

## **The content and the meaning of teachers' corrections of disruptive behaviour in the classroom**

This paper describes ongoing research where 49 Swedish secondary school teachers were followed during eight months, through a Yo-yo fieldwork, in order to search for their actions towards pupils with troublesome behaviour. During this period of time the teachers were disturbed by four different categories of pupils' misbehaviour: (a) disturbing ways to handle oneself, (b) pupils' misuse of artefacts, (c) pupils' odd traits or peculiarities, and (d) lack of order in the classroom. The teachers used both verbal strategies and non-verbal signals to handle such disruptive behaviours. The verbal measures taken by the teachers were (a) to talk ironically to pupils, (b) to name pupils, (c) to urge pupils, (d) to reproof pupils, and (e) to reprimand pupils. Such strategies were combined with non-verbal signals such as (a) gestures, (b) external support, (c) touching pupils, (d) ignoring pupils, (e) physical interventions, (f) getting close to pupils, (g) eye contact, and (h) stop talking. This paper ends up in a discussion about the meaning, the consequences, pros and cons of teachers' corrections of disruptive behaviour in the classroom.

Keywords: *pupils' misbehaviour; teachers' strategies, pros and cons of corrections*

## Introduction

Teachers' use of different classroom management strategies has throughout history been a part of school discourse (Husén, 2002). It has also been part of educational research (Marklund, 1956; Husén, Husén, & Svensson, 1959; Sjöberg, 2003.) Little (2005, p. 375) requested qualitative research that would provide further information about teachers' intervention types as well as their reasons for intervention when dealing with troublesome behaviour. Her argument for other forms of research came out of the fact that most of the earlier research had been carried out using quantitative material such as surveys. My research that started during the school year 2003–2004, as is to be presented below, could perhaps be seen and understood as an answer to her question.

## Earlier research

Even if I found very few examples of recently conducted research from Sweden and Scandinavia with focus on the two phenomena that interested me I knew that there were earlier research that could help my get a perspective for a comparison.

### *Troublesome behaviour*

Doyle (1986; 1990) investigated teachers' leadership according to pupils' misbehaviour and came to the conclusion that pupils' misbehaviour could be defined in the following way.

Any action by students that threatens to disrupt the activity flow or pull the class towards an alternative program of action, and is related to attention, crowd control and accomplishment of work. (Doyle, 1990, p. 115)

In this definition Doyle (1986) focuses on the activity flow that is threatened by students' actions. Burden (1995) defines in a similar way disruptive behaviour as follows.

**Misbehavior** is any student behavior that is perceived by the teacher to compete with or threaten the academic actions at a particular moment. (Burden, 1995, p. 15)

As Burden (1995) states one has to remember that these actions take place in a specific context. This is an aspect that Burden (1995) discusses further on, saying that teachers' knowledge about contextual aspects helps them to decide whether a pupil is misbehaving or just off-task. Burden (1995) then says that *off-task behaviour* such as daydreams or thought breaks have to be seen as something else than misbehaviour, as long as they do not disturb the rest of the class. From this discussion Burden (1995) separates four categories of misbehaviour by individuals:

*Hyperactivity* – a high level of activity and non-aggressive contact, often due to neurological dysfunctions. Behaviors include (a) unable to sit still, and fidgets; (b) talks too much; (c) cannot wait for pleasant things to happen; (d) constant demand for attention; (e) hums and makes other noises; (f) excitable; (g) overly anxious to please; and (h) awkward and poor general coordination.

*Inattentiveness* – the inability to complete work and activities, and have a high level of distractibility. Behaviors include (a) doesn't stay with games and activities; (b) doesn't complete projects; (c) inattentive and distractible; (d) doesn't follow directions; (e) withdraws from new people and is shy; (f) sits fiddling with small objects; and (g) unable to sit still and fidgets.

*Conduct disorder* – the inability to accept corrections, tends to tease others, and shows a high level of defiance. Behaviors include (a) doesn't stay with games and activities; (b) cannot accept corrections; (c) tease others; (d) discipline doesn't change behavior for long; (e) is defiant and "talks back"; (f) moody; (g) fights; and (h) has difficulty in handling frustration.

*Impulsivity* – has constant demand for attention, with orientation to the present, and predictability. Behaviors include (a) reckless and acts careless; (b) has numerous accidents; and (c) gets into things. (Burden, 1995, p. 21-22)

Burden separates, as seen above, individuals from groups of students. Disturbance from groups is recognized as

Problems include (a) a lack of unity; (b) non-adherence to behavior standards and work procedures; (c) negative reactions to individual members; (d) class approval of misbehaviour; (e) prone to distraction, work stoppage, and imitative behavior; (f) low morale and hostile, resistant or aggressive behaviour; and inability to adjust to environmental change, such as change in seating arrangement or classroom routines. (Froyen, 1993, in Burden, 1995, p. 23)

Another way to discuss what misbehaviour could be is described in Houghton, Wheldall and Merrett's (1988) questionnaire survey of 251 British secondary school teachers. The questionnaire aimed to determine frequency and types of classroom behaviours that teachers found troublesome. The results showed that *talking out of turn* [TOOT] and *hindering other children* [HOC] were seen as the most problematic behaviours by the teachers. These two were selected as the most troublesome as well as the most frequent misbehaviour of individuals and in classes generally. Even so, Houghton, Wheldall and Merrett (1988, p. 309) claims that these types of misbehaviour are to be understood as relatively trivial. These sentences are to be understood as an argument against media description about the situation in school at that time. Houghton, Wheldall and Merrett (1988) also discuss how pupil's gender has an impact on teacher's experience of them as misbehaving or not. They draw the following conclusion.

