

Association of Teachers and Lecturers Press Release

Press Office: 7 Northumberland Street, London WC2N 5RD
Direct Line: (020) 7782 1589 Fax: (020) 7925 0529
Switchboard: (020) 7930 6441 Mobile: 07918 617466

E-mail: newsdesk@atl.org.uk Website: www.atl.org.uk



30 March 2009

Inappropriate behaviour on *Big Brother* and *Little Britain* are leading to classrooms of Vicky Pollards, says ATL

Big Brother and *Little Britain* are the television programmes which teachers, support staff and school leaders say cause most behaviour problems among children in their schools, according to a survey by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL).

In a survey of almost 800 education staff, 66 per cent said that *Big Brother* was the programme that caused most poor behaviour among pupils, closely followed by *Little Britain* at 61 per cent and *Eastenders* at 43 per cent. Staff say these programmes led to general rudeness, such as answering back, mimicking, using retorts and TV catchphrases (mentioned by 88 per cent), and swearing or using inappropriate language (mentioned by 82 per cent). Aggressive behaviour was highlighted by 74 per cent of those surveyed, and sexually inappropriate behaviour by 43 per cent.

A classroom teacher at a state secondary school said: "*Little Britain* caused a lot of answering back when it was on, and the content in any case was not appropriate for the year 7 - 9 pupils who I know watched it." And a teacher at an independent secondary school in Wales added that pupils in her school were "Mimicking *Little Britain* loud enough for me to hear about breast feeding!"

Other shows which were heavily criticised were *The Catherine Tate Show*, with pupils using phrases such as "*Whatev-ah!*" and "*Am I bovvered!*" as regular retorts. Worrying behaviour in younger pupils included kicking and fighting games, picked up from TV programmes such as *Power Rangers* and *Ben 10*.

Teachers, support staff and school leaders believe that television is the media type which has the greatest impact on children's behaviour (mentioned by 40 per cent), and has an even more significant influence on children's behaviour than computer and video games (mentioned by 28 per cent.)

Eighty-six per cent of school staff felt that television programmes containing bad behaviour had a negative affect on the behaviour of their pupils. With 85 per cent stating that pupils in their school watch TV programmes containing bad or inappropriate behaviour, either before or after the nine o' clock watershed.

Many members felt that pupils copy what they see on television, and that bad behaviour on television gives pupils ideas, and reinforces that it is acceptable to behave in that way.

Debbie Cooper, a member of the school leadership team at a Northamptonshire primary school said: "A year 2 child is being very rough at playtime - he claims he is *Ben 10!* When asked to stop, he changes it to *Power Rangers*.....and so it goes on. A challenging pupil repeatedly hits himself on the forehead (enough to make a mark) and says 'doh' every time - he thinks he is one of *The Simpsons*. Girls in year 1 and 2 are talking inappropriately in the playground - when asked who they are pretending to be in the

game, the reply is 'Whitney' and Tony from *Eastenders* - the one with lots of make-up who snogs her Dad!"

A primary school teacher from Gloucestershire added "A child decided to impersonate a terrorist and shoot a group of children because they were another religion."

And a Kent primary school teacher said that behaviour displayed included "Knives brought in due to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, sexually inappropriate language, swearing etc."

A school leader at a state primary school said: "Children do not think that 'bloody' is swearing as they hear it so often on television. Catchphrases are used as retorts - 'eat my shorts' from *The Simpsons*. They talk freely about shooting people, stabbing, and the music videos give the boys an unrealistic outlook on females as sexual objects."

A head of department at a Kent secondary school added that pupils "...cannot see a difference between reality and reality TV, and the glorification of low culture and moral standards being displayed are seen as normal." He added that behaviour in his school specifically related to TV programmes included "Use of the word 'nigger' because of *Celebrity Big Brother*, shouting and screaming at each other - walking off too - like on *Jeremy Kyle*, poorly worn uniform as on *Waterloo Road*, and being like *Little Britain* characters - for real!" Other comments included young people role playing situations they have seen on TV, including robbery, kidnap and drug-dealing.

Seventy-five per cent of education staff said that television programmes should be classified in a similar way to film age classifications. However, although many said that they thought classifications would help parents and carers make informed decisions about what is appropriate for their children to watch, they largely felt they would be "unenforceable".

