

CHAPTER

1

Being Prepared: Proactive Management

'A good plan is like a road map: it shows the final destination and usually the best way to get there.'

H. Stanley Judd

Key subjects

- Organising the learning space
- Planning for behaviour
- Understanding behaviour
- Establishing positive relationships

Organising the learning space

Our focus throughout this book is on creating a positive learning environment through effectively managing the 'hidden curriculum'; that is, how we connect with our students to engage them in their learning. This chapter focuses on working proactively—on being *prepared*, to not only engage but to also manage your students and their behaviour in any given learning environment.

Working proactively to create a positive learning environment you will ask yourself:

1. What is important to consider and prepare for, prior to teaching?
2. What is important to focus on in the next few weeks in order to establish positive relationships, build a general sense of well-being and lay the foundations for effective teaching and learning for the year?

And in order to assist you in preparing to manage a class and establish a positive learning environment, we will focus on the following areas.

1. Organising the learning space
2. Planning for behaviour
3. Understanding behaviour
4. Establishing positive relationships

A well-organised and well-managed learning space can prevent many behaviour issues from arising. Whether you share an open learning space with colleagues or teach in a single classroom, science laboratory, art or music room, gymnasium, or the outdoors, you will need to plan for both your students and the learning that is to take place and organise the learning space accordingly. This requires considering, firstly:

- the kind of learning space you are working in
- the planned activities
- the arrangement of furniture, equipment, materials and the effective use of teaching resources, including technology.

Then, secondly, consider the needs of your students—both on a daily basis and in general—and plan for these accordingly. It may sound a little onerous but when working proactively and having considered the various options described above, you will be far better prepared for your classes. Now consider the following section as a checklist and choose what is appropriate for you in your teaching situation.



During your practicums, observe how other teachers organise their classes and note down what you feel will be important for you when preparing to manage your own class.

Managing for optimum learning

You and your students share the learning space and therefore it should be optimised for both their learning and your teaching. Arrange the furniture and equipment to help ensure this and improve everyone's overall well-being. Poorly organised or unplanned learning spaces can lead to issues in a class that can impinge upon general well-being and are often reflected in noisy and restless behaviour across a class. It can be a valuable exercise to discuss with your older students how to arrange the learning space to achieve optimal learning.

The ability of students to work together depends on the cohesiveness of the class. Sometimes troublesome class dynamics can impact on both student behaviour and on learning. Consider the following when planning.

With younger students, seating is often according to the activity and is randomly shared. Provide opportunities for younger students to work with different partners and in different groups—for example, having rotating work partners or buddies. When the students have opportunities to get to know each other, they can develop a greater tolerance and acceptance of difference in the classroom, which ultimately builds empathy among classmates.

With older students who may have preferred desks or tables, you may wish initially to arrange seating strategically for your benefit—for example, students sit alphabetically as you get to know them at the beginning of a year or term. Also, establishing seating at the beginning of a year or term can be a way of working proactively, depending on how you perceive their behaviour. When students demonstrate that they can make wise choices regarding their work partners or work groups (not necessarily partnering with their friends) and, once they've become familiar with your teaching approach, then you can provide opportunities for them to choose where they sit and with whom they work.



When re-arranging furniture, students are quite capable of moving their own chairs and tables according to their learning activity. Train them to do so, while timing them so they can see how quickly and quietly they can accomplish this. They will enjoy the exercise and learn to take responsibility for themselves and for their school equipment.

Never do what students can do—if they can do it why are you?

When facing a more challenging class, you may wish to arrange how students are seated, where they sit and with whom they sit as a way of reducing disruption. You may advise the class, ‘I really want everyone to do well and produce the best work they can, so we are going to try out some new seating arrangements. You may not be happy about these at first, but I have confidence in your ability to adjust to the changes and produce better work.’ Your students may complain, but don’t get hooked in. Remain firm—you are their teacher and they will see the benefits eventually.

Managing the learning space

Consider the following suggestions and think about what may work for you and your students.