The fact that boys were considered to be more of a problem than girls is supported by casual observations and agreement among teachers generally, but, by very little empirical evidence in the secondary school sector. (Houghton, Wheldall & Merrett, 1988, p. 309)

McNamara (1987) found during a survey that *inappropriate talking* was the most disruptive behaviour generally. He also found, just like Houghton, Wheldall and Merrett (1988), that *aggression*, *verbal abuse* and *physical aggression* very seldom were cited as a day-to-day problem. McNamara (1987) also stated that inappropriate behaviour vary along a continuum from minimal disruptive behaviour, such as quiet but inappropriate talking, to maximal disruptive behaviour, such as public defiance of the teacher. Beside this he claimed, as also Houghton et al. (1988) later focused on, that frequency has to be taken into consideration when assessing the influence of pupils' disruptive behaviour.

Built on research conducted by Merrett & Wheldall (1993) some Swedish teachers were asked to describe what pupil's behaviour that disturbed them the most. By doing so Granström and Einarsson (1998) found the following results among Swedish secondary school teachers teaching grades 7 - 9.

Table 1. *Pupil behaviour that teachers experience most troublesome*

School year	Most troublesome behaviour
Year 7 – 9	1. Talking 2. Physical aggression towards the teacher

Based on the results from their investigation, concerning teachers from primary-, late secondary- and high school as well as from adult education, Granström argues (in Colnerud & Granström, 2002) that teachers find pupils' behaviour that could be understood as an attack on them as leaders to be the worst ones to handle. These misbehaviours could also be understood as an attack against teachers as a profession. Granström continues to argue that teachers also describe pupil misbehaviour as an attack on them as private beings. Granström (in Colnerud & Granström, 2002, s. 106) draws the conclusion that teachers with poorly developed professionalism are more likely to be provoked by pupils and the other way around - teachers with highly developed professionalism are more likely to stand against provocations from troublesome pupils. From this follows that professional teachers have learnt to separate attacks on the private and attacks on the professional role (Granström, 1998a).

Once again built on the results by Houghton, Wheldall & Merrett (1988), Little (2003) did some similar survey research among Australian teachers. She found that the most troublesome behavioural problems that Australian teachers had to deal with in their day-to-day classroom work were *talking out of turn* [TOOT] – calling out during times when the teacher or other children are speaking (this also includes children not waiting for their turn by putting up their hands when the class was engaged in a discussion), and *hindering other children* [HOC] – which involves behaviours such as talking instead of working, engaging in getting the other children's attention by 'clowning around' and more generally interfere with other pupils' possibility to stay on task (Little, 2003). Beside these two most troublesome behaviours teachers reported behaviours such as those mentioned in table 2.

Table 2. *Specific classroom behaviour problems (Little, 2003, p. 7)*

Category	Examples of category
Disobedience	Generally not doing as the teacher has asked. This can be direct defiance, or more subtle forms of disobedience such as only doing part of what was requested.
Idleness/slowness	Children who work slowly. This does not include students who do not have the ability to complete the work. Rather, children who spend a large amount of time being idle or work exceedingly slowly for no apparent reason.
Unnecessary noise	Teachers frequently report unnecessary noise as being a cause of disruption in the classroom. This can take many forms from exceedingly loud voices through to noise made by banging on tables.
Aggression	This includes both verbal and physical aggression. It is not uncommon for some children to hit out on their peers. Kicking, hitting, biting, pinching and so on are seen in some school children.

In addition, Little (2003) also reports that teachers were concerned about “*children's organisational skills /.../ social behaviours /.../ staying on task*” (Little, 2003, p. 8). She discusses these behaviours and state that

All of these behaviours may initially start as quite minor severity, however they can interfere with teacher's ability to teach and manage the classroom. (Little, 2003, p. 8)

Bru (2006) discuss that troublesome behaviour, as well as lack of on-task orientation, during the last years has become an increasing problem in Norwegian schools, as in schools in other Western societies. He argues that these results send a message that it is “important to explore to what extent different factors influence such behaviour” (Bru, 2006, p. 23).

Those factors that Bru (2006) investigated the connection between was (a) cognitive competence, (b) relevance of schoolwork and (c) going against school norms increases peer status as making pupils opposite against the teacher and be off-task. As part of the results he stated that pupils' off-task behaviour was related to their cognitive competence along with their perceived relevance of

schoolwork, as well as the belief that their status among peers would increase when they acted against school norms. All three factors could make pupils be off-task as well as raise an opposition against the teacher.

His results also showed that grade 9 pupils had more negative perceptions of negative attitudes than grade 6 pupils. This could, according to Bru (2006), be understood as

Adolescent yearning for independence /.../ secondary schools not being adequately adapted to the needs of adolescents. (Bru, 2006, p. 36)

Furthermore, Bru (2006) found that the grade 9 pupils showed twice as many marked difficulties in finding schoolwork relevant than the grade 6 pupils. In conclusion Bru (2006) argues for increasing pupils' on-task orientation and at the same time reducing their opposition against teachers by implementing different measures. To improve pupils' cognitive competence Bru (2006) suggests creating a cooperative learning climate that would reduce both competition and social comparison. In order to improve pupils' on-task behaviour "it is probably necessary to place more emphasis on the practical subjects in secondary school curriculum" (Bru, 2006, p. 38). Improving pupils' cognitive competence and their belief in school contents as relevant would to some degree change pupils' thinking as regards the conflict between school norms and peer status. Teachers should therefore, as a counteraction against the effects of anti-school norms, highlight and work for regulations that promote task orientation. Another way, that Bru (2006) suggests is to separate pupils who have a bad influence on each other. In doing so the teacher should be aware that he/she could make those pupils socially isolated, which in the worst case could lead to them dropping out of school. One could therefore as an alternative strategy work to improve the quality of friendship among the pupils.