A teacher at a Special Education Needs School in Kent said "I am not sure it would help much - would the parents really vet what their children are watching, especially since a great many children now have their own TVs in their rooms?"

The lack of parental supervision over TV viewing was highlighted by a number of respondents, with some recommending that parents should take more responsibility over what their children watch. There were also concerns that young people are staying up too late watching television, not only because they are exposed to content inappropriate for their age, but because it affects their ability to function during lessons.

Dr Mary Bousted, general secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) said: "School staff believe that television has an even greater influence on the behaviour of young people than computer and video games, which are age classified. Teachers, support staff and school leaders report that more and more pupils believe the violence depicted on television and computer and video games is cool, heroic and something that they want to emulate. And it is not just aggressive behaviour, our members face swearing, inappropriate language and general rudeness on a daily basis, which is frequently picked up from the TV programmes pupils are watching. It is worrying that some of the youngest pupils do not know what behaviour is acceptable and when they should use it, and can not differentiate between what they have seen on TV and real life.

"ATL believes that television companies should consider the consequences of showing programmes containing bad behaviour before the watershed, and take more responsibility regarding the content of programmes in general, particularly considering the impact they have on the behaviour of young people. The increasing accessibility of TV programmes on digital channels and via the internet, means that parents and carers have an even greater role to play in supervising what their children watch."

ENDS

For further information please contact the ATL press office on 0207 782 1589 or visit our website www.atl.org.uk.

Note to editors:

1. 796 ATL members working as teachers, support staff and school leaders in primary and secondary state and independent schools in the UK were questioned between 9 March and 16 March 2008.

Key survey results:

What type of media do you feel has the biggest influence on your pupils particularly in terms of their behaviour? (724 answered)	Television Radio Films/DVDs Magazines Internet Social networking sites eg. Facebook, Bebo, Twitter Computer/Video games Other	40% 0.1% 9% 1% 5% 17% 28% 2%	
Looking specifically at television, do you feel that programmes aired before the 9pm “watershed” are in general appropriate for your pupils? (724 answered)	Yes 36%	No 56%	Don't know 8%
Do you feel that TV programmes should be classified in a similar way to film age classifications? (724 answered)	Yes 75%	No 17%	Don't know 8%
Do any of your pupils watch TV programmes containing bad/inappropriate behaviour, either before or after the watershed? (724 answered)	Yes 85%	No 1%	Don't know 14%
If you answered yes to previous question, do you feel these TV programmes have a negative affect on your pupils behaviour in school? (616 answered)	Yes 86%	No 6%	Don't know 8%
If you answered yes to previous question, what type(s) of bad/inappropriate behaviour do pupils display? Members ticked all that applied. (537 answered)	Aggressive behaviour Bullying (both physical and verbal) Dressing inappropriately Drinking General rudeness i.e. answering back, mimicking, retorts using TV catchphrases etc Sexually inappropriate behaviour Smoking Swearing/inappropriate language Other	74% 42% 43% 26% 88% 43% 17% 82% 3%	
Do you feel any of the following TV programmes have led to, or could lead to, bad/inappropriate pupil behaviour in your school? Members ticked all that applied. (599 answered)	Big Brother The Bill Coronation Street Demons Dr Who Eastenders Emmerdale Gossip Girl Hollyoaks Little Britain The OC The Simpsons Skins Waterloo Road Don't know TV programmes don't affect pupil behaviour Other	66% 10% 17% 8% 4% 43% 11% 12% 36% 61% 5% 20% 33% 26% 12% 2% 8%	

2. The 2009 ATL annual conference is taking place from the 6-9 April at the BT Convention Centre, Liverpool.

3. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) is an independent, registered trade union and professional association, representing approximately 160,000 teachers, headteachers, lecturers and support staff in maintained and independent nurseries, schools, sixth form, tertiary and further education colleges in the United Kingdom.
4. ATL exists to help members, as their careers develop, through first rate research, advice, information and legal advice.
5. ATL is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC), Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) and Education International (EI). The union is a member of the Social Partnership – working with the UK Government, employers and other unions on education issues. ATL is not affiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.