Positioning yourself in the learning space

When a speaker stands at a podium, the audience, no matter their age, knows to be quiet and listen. A teacher does not have such a facility as a podium. However, you often need to address the class and, in turn, require your students to stop and listen. Consider choosing a position in the learning space as soon as you begin teaching in the space, from where each student is able to clearly see and hear you, and which reaffirms to them that when you’re in that position you have something important to communicate to them. As students learn from your stance, body language, voice and gesture to be quiet and listen, you will be able to vary your position for addressing the class. However, remember that important information is far better retained when made visual as well as when given verbally, so ensure you have easy access to a whiteboard or interactive whiteboard to demonstrate or outline any important information or involve students in helping to do this.

Managing technology and behaviour

For many teachers, technology is a valuable tool; however, many a behaviour issue can arise due to technology being poorly managed. If connections are inadequately placed in the room, avoid where possible having to sit beside your computer to operate it. Rather organise for extension cords, a wireless keyboard, or a remote control to ensure that you can interact with and maintain focus on your students.



Your students are your focus, and they need to know that you are aware of them all the time. Scanning the room and ensuring students know that you know how they are doing is an important management skill.

Furniture placement and seating arrangement

Placement of furniture and arrangement of seating also impacts on behaviour and requires careful planning. As a general rule, ensure that you can move around the room and have easy access to all students. Remember to avoid placing desks/tables and chairs against walls, and avoid arranging rows in a way that prevents you from moving to the back and around the learning space. Ensure students have easy access entering and exiting and to all learning and resource materials.

Working individually, in pairs and in groups

Specific learning activities will determine whether students work individually, in pairs or in groups. For individual and group work, organise furniture according to the learning space available, the learning requirements and the age and capabilities of your students.

For individual work: Tables or desks (for one or two students) can be arranged in a semi-circle, a U-shape, two large Ls around an open space or a series of L-shapes, or in rows. You may vary this according to the age and learning abilities of your students.

For group work: Where tables and desks are grouped for students to work together, consider the following and adapt your plan accordingly. Being seated in a group of four or six where they face each other naturally invites conversations, which is excellent for group work. However, be mindful that with a 'chatty' class, this arrangement of tables and desks is not advantageous for individual work, so you may need to re-arrange the furniture once the group work is completed.

For small group or individual teaching: When you are working with students in small groups, choose an allocated table area or floor space to work from where you can scan the room, or, if you're focusing on students individually and moving around the room, you may need an extra chair as you work beside students. Ensure flexibility in the arrangement of the learning space so you can move and work from any area in the room, while still being able to scan the room to check that students are on task and when they are in need of assistance.



If you have additional support staff to work with some students, ensure you can accommodate them and they have a place in the learning space. A table, desk or chair should be available as needed, so they can work with individual students.

Managing open spaces

An open floor space provides opportunities for early years, primary and middle year classes to come together, connect, discuss, share, and reflect. It also provides a space

for learning games and group activities. If you are fortunate enough to have this facility of an open floor space when planning an activity, you need to assess what space you will require for the whole class to be on the floor—either seated on the floor or carpet, or chairs if required. In some schools, teachers move outdoors or into a hall for certain open space activities. Whatever space you may have, keep the following in mind.

Group or block seating works well on the floor when you are communicating with your students, giving them information or when they are learning from a board or interactive whiteboard. Teach students different ways of sitting on the floor (e.g., either with legs crossed or legs to the side) so they can switch around without disturbing others.

Prevent quiet disruption (e.g., touching, bumping, fiddling, whispering, restless moving) by ensuring students are not crowded together. Be aware that students who sit themselves at the back of a class tend to be the least attentive, and can be more restless. To exacerbate matters, these students often cannot hear what other students at the front are saying and therefore they lose focus. It is important to consider the placement of these students when organising group or block seating.

For younger children you can mark out seating squares on the floor and teach them about their ‘space bubbles’. The ‘space bubbles’ give each child their own personal space and demonstrates to them how to respect other people’s personal space. Providing an individualised carpet square or circle can enable some students to better manage themselves within that space— for example, restless students can inadvertently enter another’s personal space and some students can become upset when another student infringes on their personal space. Aim to prevent these low-key disruptions by marking out these ‘space bubbles’.

Limit time on the floor as students can become fidgety and some tend to ‘loungue around’. A couple of stretching or brain gym exercises can help, or a helpful phrase or two which gives a reminder to help re-focus the students’ attention.