Little (2005) discusses media portrayals of behavioural problems in secondary school. She wonders if their focus on bullying and violence as two big areas of concern coincide with the issues that secondary school teachers find most troublesome. By reading earlier research, among them the above-mentioned study by Houghton, Wheldall & Merrett (1998), she conducted a survey study among 148 secondary school teachers from schools in Victoria, Australia.

With regard to classroom management Little's (2005) results showed that 68 % of the teachers who participated in the study spent more time on matters of control and order than they believed they should. Her results also showed that

The mean number of troublesome students per class was 5,3 and males were reported as being more problematic than females, with a mean of 3,5 troublesome boys compared to 2 troublesome girls per class. (Little, 2005, p. 371)

Little (2005) also found some interesting changes over time that showed that the three most troublesome behaviours in grades 7 and 8, i.e., talking out of turn, hindering others, and disobedience, dropped as the pupils got into grades 11 and 12. Some behaviour, talking out of turn and disobedience, had dropped by half or more, according to the reports from the teachers. Another interesting result was that two pupils' behaviours showed the opposite change over time. Both idleness as well as unpunctuality increased over time. Concerning idleness, that was found to be the most troublesome behaviour in upper secondary school.

From Little's (2005) findings one can draw the conclusion that pupils over time in secondary school develop greater ability towards other pupils at the same time as they rebel against the teachers. Little conclude by saying, among other things, that

It is evident that teachers are spending a great deal of time and energy on managing inappropriate classroom behaviours that are of minor (but disruptive) nature. Students in secondary school classrooms engaging in behaviours that are interfering with their teachers' ability to teach and the smooth running of the classroom. (Little, 2005, p. 376)

Infantino and Little (2005) could, as a conclusion of their research, state that both teachers and students agreed that too much time was spent on managing troublesome behaviours in classrooms.

### *Classroom management*

As mentioned above, Granström (1998a) discussed professionalism as a general part of teachers' leadership and classroom management. Granström (1998b) makes a point that teachers' classroom management in Sweden still remains *a private matter* that in best case reflects the teachers' personal knowledge about teaching and the culture of teaching.

Brophy (1999) agrees that one could see four essential teacher functions (a) Instruction, (b) Classroom management, (c) Disciplinary interventions and (d) Student socialization.

*Instruction* refers to actions taken to assist students in mastering the formal curriculum (presenting information, demonstrating skills, conducting lessons or activities, supervising work on assignment, assessing progress).

*Classroom management* refers to action taken to create and maintain a learning environment conducive to successful instruction (arranging the physical environment of the classroom, establishing rules and procedures, maintaining attention to lessons and engagement in academic activities).

*Disciplinary interventions* are actions taken to elicit or compel changes in the behaviour of the students who fail to conform to expectations. These interventions are especially necessary when behaviour is salient or sustained enough to disrupt the classroom management system.

*Student socialization* refers to actions taken to influence students' personal or social attitudes, beliefs, expectations, or behaviour, especially those actions designed to help students fulfil their student role responsibilities more effectively. (Brophy, 1999, s. 43-44)

Teachers would (Brophy, 1999) spare themselves a lot of work if they kept their focus on three central aspects of classroom leadership. First of all teachers have to explain their expectations towards the students. Doing so would help teachers in the following way.

Is likely to be more effective than management that focuses on misbehaviour and places more emphasis on after-the-fact discipline than on before-the-fact prevention. (Brophy, 1999, s. 54)

Beyond this preventive work teachers should, according to Brophy (1999), as a second point, combine leadership and instruction. Thirdly, teachers should put a lot of work into their planning with a particular focus on possibilities

About desired learning activities and about the knowledge, skills, values, and behavioural dispositions that student must acquire in order to engage in these learning activities most profitably. (Brophy, 1999, s. 55)

If teachers could bring these three aspects together they would be able to create a classroom climate of clear expectations and frames that is necessary for the pupils to understand if they are to act in a way that is expected by the teacher.

Brophy's (1999) four functions and three aspects are more or less comparable with Little's (2003) argumentation about the effective teacher. Little (2003) builds up her argumentation with support from Freiberg (1983) who wrote

Classroom management is an important dimension of teaching because management activities lead to the establishment and maintenance of those conditions in which instruction can take place effectively and efficiently. (Freiberg, 1983, p. 1)

Little (2003) thinks that characteristics for the effective teacher include “‘withitness’, ‘rule setting’, ‘reinforcement’, ‘rapid pacing’, ‘lesson overlap’ and more time engaged in academic activities” (Little, 2003, p. 18).

Further, Little (2005) argues for minor interventions from the teachers towards minor problems, as found in her study. She agrees with Fields (1986, p. 56) who stated that “extraordinary intervention strategies are not normally required for those behaviours”. Merret and Wheldall (1988a) meant the same when saying that the most troublesome behaviours are those that require the least intervention in order to apply a change. These minor problems have been successfully treated in primary schools when teachers used so called tips sheets (Little, et al. 2002).

Corrie (1997) investigated how teachers could handle the most disturbing behaviour in classroom, i. e., talking out of turn (see for example Elton, 1989). For that reason she collected naturally occurring teacher-student interactions from whole-class story times. From interactions between two teachers and their students (Corrie, 1997) she was able to see that none of the teachers could describe why they acted as they did. Even so Corrie (1997) saw a clear link between their classroom practice and their professional knowledge. Both teachers were interested in reducing pupils’ talking out of turn because it interfered with learning. As part of doing that they engaged in describing their ways of acting with or against the pupils. From their and other teachers descriptions Corrie (1997) found that each of the teachers could be included in one out of two ways of talking with pupils during group work.

