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# The good behaviour game: Maintenance effects☆

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of the Good Behaviour Game on teacher and student behaviour in a general education classroom. Using a multiple baseline design across classes, baseline rates of disruptive behaviours were collected in each class and the class was divided into two teams. Each team then competed to obtain reinforcers for good behaviour. High baseline rates of disruptive behaviour were reduced significantly when the game was in first introduced. When it was introduced a second time the teachers were instructed to increase their positive comments. Surprisingly, there was little evidence of an increase in positive comments from the teachers. Findings are discussed in the context of the need for teacher training in behaviour analysis.



## 1. Introduction

Merrett and Wheldall (1978) surveyed teachers' opinions in the West Midlands borough of the United Kingdom as to what were the most troublesome classroom behaviours. Results indicated that 'talking-out-of-turn' was the most troublesome behaviour and that it accounted for one third of misbehaviour in classrooms. When weighed against problems such as violent behaviour or illiteracy, talking-out-of-turn may not appear to be a serious problem. However, unsolicited talking in the classroom interferes with the work habits of cooperative students, wastes teacher time, causes aggravation to both pupils and teacher, and quiet pupils are often ignored.

More generally, if disruptive behaviour is allowed to continue without successful intervention it can reach levels where completion of academic assignments is impeded and teaching time is spent reprimanding students. In a survey of more than 10,000 teaching staff across the UK it was found that up to five weeks of teaching time are lost each year because of disruptive behaviour (Coughlan, 2009). Other news items that have hit the headlines recently in the UK include a report by Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills in the UK) claiming that disruptive behaviour was damaging pupils' life chances (Satchell, 2014). When Ofsted inspectors review school performances they include statistics on the behaviour of students. Worryingly, the extent of the problem with disruptive behaviour is so pervasive that another headline focused on the possibility that some schools were massaging figures to avoid punitive consequences (Gordon, 2015). Sellgren (2013) noted that The Association of Teachers and Lecturers in the UK was concerned from findings showing that 53% of 844 members considered disruptive classroom behaviour to be deteriorating over the past five years.

Many teachers who are not behaviourally trained would advocate a "get tougher in the classroom" strategy to regain respect, control and authority. A study by Van Houten, Nau, Mckenzie-Keating, Sameoto, and Colavecchia (1992) exemplifies

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this approach. They found that when verbal reprimands were delivered with eye-contact and a firm grasp of students' shoulders, a reduction in disruptive behaviour was observed.

One of the simplest ways to enable classroom control is through the use of group contingencies (Ninness, Ellis, & Ninness, 2000). This strategy ensures all members of the group gain or loses according to a group standard. Group contingencies also eliminate differential treatment of individuals and are thus both cost and time effective, a view echoed by Litow and Pumroy (1975). In this study we examine the effectiveness of a group contingency called the Good Behaviour Game that was pioneered by Barrish, Saunders, and Wolf (1969). This is an inter-dependent-group oriented contingency system (Sulzer-Azaroff and Mayer, 1991). In this type of system, receiving reinforcement is contingent upon a specified level of group performance (e.g., the frequency of out-of-turn-talking remaining below ten instances). Interventions based on group contingencies such as the Good Behaviour Game automatically harness the valuable reinforcement of peer attention. Numerous studies have demonstrated that peer attention is a powerful reinforcer for disruptive behaviour (e.g., Northup et al., 1995).

Since it's conception many modified versions of the Good Behavior game have been implemented with resounding success. For example, Fishbein and Wasik (1981) used it in a library setting while Saigh and Umar (1983) demonstrated the game's cross-cultural validity when they used it in an elementary school in The Sudan. Research into the 'normal' classroom has, for the most part, however, focused on the primary/junior schools (Barrish et al., 1969; Fishbein & Wasik, 1981; Harris & Sherman, 1973; Merrett & Wheldall, 1978; Saigh & Umar, 1983) with relatively few studies concentrating on secondary schools (McNamara & Harrop, 1979).

> In 2003, the first commercialized version of the game was published with Hzelton, and now, the Game is in over 8000 classrooms in the United States and Canada alone.
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> Fast-forward to March 2009 and the release of the Institute of Medicine report on the prevention of disorders. The report was ground-breaking, right on page one: Mental, emotional, and behavioural disorders are completely preventable. . . . Just as important, if not as surprising, were the recommendations of effective prevention strategies: almost every strategy had roots in behaviour analytic literature and practice. Of the listed techniques, the Good Behaviour Game was among the most cited (Gokey & Pritchard, 2015; p. 38).

In the current study, a multiple baseline across settings (i.e., classes) was used to examine the effectiveness of the Good Behaviour Game with 11–12 year-old children in a secondary school. The secondary school differs greatly from the primary school in that there is much less interaction between teachers and pupils as students move from classroom to classroom, subject to subject, teacher to teacher. Establishing control over the students' behaviour in a classroom is not an end in itself, however. The main objective is to fade out any intervention implemented as effectiveness increases (Vargas, 2013). Thus, the objective is to establish the student's environment as the source of control over the student's behaviour (i.e., establish discriminative control by the classroom and teacher) so that access to positive reinforcement is increased and the use of aversive consequences is decreased (Chance, 2014). When access to positive reinforcement in the classroom is increased for appropriate behaviour, then the appropriate behaviour should be maintained while the disruptive behaviour decreases. To examine this in the current study we initially implemented the game across three classrooms to examine its effects. In addition, because teachers play a central role in delivering positive consequences for appropriate behaviour, they were asked in one condition to increase the number of positive comments they deliver during the game. This was done to determine whether changes in student behaviour would be maintained by teacher comments alone when the game was removed.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

Participants were 14 boys and 6 girls aged between 11 and 12 years old who attended a general education classroom in N. Ireland. The 20 students were in their 1st year of school and their class was selected for the Good Behaviour Game (GBG) due to their inattention and disruptive behaviours. The study began after the students had been attending the school for 4 months and it was reported that classroom control was a significant problem with this class in particular. The class was taught by three teachers across three different subject areas and a classroom assistant was in attendance at all times.

### 2.2. Observations

Behavioural observations took place from the back of the classroom twice a week in English, History, and Geography classes. During this time students worked both independently and as a group with different teachers for each class but they were not made aware of the reasons for the presence of the reseacher. Initial observations identified that the frequency of ***Talking out***,***Turning Around in the Chair*** and being ***Out of Seat*** were the behaviours of most concern to all three teachers.

### 2.3. Inter-observer reliability

The teacher or classroom assistant and the researcher simultaneously but independently observed the frequency of the three behaviours during each of the sessions. Inter-observer reliability (IOR) was calculated by dividing the smaller of the

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