For example, with younger students in early years and primary there are simple rhymes: ‘One, two, three—look at me. One, two—look at you’ or teach them the 5 Ls:

- Look**—with eyes
- Listen**—with ears
- Lips** sealed
- Legs** crossed
- and hands in **Lap**.

With students in middle years and high school, enable self-correction with open questions, for example:

‘What should you be doing?’ and ‘How do we sit on the floor?’ or a quiet brief reminder of ‘Let’s all sit up straight’ or ‘This is not your lounge room, it is our learning space. How do we sit?’

And follow with ‘Thank you’, conveying an expectation and enabling self-correction.



Occasionally you may find a young student who has difficulty with the hardness of the floor or the texture of the carpet—a flat cushion or a piece of softer carpet may help. Or if a student is very restless, sometimes a weighted object e.g., toy animal on their laps will enable them to relax and sit quietly on the floor. Check with support staff as they should be able to advise you further on what would be suitable for the student.

Circle seating works well when your focus is on involving students in listening, sharing and learning from each other. In order to ensure that all students have the opportunity to build their listening and communication skills, train them to create a complete circle, with enough elbow space between them. If the space is crowded teach the students to move furniture and replace it after the activity.

As the facilitator of the activity, you also need to participate in the circle. If students are seated on the floor, you may wish to join them; although, some of you may prefer a small stool or low chair. Ensure you wear appropriate clothing if seated on the floor. Remember to advise students of their seating options so they can be comfortable moving their legs without disturbing others.

If students find it difficult to listen without interrupting within this seating arrangement, you may teach them to use, for example, a talking stick or perhaps a small bean bag—either of which can easily be passed around. The rule is that only the person holding the ‘stick’ is permitted to speak. Balls are best kept for games, and are not an advisable substitute for a talking stick or bean bag.



Using a talking stick also teaches students to pause, listen and think before speaking, which further develops self-control.



Behaviour is a message. Tune in. Acknowledge your students.

Responding to students’ needs

When planning the learning space, you also need to take into account factors that can impact on overall student learning. If you are not prepared for them, they can lead to disruptions and distractions and consequential behaviour issues.

Lighting and sound

Natural light is preferable, although some rooms will require additional lighting. Sometimes there may be students with a high sensitivity to noise, colour, or light, and, particularly when not coping well with these factors, these students will manage far better when given their own space—preferably a desk or table facing a blank wall—and with earphones or ear plugs if needed.

Students will work at different noise levels, varying from quietly to silently to a more robust level of noise. Be aware that you may occasionally have a student with

visual or hearing problems and it is important to accommodate them accordingly, often by moving them to a space where they can better cope and learn in the classroom.

Ventilation and hydration

Students can become restive, and if you see yawning, then ensure that the learning space is well-ventilated. Occasionally it can be greatly beneficial to open the windows and doors and have fresh air flow through, particularly if you regularly have air conditioning or heating switched on. Rooms can become both stuffy and smelly and students can become sleepy as a result. It is only when coming in from the outside that you realise how stuffy a room can be, so do check this from time to time.

Students can also become restless and lose concentration. Recent medical research has shown how dehydration affects concentration and how drinking a glass of water can enhance a student's ability to focus, concentrate and learn. Consequently water bottles have become accepted equipment in many schools. In addition to simple exercises to get the blood flowing and a fruit snack to build up energy, younger students need guidance in managing their learning equipment, so be prepared. A simple rule or two from the beginning is advisable, as students tend to get up to get a drink whenever they feel like it, which often disrupts those working and can reflect poor manners. Think carefully how this can best work in your class.



Brief breaks in learning to re-energise can range from getting up and stretching to brain gym or to simple follow-the-teacher movements such as 'Simon Says', always ending with a calming movement to settle them back into focused work.

In the first week, ask students to list in groups what helps them most to concentrate and learn. Pool their ideas and together choose three or four to implement. Review this list each term.

Similarly, toilet breaks should be taken in moderation. Teachers generally teach students in their first year at school regarding toilet breaks and encourage break time for these. It may help to revisit this each year with younger students to minimise disruption during class.