Table 3. *Two ways to effectively talk to the pupils during group work*

Teaching style	Content
Classroom talk teachers	Lead the children’s learning Know where the children should be going Organise the classroom Structure the learning Intervene to teach behaviour Enable children to learn Assess learning
Conversational teachers	Follow the children’s interest Step back and observe the children Don’t push children into learning until they are ready Don’t impose learning on children Respond to children’s needs

Corrie (1997) concludes by stating the importance of bringing teachers together so that they could reflect upon their work.

Teachers know a great deal; they need opportunities and support to talk about what they need and do, as they strive to achieve their aims for children in their classrooms. (Corrie, 1997, p. 31)

As part of classroom management research Van Houten et al. (1982) did some experiments in order to find out the effect of different reprimand strategies. They found in a first experiment that verbal reprimands together with eye contact and grasp reduced a student’s disruptive behaviour. As part of a second testing against another student they found that,

Reprimands delivered from one meter away were considerably more effective than reprimands delivered from seven meters away. (Van Houten, et al., 1982, p. 73).

In their third test they found that reprimands given to one out of two boys in a pair reduced the disruptive behaviour for both the boys. As part of their general discussion they state that through their

experiments they have identified three important factors, which had effect on reprimanding boys. They also argue that a lot of research is still to be done in order to deeper understand how to use these findings most effectively in the classroom.

Some of Van Houten et al.'s (1982) conclusions were also drawn by O'Leary et al. (1970) as part of their research about the effect of loud and soft reprimands directed towards disruptive students.

Their investigation examined an alternative approach against disruptive students, who until then often were ignored. O'Leary et al. (1970) stated that such a passive strategy could enforce other students to react along with the ignored student and then teachers had an even larger problem to handle.

Soft reprimands as they saw it were corrections delivered "in a soft manner so the other children in the classroom could not hear the reprimand" (O'Leary et al., 1970, p. 146).

The O'Leary et al. research was built on some assumptions about soft and loud reprimands;

First of all, a soft reprimand does not single out the child so that his disruptive behavior is made noticeable to others. Second, a soft reprimand is presumably different from the reprimands that disruptive children ordinarily receive at home or in school, and, consequently, it should minimize the possibility of triggering conditioned emotional reactions to reprimands. Third, teachers consider soft reprimands a viable alternative to usual methods of dealing with disruptive behavior. (O'Leary, et al., 1970, p. 146)

In their results they could see that soft reprimands, delivered close to the children, had some effects. But, they could also state that teachers gave their soft reprimands in the same harsh, firm or intense manner as when leaving loud reprimands. They concluded their findings by saying "that soft reprimands can be a useful method of dealing with disruptive children in a classroom. Combined with praise soft reprimand might be very helpful in reducing disruptive behavior" (O'Leary, et al., 1970, p. 155). Along with this conclusion they stated that loud reprimands could "lead one into a vicious cycle of more and more reprimands resulting in even more disruptive behavior" (O'Leary, et al., 1970, p. 155).

Good and Brophy (2000) describes some general management principles they think could help teachers to establish good classroom management, built on four assumptions such as,

1. Students are likely to follow rules that they understand and accept.
2. Discipline problems are minimized when students are regularly engaged in meaningful activities geared to their interests and aptitudes.
3. Management should be approached with an eye towards establishing a productive learning environment, rather than from a negative viewpoint stressing control of behavior.
4. The teacher's goal is to develop inner self-control in students, not merely to exert over them. (Good & Brophy, 2000, p.128)

Good and Brophy (2000) then describes six general principles for managing the classroom organisation, such as *plan rules and procedures in advance, establish clear rules and procedures where needed, let students assume responsibility, teacher-student cooperation, minimize disruptions and delays, plan independent activities as well as organized lessons*. Of particular interest for this paper is how teachers can handle disturbance during lessons.

Good and Brophy (2000) holds, like many others, that disruptions are easiest to handle before they have occurred. Teachers should therefore work on their preventions instead of using different strategies of intervention. Such a work could mean trying to avoid creating situations where students have to wait idly for something. This could be done by planning the activities, storing the items in different containers, breaking up the class into subgroups, using some students to distributing supplies, preparing on chalkboard, white board, overhead or computer should be done before the

lessons, as also the preparation of experiments or other demonstrations. All this is done in order to keep the pupils occupied instead of waiting.

## **Method**

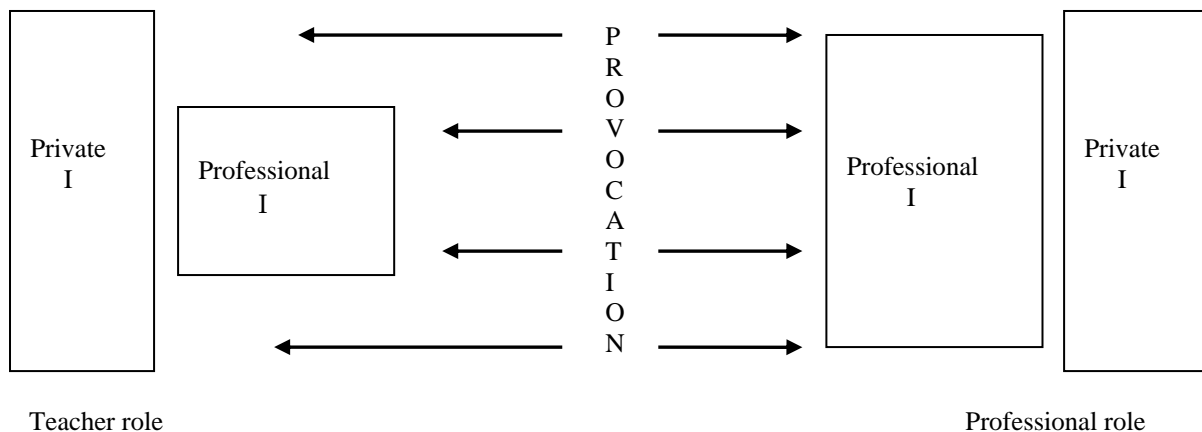
In order to collect data for my doctoral thesis I contacted school leaders of three secondary schools during spring 2003. All three of them were interested and introduced me to some of their teachers who were supposed to teach grade 7 classes the following school year 2003-2004. After meetings with the teachers, I got permission to follow three ordinary classes and all their teachers. Focus of the research I planned was formulated as questions, such as: *what kind of pupils' behaviour do teachers perceive as disturbing* and *what kind of strategies do teachers use to bring pupils back to work?*

