www.returntolearning.com