It can be helpful to check on the urgency, no matter the age, for when students think they can go on a whim, they will. For some students a toilet break often is just a pretext for a break. If this is the case, it may suggest a need to adjust your scheduling and give students short breaks from learning during class time—to have a toilet break, or else to stretch, move around or chat for a minute in order to be able to re-focus easily.

Do check with colleagues as the school may have guidelines for teachers in regard to these matters.

Informative and attractive learning environments

To make important information easily accessible to students, displaying colourful charts and tables as visual aids can provide a valuable reference. This can be

particularly helpful for students in high school where learning spaces can be bare and uninviting. However an overly crowded wall display can be confusing, so much so that students tend not to refer to it as much. Ensure you keep a balance and consider the following, particularly in regard to primary school classes.

- Don't use information and students' work displays for décor. They are there for a specific purpose and relate to present learning. Check and change accordingly.
- Don't cover all the walls and windows to make them look 'attractive'. Remember that windows are there for natural light and to allow fresh air to flow into the learning space
- When changing charts and wall displays, involve the students in choosing what they need or want. The material will then be useful and far more often referred to by them.
- And finally, students' enjoy seeing their work displayed! Designate an area where students can see each other's work, but, as stated above, change it on a regular basis.

Your overall aim is to build a positive learning environment in which all students develop the skills to manage themselves, their behaviour and their learning. So from time to time take the opportunity to see that space from your students' perspective; that is, sit where they sit, see what they see just to experience the space as they do, and to ensure it is an environment in which they can all learn and achieve.

Planning for behaviour

The following provides an overview of when planning for behaviour occurs.

1. **Prior to taking a class:** to prevent behaviour becoming a major issue—working *proactively* is your focus here.
2. **In the moment:** when behaviour situations do arise, remember that although you may not know the answer, you do need to manage the situation—working *interactively* is your focus here.
3. **In retrospect,** after the event reflect and learn, either by acknowledging that what you did worked well or focusing on improving next time—working *restoratively* is your focus here.

Planning enables us to work proactively on being prepared and ensuring students are prepared—for example, by establishing guidelines, students are able to manage themselves in the social environment of the classroom. When students know how to behave in class they are far less likely to misbehave because they feel safe and secure in knowing what is expected of them. This in turn achieves the necessary discipline and order in a well-organised learning space so students can confidently focus on the learning at hand.



The word 'discipline' is derived from the Latin noun *disciplina*, which means instruction, training, knowledge.

The Latin verb *discere* means to learn (<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com>).

Start your behaviour planning in the first week. Begin by establishing your long-term goal through observing the behaviour of your students and asking yourself, *What do I wish my students to learn and achieve by the end of the term, with regard to their behaviour?* Ask this every term, just to check you are on track and always have an end goal in mind. The goal may remain constant throughout the year with the focus being, for example, on improving manners or respect. However, students change, and your goal may necessarily change; student relationships may become an issue and developing consideration for others may become your behaviour goal for the remainder of the year.

With these thoughts in mind, consider and incorporate what is appropriate from the behaviour guidelines outlined below when planning how best to prepare for your classes and achieve your end goal.

Behaviour guidelines: routines

For students, routines are re-assuring as they know what to do and what is expected of them. This in turn removes anxiety, builds self-confidence and enables them to focus on whatever task is at hand.

For teachers, routines ensure a well-organised and smooth-running class, with students being ready for learning and the day's activities because of the already established routine.

The following section features ideas for establishing routines with your classes. Do discuss and share ideas for routines with your colleagues as some schools will have well-established routines.

Beginning the day or lesson

Lining up—This enables students to adjust their behaviour from 'outside' physical activity and social interactions to 'inside' behaviour that requires focus and thinking.

Greetings—Whether these occur during line-up or inside the classroom when students are standing at their tables or sitting on the floor, greetings are a courtesy that cultivate good manners and respect.

Ready to learn—Whether teaching young children to unpack their bags or older students to have learning materials ready on their tables at the beginning of class, this idea focuses them on being organised and prepared for learning.

Settling routines—Upon entering the classroom, time should be given for students to quickly and quietly settle. Some teachers allow a few minutes to chat, catch up, and have learning materials ready (see above) but they expect everyone to be ready to listen and to learn once they begin speaking. Other teachers find 'tuning in' a valuable activity (see below) as it briefly acknowledges every student and their feelings and readiness for the day. When an acknowledgment such as this arises out of a genuine interest that a teacher has for their students, it helps build empathy and relationships.