### *Observations in three fields*

During my Yo-yo fieldwork (Wulff, 2002) I tried, as part of using participant observations, to be as open as possible about my research towards those involved. Having three fields to study I was able to stay in periods at each school. As a consequence I was not seen at some schools for some time. This also meant that, for each new period at one of the three schools, I had to reflect on my possible interference. A part of my reflections was concerned with three aspects of authenticity (Granström, 2004) as a way to discuss trustworthiness in observation as a method. Granström's (2004) first aspect is concerned with *the situation as authentic as possibly*. Reflection about this criteria means that we as researchers must be able to argue that the situation that we study or follow "does not diverge from the natural or ordinary" [my translation] (Granström, 2004, s. 290). The second aspect is that the researcher should make credible that "the observations did not influence the situation" [my translation] (Granström, 2004, s. 291) which means that the arrangements' possible effects must be discussed, especially if the researcher uses type recorder, videotape recorder or other types of artefacts for collecting data material. Finally, Granström (2004, s. 302) holds that one should make credible that the "participants have not been influenced by the research situation" [my translation]. From this follows that the researcher, in a reflective way, has to discuss the potential effects of the observations by not hiding his comments, whatsoever, that express consciousness of being observed spelled out by any informant. In my case the first criterion was fulfilled by my following the ordinary schedule for the grade 7 classes. I also followed the school classes and their teachers for a long period of time while using different places for my observations inside the classroom. The second criterion was fulfilled through my open use of diaries where I wrote my field notes. If teachers or pupils asked me about what I was writing I tried to explain and let them, if they wanted, read for themselves, directly from my field notes. I also adjusted my writings to certain situations trying to disturb as little as possible. It sometimes meant that I gave up writing during periods of lessons, especially when few pupils were present. The third criterion was fulfilled through talks with both teachers and pupils before and after the lessons.

### *Analysing data material*

In order to answer my research questions I analyzed the field notes that had been written during my field periods in school. The analysis was inspired by Grounded theory (Guvå & Hylander, 2003). My findings were then applied to Granström's (1998) model for describing the effects of a poorly developed professionalism among teachers or other professionals such as psychologists.



*Figure 1.* Description of how provocation as a consequence of low or high professional development reaches the private I (after Granström, 1998).

Granström (1998a) argues that teachers' uncertain professionalism could make them easy targets of pupils' provocations. This is a consequence of them experiencing pupils' disruptive behaviours "as an attack on their role as leaders of work" (Granström, 1988a, p. 47). Some teachers also told him that they were exposed to direct attacks on their private role. This happens when a pupil "says bad things to the teacher, hits or spits on the teacher or disobeys" (Granström, 1998a, p. 47). Such acts from pupils could interfere with the teacher's flexibility and creativity. As part of teachers connecting their identity and personality to their role as teachers they risk to understand every troublesome behaviour as an attack against their private I.

## Results

In the field notes that I wrote during my eight months Yo-yo fieldwork where I followed three secondary grade 7 classes I found that the 49 teachers [28 female and 21 male] who instructed the classes put their attention to 460 misbehaviours that in some kind of way disturbed them. In order to change these misbehaviours that disturbed the lessons the same teachers used 491 corrections of some kind.

### *Disturbing actions from pupils during lessons*

During my analysis of disruptive expressions I found that pupils' misbehaviours could be divided into four main categories, such as (a) *disturbing ways to handle oneself*, (b) *pupils' misuse of artefacts*, (c) *odd traits or peculiarities*, (d) *lack of order in the classroom*.

### **Disturbing ways to handle oneself**

When teachers were disturbed by pupils' way to handle themselves it was as a consequence of how they handled their bodies, how they listened or spoke.

#### *Handle bodies*

Teacher's attention towards pupil's way to handle their bodies was connected to either *place* or *work*. When it was put under attention as a consequence of place pupils were often found at the wrong place at the wrong time.

The female civics teacher walked around in the classroom among the pupils who wrote an examination. She suddenly stopped and looked at three boys who stood at one of the windows looking out, and then she said: "Go back to your places and sit down."

When teachers were disturbed during work it was connected to pupils who failed to live up to the teacher's expectations. This often was a consequence of how pupils arranged their bodies towards the work that they were expected to fulfil. Pupils were thereby reminded that their bodies should be directed to the front of the classroom in an upright position.

### *Handle listening*

When pupils failed to listen to either the teacher or their classmates, teachers commented on how they handled listening. This was done as a consequence of pupils not listening at all or pupils listening at the wrong thing. In the cases when pupils were put under attention because of not listening at all, teachers complained about them being unable to interact with the surroundings.

The female maths teacher talked to the whole class about ways to handle a problem. She stopped her introduction and directed a question towards a girl: "Explain unit price!" The girl startled and looked up towards the teacher who said: "I turned to you because you were doing something other than listening."

