Effective learning can only begin to take place when adverse or aberrant behaviours, that interfere with learning, have been eliminated. Closely allied to this, is the need for classrooms to provide a motivating atmosphere that leads to the growth of internal motivation, and the independent will to learn.

Whilst many teaching techniques, for example, discovery learning, are designed to foster self motivation, it is possible for teachers to envelop the entire classes in a style such as Cooperative Learning. This type of learning is characterised by: more learning, more spoken language, more critical thinking, better retention, more positive psychological adjustment, and health, and the growth of individual accountability (Johnson and Johnson, 1989). For a more detailed account in the Singapore context, see Dowson, 1991.

The adoption of such an approach, before the emergence of troublesome behaviours, is called a pro-active approach. One attempts to deal with problems before they emerge. The use of Cooperative Learning, in regular classes containing children with learning problems, has also been shown to be beneficial for all parties (Johnson and Johnson, 1986). From any perspective, there are a number of pro-active steps that can be taken to ensure that the classroom operates smoothly. The following behavioural considerations are adapted from Church, 1985. The teacher should first consider,

Lesson content:
- sufficient, meaningful work is available
- expectations and objectives are set
- monitoring occurs
During contact time:

- teacher addresses named individuals
- pupils' attention is gained before talking
- clear instructions have been given
- use of punishment is preceding by a warning
- teachers movements about the room are controlled and functional

Teacher attributes:

- expectations are appropriate
- rules and consequences are clearly expounded
- prepared material goes from least to most interesting
- variety of teaching methods used
- teacher praises improvements
- high interest activities are used to reinforce attention and effort
- teacher attends to appropriate behaviour more than inappropriate behaviour
- positive reinforcement far exceeds punishment

When it comes to dealing with individuals, a behavioural approach has a number of advantages. One major advantage is that it forces the teacher to define, measure and examine the surrounding conditions. Use of a behavioural approach means a teacher must examine the events preceding a behaviour, and the consequences of that behaviour. In an example such as a young child hitting other pupils, the examination of prior events, or antecedents may lead to the discovery that the pupils who hits out, is mercilessly teased. The strategy then may be to help the pupils overcome this, or work with the teasers. Using the same example, an examination of the consequence of the hitting behaviour may reveal that it leads to the pupils getting his/her own way. The strategy this time may involve teaching the pupil appropriate communication skills, working with parents, or direct reinforcement of all non hitting, appropriate behaviours. An important point here is that a behavioural approach
does not give 'guaranteed' solutions. What a behavioural approach does, is to make the user measure, and see whether or not a particular intervention is effective. Of course, you may be lucky enough to find, that your first well chosen intervention causes an elimination or diminuation of the problem behaviour. A behavioural approach can be used, just as effectively, to increase a desired behaviour. A good illustration of this, is the pupil who is reluctant to contribute during class discussions. Given the right circumstances, for example, small class groups, or the right reinforcer, for engaging in verbal behaviour, the pupil may respond. There are two considerations that the above example raises. Firstly, is the pupils lack of verbal response, a behaviour deficit? Or is it a learning deficit? It is prudent to ensure that the pupils know how to engage in verbal behaviour before creating a carefully planned strategy for behavioural change. The second consideration is the power of the positive reinforcer used to induce behavioural change. Positive reinforcers run from tangible objects such as food, or small items through to social reinforcers such as praise. When positive reinforcement is used to increase desired behaviours, the most powerful reinforcer may not be the one that the adult thinks it is. The trick is to find the thing that the pupil wants. I have seen a group of troublesome adolescent boys remain on task for a full week, simply to obtain a small chocolate bar. Likewise, some pupils will do almost anything for verbal praise from the teacher. With other pupils, verbal praise acts almost like a punishment, diminishing the very behaviour that the teacher is trying to increase. There are a number of techniques that can be used in a behavioural approach. Alberto and Troutnam (1991) offer some sound advice and techniques to teachers. The reader is strongly advised to consult a text on the use of a behavioural approach. There are a number of issues which should be taken into account before commencing behavioural strategies.
The flow chart below is offered as a general guide.

- **Define the problem in measurable terms**
  - [Check for a simple solution]

- **Record its occurrence**

- **Develop an intervention strategy**
  - [Always try a positive reinforcer first]

- **Measure the effect of the intervention**

- **Effective?**
  - Intervention

- **Not working?**
  - Try another intervention
References