Tuning in

The following are suggestions for tuning in to your students.

With older students it can be a quick open question such as ‘How is everyone today on a scale of 1–10?’

Make it visual. Write on the board: 1 = terrible, 10 = terrific. Occasionally an adolescent may challenge, for example by saying –5 or +23, but just let this pass. They are being creative or just having fun, but it is a relevant response to your question—acknowledge it with a nod, a smile or ‘thank you’. Otherwise you can ask for a gesture using their thumb or hand to indicate whether they are feeling good, mediocre or not so good.

Be creative by showing an interest in them with your questions. If possible, use a PowerPoint slide with Clip Art (e.g., cartoon pictures of people and animals) or emojis, which can suggest a range of feelings. These provide another option and can make for a fun exercise.

With younger students, try developing their own ‘feelings’ language starting with something simple like ‘mad, bad, sad, glad’. Allow them to find similar words or pictures, drawings or emojis, or colours to express how they feel.

A connecting circle is another settling process that can be particularly valuable for younger students in primary schools, for ‘tuning in’ to each other and developing listening skills, empathy and relationships.

SEE

See more on connecting circles in the Appendix on p. 195.



If any student’s negative responses concern you, allow the activity to flow and, if need be, address their response at a more appropriate time.

Managing administrative requirements (e.g., for roll-call and information giving)—Keep all important information brief and involve students by giving them responsibility for giving important reminders, collecting and handing out materials, and putting up notices. Make important information visual—it’s helpful to put such information on the board and it prevents repeated questions. For example, you may have a summary of the daily program and activities written up for all to see. For middle years and secondary students, a classroom noticeboard could be an asset, providing you train them to check it daily.

Remember that writing the learning objectives, success criteria, learning reflections and homework tasks on the board helps keep students focused on their learning and can reduce unnecessary questions.



Some teachers write a ‘quotation of the day’ on the board, which students look forward to and which can often become a topic for conversation.

During the day or lesson

Planning activities with time allocation can become part of your daily routine and is a key to achieving optimum learning when students are required to work on, practise

and apply the knowledge they have gained. This involves applying the ‘pace, chunk and time’ strategy:

- *pace* the lesson
- *chunk* the learning
- *time* the activities or exercises.

This enhances concentration and focus, keeps students engaged and prevents misbehaviour. You may wish to adapt the following, according to the length of the ‘lesson’ and the learning to be addressed.

- Allow 5–10 minutes for settling and introduction.
- Divide learning activities into varying blocks of 10 and 30 minutes.
- Allow 5–10 minutes for learning reflection and lesson closure.



As some students have shorter attention spans, can become restless or less engaged, providing the occasional short break—for example, use ‘brain breaks’ (see <https://minds-in-bloom.com/20-three-minute-brain-breaks/> for ideas) to re-energise and re-focus, ‘stretch breaks’ to alleviate restlessness, and ‘chat breaks’ to remove the need for social chatter—can prevent distracting and sometimes disruptive behaviours.

Students tend to cope better when teachers are attuned to their needs. However, when introducing the concept of a break to the class, you may need to practise a few times, so they experience the benefits to their learning. Knowing the benefits, students are likely to appreciate having a more focused learning with the occasional short break, as part of their daily learning routine.

Transitions between topics and activities are also part of the daily routine; however, these can lead to numerous behaviour issues if not carefully managed. Always ensure transitions are ‘quickly and quietly’ achieved with the least disruption to the learning flow. Clear and succinct instructions for minimising disruption, as well as counting down from ten or five, or using a timer can be helpful in training students for quick transitions. Refer to the internet; e.g., ‘Cool Timers for the Classroom’ is a helpful Google search, and can be good fun for younger students.

Routine classroom tasks can include:

- handing out books
- checking ventilation
- ensuring the learning space is clean and tidy
- cleaning boards
- checking technology and display boards.

These are all responsibilities that can be happily undertaken by students and that can be rostered on a weekly basis, so that all students get a chance to take on a responsibility. It is important to convey that it is their learning space and therefore it is also their responsibility to maintain and manage it.