In those cases when teachers reacted towards pupils listening to the wrong thing, it was often as a consequence of them being involved in listening to other pupils. The teacher there- by made the pupils aware of whom they should listen to, as a way of telling them where they should have their focus.

### *Handle talking*

If a single pupil or a group of pupils talked when they were not supposed to, the teachers reacted on their actions. This was done if pupils talked at the wrong moment or if they said something unsuitable. Teachers' attention to pupils talking at the wrong moment followed after pupils answering or commenting things right across the classroom without waiting for their turn to speak. When some of the pupils said something not fit for the classroom situation, such as bad language or condescending comments about other pupils, other pupils' capability or beliefs or something outside school, as idols, immigrants or pupils at another school, teachers reacted.

### **Pupils' misuse of artefacts**

Artefacts were seen to disturb the education by its presence or its absence. These disturbances were connected to whether the artefacts were personal or educational.

#### *Personal artefacts*

The personal artefacts that were put under attention were described as lesson irrelevant. Teachers commented on pupils' caps, Walkman, mobile phones or chewing gums.

#### *Educational artefacts*

As concerns educational artefacts that were under attention it came as a consequence of pupils not bringing calendars, maps or rulers to the lessons. These artefacts were seen as necessary for the moment or for the future.

The female English teacher asked the class to look at their schedules. When nothing happened she looked at the pupils and asked: "Did you come to the lesson without a schedule or a calendar?" Some pupils said: "Yes." The teacher then told the pupils about the benefit of always bringing both schedule and calendar to the lessons in the future.

### **Odd traits or peculiarities**

Pupils' peculiarities that disturbed the teachers during the lessons were divided into *pupils' responsibility*, *pupils' adjustment* and *pupils' confidence*.

#### *Pupils' responsibility*

The first aspect of traits that teachers put under attention was concerned with pupils' responsibility. This was often as a consequence of pupils' lack of responsibility for doing schoolwork or lack of responsibility for keeping agreements. If pupils in some kind of way failed to live up to the teacher's expectation, the teacher commented on their age, experience of school or maturity as aspects that should condition them to act as expected.

### *Pupils' adjustment*

From the first day in secondary school teachers made different types of adjustment with the pupils. If they, for some kind of reason, did not live up to adjustments, such as pupils' thoughts about schoolwork in general, as well as pupils' confidence towards different subjects, and also pupils' joking, teachers put that fact under attention.

### *Pupils' self confidence*

The third aspect of traits or peculiarities that teachers put under attention was pupils' self confidence. Teachers thereby reacted towards pupils not trusting their own capability to handle a part of or a situation in a subject.

### **Lack of order in the classroom**

The lack of order in the classroom that the teachers put under attention came out of the fact that the material was unorganised or that the structure was unorganised.

### *Workplace related disorder*

Material for work that teachers put under attention was connected to either pupils' work or disorder in the organisation of interiors in the classroom. In those cases when pupils failed to keep their workplaces clean or did not bring back material that they had used during the lesson teachers reacted. When disorder in the organisation of interiors was put under attention it followed as a consequence of pupils' failure to restore furniture as they were when the lessons started.

### *Unorganised structure for work*

When the structure for work was put under attention by the teachers, it often followed as a reaction to how pupils were divided into groups or how pupils were seated in the classroom. Division in groups was never put under consideration or discussion by the teachers. When it came to where pupils should sit it was the other way around. The teachers spent much time in organising where the pupils should sit for their own benefit as well as the classes and the teacher's.

### *Teachers' ways to handle disruptions in the classroom*

Teachers who gave the lessons that I visited used all together, as mentioned above, 491 corrections in order to handle the corrections in the classrooms. During my analysis it became evident that these corrections could be divided into (a) *non-verbal signals* and (b) *verbal measures*.

### **Non-verbal signals**

Those non-verbal signals that the teachers used towards the secondary school pupils were (a) gestures, (b) external support, (c) touching pupils, (d) ignoring pupils, (e) physical interventions, (f) getting close to pupils, (g) eye contact, and (h) stop talking.

### *Using gestures*

Teachers used different gestures in order to handle troublesome behaviours in the classrooms. They sometimes used their hands or their fingers to point at a place or at pupils who ought to redirect themselves. They also used their heads to stop wrong actions shaking their heads from one side to the other. Beside these signals teachers sometimes also used their faces to reduce disruptive behaviour. This was then done by looking sad or angry at something said or done by the pupils. When using gestures teachers often stood distanced from the pupils they corrected.

### *Using external support*

When this non-verbal signal occurred the teacher used the school's official alert system to make a group of boys understand that they had crossed the line of acceptable classroom behaviour. This non-verbal signal was also delivered from a distance to the pupils.

### *Touching pupils*

As part of teachers' corrections they sometimes touched pupils. This was done by teachers getting close to the disruptive pupil and after that putting their hand on the pupil's arm or shoulder.

### *Ignoring pupils*

As part of the interaction after the lesson had started teachers sometimes ignored pupils as a way to handle their troublesome behaviour.

The female French teacher said to one boy standing up in the classroom: "Sit done!" The boy replied to her request and said: "Yeah, but I need to take a pee." The teacher continued informing the class about the importance of listening to the cd-records they had borrowed from school.

As seen in this example, teachers when ignoring pupils did not continue the interaction with them. Instead they, as in the example, directed their speech towards someone else.

### *Physical interventions*

During a few lessons teachers did physical interventions towards pupils, artefacts or structural aspects. When it was towards pupils it often was as a consequence of pupils wrestling with each other. The teacher then separated them, brought them back to their places and then went on with the lesson. In those cases when the teacher intervened against artefacts it followed as a consequence of pupils' way to handle for example their caps. The third aspect of physical intervention, against structure, came as a consequence of pupils trying to rearrange the places in the classroom.

