

Book review

Positive Teaching for Australian Primary Schools: Effective classroom behaviour management.

Reviewed by **Jessica McLaren**

Kevin Wheldall, Robyn Wheldall & Frank Merrett, 2020. Positive Teaching for Australian Primary Schools: Effective classroom behaviour management. Published by MultiLit Positive Teaching and Learning.

Most teachers at some point in their career ask themselves: "What are the secrets to effective classroom behaviour management?"

The authors of *Positive Teaching for Australian Primary Schools* challenge teachers to reflect on their own teaching practice as a primary means of changing their student's behaviours. Wheldall et al. present their research findings into effective classroom behaviour management, and they discuss how to change classroom behaviour through intentionally changing teaching practices and the classroom environment.

For the past 40 years the authors have researched, written and taught about the Positive Teaching approach and supporting practices. They argue that by implementing Positive Teaching Strategies, primary school teachers can create learning environments that foster effective teaching and learning, while decreasing stressors that inevitably impact on teaching outcomes.

Positive teaching practices, in general, are based on the principle that student behaviour is largely learned as a consequence of interacting with their environment in the classroom. According to the authors, Positive Teaching involves considering a simple

ABC pattern:

- A refers to the *antecedents* to the problem behaviours.
- B refers to *behaviour* or what the student is doing that is disrupting learning.
- C refers to the *consequences* that result from the student engaging in the troublesome behaviours.

The Positive Teaching principles are summarised in five basic points:

- 1 Teaching should only be concerned with what can be observed.
- 2 Majority of classroom behaviour (good and bad) is learned.
- 3 Learning involves changing behaviour.
- 4 Student behaviour changes as a result of its consequences.
- 5 Students behaviour is influenced by classroom context.

This book provides a clear, concise and accessible framework through which teachers can reflect on their own classroom behaviour. The authors provide guidance to teachers on how to observe and identify what they may be able to change, and then provide a discussion of evidence-based strategies that create a classroom environment that can facilitate effective and efficient learning.

The authors' studies of classroom behaviour conclude that the most common distressing behaviours are relatively minor. That is, the behaviours that teachers frequently report as being the most disruptive are talking out of turn and hindering other children. The good news is on balance, the authors have found that primary school students are on task 80% of the time. Interestingly, the author's studies show that what teachers typically praise and provide positive reinforcement for is *academic* work. Positive *behaviours* of students in the classroom, on the other hand, are not reinforced at the same rate. Addressing

this balance is at the heart of Positive Teaching practices.

For this reviewer, effective behaviour management is the thing we aspire to

and want to facilitate, and yet it can be quite elusive. As classroom teachers we are all too aware troublesome student behaviour has negative impacts on the academic outcomes of not just the student in question but also all learners in the classroom. Teachers are also aware that negative academic outcomes may lead to troublesome student behaviour. We need to work on both sides of this classroom issue.

This book provides valuable, evidence-based insights into the interactions that take place between teacher, student and the classroom environment. The authors do not set out to provide an easy or quick fix. While ABC appears simple on the surface, it may not always be that easy when it comes to consistently practicing the principles. But then again, nothing worthwhile is straightforward at first.

The authors encourage teachers at all stages of their career to be brave and begin or continue their journey from "unconscious incompetence" to "conscious competence."

In my opinion this book is compact, practical, very readable, and would be a valuable resource for any teacher or school's (K-12) Professional Learning Library.

Jessica McLaren's qualifications include a Diploma of Teaching, a Master of Education and a Graduate Diploma in Communication Disorders. She is currently working as a Special Education teacher.