Participation leads to ownership, which in turn leads to responsibility.

Re-entering the classroom is part of the daily routine. The following are suggestions that can greatly improve the atmosphere and mood in the class when applied and therefore prepare students for a more positive learning experience.

For older students, 5–10 minutes of quiet reading, or a relaxation or mindfulness exercise helps focus them back into learning.

For younger students, the ‘Connecting Circle’ can provide a valuable after lunch activity where they share fun, feelings or foibles, while also being re-assured that their teacher is interested in and cares about them.

Children need us to listen and acknowledge them. Frequently they do not require us to solve a problem—expressing it can so often lead to it resolving itself. However, if a student raises a problem of particular concern, follow up later at a more appropriate time.

SEE

See more on the connecting circles in the Appendix on p. 195.

⇒ Talk less, listen more and acknowledge your students.

End of the day or lesson

An important part of teaching for orderliness and self-discipline requires establishing a closing routine. Consider the following and choose what is appropriate for you in your situation at the end of the day or lesson.

Firstly, bring the class together to reflect on what they have learnt and achieved and what they can look forward to in the next lesson with questions such as ‘What did you find interesting, fun, challenging, or difficult today?’ or ‘What would you like to learn more about in our next lesson?’ This way students leave focused on what they have achieved and will achieve, through sharing or writing down their achievements.

Secondly, the learning space should not be left messy. Teach students about the importance of packing up at the end of a lesson, which involves cleaning, tidying and putting away materials, and ensuring the room is left as it was found—clean and tidy. It is their learning space after all!

Thirdly, before exiting the learning space reinforce ‘good manners’ with a closing salutation: ‘Good afternoon class. I look forward to our next lesson and to seeing you tomorrow.’ Ensure an orderly exit by lining students up to leave or instructing them to leave singly or as excused. Sometimes reminders such as ‘walk, don’t run’, ‘wait your turn’, and ‘don’t push’ may be needed to help an orderly exit. You manage your students to the end!



Plan to establish two or three simple routines from the first day so students know what to do and feel reassured and confident as they settle into their new class.

Behaviour guidelines: expectations, ground rules and benefits

Your school’s code of conduct may use behaviour words such as ‘rules’, ‘norms’, ‘values’ or ‘guidelines’ for behaviour. Choose whichever word is appropriate in your school and apply it with your classes.

There are two options for establishing behaviour guidelines for your class or classes. Which one you use mostly depend upon whether you are a classroom teacher and have time to establish a set of ground rules, or a subject or specialist teacher where all you require is to establish a few simple and clear expectations for student behaviour.

Expectations for behaviour

As an early years' teacher, a specialist or a subject teacher, your preference may be for a simple statement of expectations for behaviour.

Choose three or four behaviours that are a concern in relation to your specific group of students and make a clear statement of expectation, for example:

- An early years/primary school teacher may say 'I expect everyone to listen quietly, follow instructions and do their best.'
- A middle years or high school teacher may say 'I expect everyone to be ready to learn, listen carefully to instructions, be considerate of others and do their best at all times.'

Follow this statement with a simple question, asking students 'What are the benefits of quietly listening?' or 'What are the benefits of being considerate of others?' (choose whichever is more appropriate to your situation). When students understand the benefits to themselves and others, they can see the sense in them and are far more likely to abide by your expectations for behaviour.

HINT Whether it is for one class or all classes, the key is to frequently repeat and continually refer to these expectations for behaviour until your students know them well. Revisit these expectations each term and adapt them accordingly as needed.

Ground rules for behaviour

As a classroom teacher spending the majority of your time with one class, you may prefer to follow this simple 4-step process particularly in primary and middle years where you want students to learn to take responsibility and make considered decisions regarding their behaviour. This is an excellent activity in the second week when students are familiar with their environment and your expectations of them and their learning.

- **Step 1, Question:** Ask the students, 'What do we need to remember so we can work together and get along well as a class?'
- **Step 2, Brainstorm:** Accept every suggestion, no matter what they are, and write them all up for everyone to see. Then let the students decide what is most important for the class. Keep a record of this list for future reference.
- **Step 3, Choose:** Tailor the list down to four or five suggestions. Let them choose what to focus on immediately. Limiting the number enables easy recall for the students and ensures they become known, understood and practised. Consider the following memory reinforcers.