### *Getting close to pupils*

After the lesson had begun most teachers started to walk around among the pupils. This way they were getting close to pupils in order to correct them. Teachers' closeness could be either spontaneous or planned. When teachers got close to pupils spontaneously it was as a consequence of their need to handle pupils they just passed. In doing so teachers often sat down beside them or leant over their desks in order to improve their actions in some kind of way. The planned closeness was when teachers were looking across the classroom to find some pupils disturbing the lesson by their action. The teacher therefore directed their way through the classroom so as to get as close as was needed without saying anything and yet urging those who disturbed to change their manners.

### *Using eye-contact*

From positions in front of the class, close to the teacher's desk, teachers sometimes used eye-contact as a way to handle troublesome behaviour. Doing so the teacher stopped and looked as long as was needed at the pupil or pupils who disturbed the lesson. This form of non-verbal signal was used towards pupils making noise or pupils not sitting as expected.

One of the boys in the class asked loudly when the lesson was almost finished: "Can we go now?" The male German language teacher turned to the boy, looked at him without saying anything. The boy didn't ask any more.

As seen in this example the teacher by his look showed the boy that he had heard the question. By doing so he also made clear to the class that they were to leave the classroom as soon as he found the desks put back to order.

### *Stop talking*

During the beginning or ending of lessons teachers sometimes stopped talking to the pupils as a way to handle their disruptive behaviour. This act from the teachers often followed after them saying hallo to the pupils or it was used to initiate saying goodbye.

## **Verbal measures**

In order to affect the grade 7 pupils they taught, the teachers used (a) to talk ironically to pupils, (b) to name pupils, (c) to urge pupils, (d) to reproof pupils, and (e) to reprimand pupils.

### *Talking ironically to the pupils*

In some cases teachers used irony in order to intervene against pupils' misbehaviour. Doing so teachers reacted as had they been provoked or as a way to make fun of pupils' capability.

A boy stopped the male French language teacher and asked: "Could we have the homework until Friday?" The teacher looked at him and said: "What are you saying Joakim, you don't even do your homework!" The boy replied: "I did once." The teacher finished the interaction by saying: "When, in October?"

As seen in the example up above the teacher uses his leading position in the classroom to shut down the boy who raises his voice. The teacher thereby makes a statement that the boy has to do his homework before engaging in the discussion about which day to show the result of doing the homework.

### *To name pupils*

When teachers named pupils they used their names in order to stop them from being disruptive. When doing so the teachers often stood close to the teachers' desk shouting all over the classroom.

### *To urge pupils*

Teachers' urges were the single most used strategy to deal with troublesome behaviours in classroom. The urges that teachers used were concerned with a lot of different disturbing actions. The strategy often referred back to instructions that were earlier given. The urges encouraged pupils to change their manner on their own without the teachers making a big thing of their misbehaviours.

### *To reproof pupils*

The teachers' reproofs aimed at pupils' adjustment. Pupils were as a consequence of teachers' reproof ordered to change their way of acting immediately. By reproof teachers thereby tried to change pupils' actions, the way the pupils spoke, pupils' thoughts about schoolwork, pupils' expression against other pupils, as well as pupils' expressions against teachers.

When the pupils moved towards the teacher's desk to get the material for the experiment, one of the boys suddenly broke the silence in the classroom by shouting back to his friends in the middle of the classroom: "What should I get?" Their answer wasn't heard because the male biology teacher over-voiced them saying: "While you get something here in front of the whole class, you aren't allowed to talk back the way you just did, you don't need to use words like hell, and so on, is that ok with you!?" The boy hummed as an answer.

The male teacher does in this example reproof the boy on account of his way to interact with his friend. The teacher also makes a point about how he wants the boy to act when fetching material for the experiment, as well as letting the boy know which word he dislikes during the lessons.

### *To reprimand pupils*

If pupils did not change their manners fast enough as part of teachers' request and reproof teachers sometimes used reprimands. This was the strongest correction according to my study and followed as part of pupils not working enough or pupils' recurrent disturbance.

After a short break the male natural science teacher commented on where a boy sat and asked him to move to some girls where he, according to the teacher's experience, had behaved better. The boy changed place. Doing so his former friend who now was left alone started to complain. The

teacher directly reprimanded and said with a strong voice: “Shut up, I am the teacher and you are the student!”

The teacher hopes to change the classroom climate by splitting up the two disturbing boys. Doing so one of them raises a protest that the teacher dismisses by letting the boy know who is in charge of the classroom.

### Conclusions

The aim of this paper was divided between, on the one hand, to describe which troublesome behaviours that some secondary school teachers in Sweden put under attention during ordinary lessons, and on the other hand, to describe which strategies teachers used in order to handle those disruptive pupils. As seen above teachers reacted against four major categories of troublesome behaviours, that is, *disturbing ways to handle oneself, pupils’ misuse of artefacts, odd traits or peculiarities, or the lack of order in the classroom*. Teachers corrected these disturbances by using either *verbal strategies* or *non-verbal signals*.

From my description one can state that the 49 Swedish teachers, who taught the three secondary classes that I followed during eight months, were in general disturbed by the same things as teachers in other Western countries (Houghton, Wheldall, & Merrett, 1988; Granström, 2002, Little, 2005). The teachers were mostly disturbed by pupils’ problems in handling their bodies seen as talk and walking around in the classrooms. As part of my description one could also state that my research showed aspects of misbehaviour that earlier was less described. This could be said about disruptive behaviour as well as classroom management. Little’s (2005) request of qualitative research to add to the earlier quantitative could therefore be described as right if we are to understand what teachers’ are disturbed of and how they handle those disturbance.