- **Create a visual chart:** Allow the students to make it, and place it where all can see it. When needed, give a verbal reminder — ‘Come on now, what is our rule?’ — and point to the chart as a reference.
- **Be Positive:** Positive statements reflect a positive mindset: Rather than saying ‘Never be late’ or ‘Don’t be hurtful to others’, write what the students *should* do, e.g., ‘We are always on time’ and ‘We are kind to each other’.
- **Focus on the benefits:** Let students discuss and decide on the benefits of each of these ‘rules’. A rule that benefits oneself and others is unlikely to be broken. However, should this happen, there are naturally consequences.
- **Step 4, Evaluate:** Review the rules at the beginning of each term. Refer back to the brainstorm list, as you may need to replace a few well-established rules with one or two new rules as students grow and their needs and behaviours change. For example, calling out or interrupting may no longer be an issue, whereas punctuality, forgetting equipment or constant talking may have become a problem.
Also, as children grow and mature, it’s important to be able to adapt and change rules— for example, ‘learning to share’ may be a major concern in the first year at school, whereas a few years later it may be ‘learning how to be friends’ that may need guidelines. Different classes also evoke various behaviours, and what may be relevant in one class may not be so in another.

Benefits and consequences

When working proactively and building a positive ethos in your classes, it makes far more sense to focus students on the benefits gained by each individual student when they follow the routines and ground rules for behaviour. Understanding the benefits tends to remove a student’s desire to challenge a rule and teachers having to apply consequences.

However, when students do challenge, it is important to remember that your aim is to teach, and, therefore, don’t jump straight into consequences but rather consider what the student may learn from an assertive or empathic response whereby you enable them to take responsibility and correct their behaviour.



Remember: ‘practice makes perfect’. So, when the routines and rules have been decided for the term, choose one or two of each and focus on these. Practise getting them right with students for a week or two until students know them, can follow them and apply them, and they have become well-established. Then move on to the next couple and so on until they too are common practice.

Rights and responsibilities

Perhaps the important concept for students to understand in this regard is that everyone does have rights but as we grow those rights are upheld only when we take on the associated appropriate responsibility and act on it, for example:

- Everyone has a right to feel safe, but each of us has a responsibility to ensure that others also feel safe.
- Every student has a right to learn but each student also has responsibility to ensure they do not disrupt or prevent others from learning.
- Everyone has a right to have their say but they also have a responsibility to listen when others speak.

Rituals

Every school has its own established rituals, formalities and ceremonies; for example, school assemblies, award ceremonies and celebrating specific events such as multicultural or harmony days. In celebrating together at chosen times, we build a sense of tradition in schools and heighten a sense of belonging.

As a teacher you can similarly build small traditions that relate specifically to you and your classes. I recall one teacher who read stories—just a page or two at the end of the day—to celebrate the work completed and encouraged a joy in reading in their students. Consequently her students' love of books was greatly enhanced by her reading ritual. Consider establishing one or two rituals in your own classes. A common one is the observance of birthdays, and another is acknowledging achievement in a good week's work with time given at the end of the week to a jointly chosen activity. Share with colleagues for ideas and suggestions.

Planning tips

The following additional suggestions may be helpful as you plan for your classes.

1. In your first week, even though you plan to teach to the 'open curriculum', take this time to focus on your 'hidden curriculum'; that is, your students and getting to know them, building relationships across the class, establishing routines and guidelines for behaviour. Let them learn your ways as you organise the room for optimal learning and set the pattern for the term and the year. Once these fundamentals are established, you will find that behaviour becomes less of an issue, your stress levels will be lower and there will be far more time to focus on teaching and the students' learning and achieving.
2. Keep a behaviour diary or notebook or use your school diary. In the first week or two, draw up a list from your observations of the most concerning behaviours. Do this every term and compare lists. In the long-term this will give you confidence as you begin to see your classroom management improving and, by the fourth term, you should find that your list of concerning behaviours is greatly reduced.
3. From this list each term, select 3–5 behaviours; that is, what students do and say. Prioritise this list and then plan what strategies and skilful responses you would need for the first behaviour on your list. Apply these until you've achieved an 80% or 90% positive result, and then move on to the next behaviour and so on. By the time you have students responding positively to the third behaviour on your list, how might you be feeling and what might your class be thinking? It's quite likely your students will begin to realise that you know what you are doing and they will feel more secure in knowing what is expected of them, and you will be more confident in your management of the class. Well done!
4. When drawing up your weekly lesson plans add an extra column with the heading 'Who I am teaching?'. In that extra column alongside your lesson plans, you can note down possible strategies, techniques and responses that will help you in managing your class, both with individual and group behaviours.