In order to correct the pupils, teachers mostly used far distanced urges from which the pupils were supposed to change their behaviour on their own. Even if teachers mostly kept some distance to the pupils they sometimes used a combination of strategies, like reprimand (Van Houten, 1982), eye-contact and touch or grasp. I could also state that they used loud reprimands as O’Leary (1970) described it and thereby missing all the possible effects he described as an effect out of using soft reprimands. In contrast to the reported earlier research teachers sometimes planned their walk around the classroom getting close to disturbing pupils thus having an effect on their behaviour. As could be seen teachers sometimes also used the strategy suggested by (Bru, 2006) to separate misbehaving pupils from each other.

### Pros and cons

The research that has been presented in this paper was conducted from a teacher’s perspective. In order to, as I described in the method section, discuss the *for and against*, pros and cons, of the behaviours that the teachers put under attention and afterwards corrected, I applied Granström’s (1998a) theories about professionalism as a shield against provocations. I observed that teachers in general put attention on some disruptive behaviour. But it also became obvious that teachers had different goals with their corrections. That followed as a consequence of the teachers having different interpretations, in fact that they meant something to be or not to be troublesome.

Combining the results from my research with Granström’s (1998a) model I found that teachers’ ways to correct pupils in classroom could be described as (a) *work orientated*, (b) *survival orientated*, (c) *collegial orientated*, or (d) *personal orientated*.

The first way to understand teachers’ corrections could be to describe them as *work orientated*. By that I mean that teachers through their corrections against troublesome behaviours meant to redirect the pupils back to work, back to the form of work that was ordinarily used during the lesson or change how the work in the classroom was conducted. This could be done as in the following example.

The female Swedish language teacher explained to the pupils how she wanted the work to be performed. "When you have finished reading the texts you form the groups I just described." She then changed her voice and stated with a strained voice: "REMEMBER THAT PRESCHOOL IS FINISHED, YOU ARE GROWN UP NOW, AND THAT MEANS WORK!"

As this example shows teachers' corrections, conducted as work orientated, could be understood as teachers trying to make whatever effort necessary to create possibilities for as many pupils as possible to develop skills needed for life after school.

A second way to understand the corrections that the teachers used was to see them as *survival orientated*. By that I mean that teachers through their corrections intended to maintain a certain atmosphere in the classroom. This was done so the teachers themselves could put up with teaching the pupils and being a teacher, for instance, by using corrections as follows.

Some of the boys shouted: "Liar, you said that we would get off earlier". The male language teacher answered them by saying: "Who said?" The boys kept on arguing with the teacher until he, without a word, lifted a local warning sign, and under silence stood with it turned against the boys until they stopped talking.

Here we can see an example of a lesson where the teacher is losing the grip on the situation. In order to silence the boys and make things smoother he threatens the boys with the warning sign.

A third way to understand these corrections is to see them as *collegial orientated*. By that I mean that the correction that teachers conducted was connected to the rules and regulations that were agreed on in each one of the schools I visited. When correcting in this way it could be done as below.

The female civics teacher said good morning to the pupils when they had sat down at their desks. The teacher looked over the classroom and commented on a boy's cap as he had it on, and then asked the class: "Have you had breakfast; are you finished with your chewing; no one has anything in his or her mouth?"

By asking the class questions about chewing gums as well as commenting about the boy's cap the teacher lived up to the collegial expectations about order in the classroom.

The fourth way in which teachers used correction was to be understood as *personal orientated*. By that I mean that the correction that the teachers gave to the pupils was connected to the teachers' own feelings about the pupils and the situation. This could be done as in the following example.

One boy reacted when it was time to make some notes and said: "I have no pencil." The female Swedish language teacher looked at him and said: "You should bring a pencil to every lesson." The boy replied: "No." The teacher went on saying: "Yes you should, otherwise you will get a bad mark to bring to your form teacher!" "No, not from not bringing a pencil to the lesson", the boy tried to say in an inferior voice. "Yes you will", said the female teacher once again and concluded the conversation by saying: "Because of irritating behaviour against the teacher!"

As seen in the example above the female teacher gets more and more provoked during the conversation by the boy's negotiations so that she ends up giving him a bad mark for irritating her.

The figure of Granström (1998a) could be used to discuss these four different teacher strategies for dealing with disruptive classroom behaviours. Teachers' ways of acting in each one of the four strategies, as seen in my examples, exposed how they were more or less provoked by the pupils' troublesome behaviours. One could see that teachers act differently as they have different intentions with their corrections, as part of their practice as teachers. Teachers' corrections could be understood as *work orientated* or *collegial orientated*, the teachers stood up against the pupils' provocations and argued that the whole idea with school was to work, learn and develop along with other human beings. No one of this argument was heard when teachers' corrections could be understood as *survival*

*orientated* or *personal orientated*. The corrections then served the teacher of being able to put up with yet another day at work or at least get as peaceful lesson as possible.

The first two *work orientated* and *collegial orientated*, could then be understood as teachers having the best interest for as many as possible before their eyes when correcting disruptive behaviours, while the last two, *survival orientated* and *personal orientated*, could be understood as looking after their own best interests.

### Final words

These four different ways to understand teachers' corrections and their connection to whatever troublesome behaviours teachers put under attention perhaps raise more questions than they provide answers to. Even so, at least one answer is provided, which follows the arguments from Corrie (1997), Granström (1998a), Colnerud and Granström (2002), saying that teachers' use different strategies against different troublesome behaviours in such a way that it could be understood as ad-hoc solutions. This unveils a lack of general classroom management competence among the 49 Swedish secondary school teachers who taught the three grade 7 classes that I followed for eight months.

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