5. In your behaviour diary or notebook, at an appropriate time each week, record what worked well and what you need to work on to better manage your students. Be pleased with the positive changes you see. Persist with those behaviours that are more challenging, remembering that some students may have been behaving in that way for a number of years and it will take time and persistence for them to learn and see the benefit in changing their behaviour. Small steps towards progress should encourage you!
6. Be re-assured, as no matter how inexperienced or experienced a teacher may be, we all make mistakes from time to time. What is important is to acknowledge your mistake and plan how to go back and put it right. When you acknowledge your own mistakes and 'put things right', you provide a powerful lesson for your students who, through experience, will learn to do the same themselves.
7. Finally, no matter how well you plan, an unforeseen situation can arise at any time with totally unexpected behaviour from a student. Remember, you won't have all the answers, but you will have to manage the situation. So, apply your control strategy (as given in Chapter 2, pp. 40–42).

Then, in retrospect, plan what you would do to prevent this behaviour re-occurring and what skilful responses and strategies you may apply next time to manage it. It may also be necessary to do some research, particularly if this is a re-occurring behaviour, to better understand the student's behaviour and be able to give a more insightful and skilful response.



When responding to behaviour, always focus on what a student says or does that needs attention. Remember that you are unlikely to achieve 100% with your students immediately while they are still learning to manage their behaviour, therefore 80% to 90% is a grand start.

Understanding behaviour

It is important to know that students will misbehave from time to time and for many and various reasons—even your 'best' students. They may exhibit a simple misbehaviour, or a repeated misbehaviour.

Simple misbehaviours are easily managed as they generally arise from a simple mistake, a misconceived notion or situation, or purely result from how students are feeling. A skilful response that enables them to self-correct is usually all that is needed.

However, repeated misbehaviours generally indicate that your regular responses are not working and that sometimes there may be more deep-seated reasons for the ongoing misbehaviour.

General factors affecting behaviour

The reasons for misbehaviour are many and diverse because a multitude of factors can impact on students and affect them. Many of these factors we cannot change,

but we can take them into account when we are responding to misbehaviour, such as:

- physical factors, ranging from the weather to hunger, tiredness, feeling unwell, and so on
- life experiences like illness, trauma, loss, general family life and issues and variable school experiences
- knowing what to expect as students move through developmental stages and the impact these have on their behaviour, notably as they move from childhood into adolescence (McInerney & McInerney, pp. 346–53)
- students with various disorders (e.g., autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), learning disorders (LDs), physical and intellectual disabilities, anxiety, depression)
- learned behaviours that are inappropriate or unacceptable in the social environment of school and the classroom but continue because they meet whatever needs these students may have. We will consider some of the reasons these behaviours are self-perpetuating in the next section.

Patterns of behaviour

Throughout their lives, children learn, experience and acquire behaviours that are self-perpetuating because they work for them in getting what they need or want. However, some of these behaviours are not helpful and when they are hurtful to others—even self-destructive and not conducive to building positive relationships—we need to be able to respond in a manner that is helpful. Consider the following.

- Aggressive behaviours tend to be confronting, demanding and sometimes abusive and hurtful; they are self-centred and overtly controlling, showing little thought for others and generally cause ongoing conflict and resentment.
- Manipulative behaviours tend to be underhand, covertly controlling and guilt-inducing behaviours that are self-centred and often derogatory and insincere. However, when confronted, the person will deny any knowledge of wrongdoing as they greatly fear rejection. These behaviours can be divisive and hurtful.
- Passive behaviours tend to be avoidant, often self-deprecating and self-defeating with a tendency to blame self or others and students would rather give in or run away than face confrontation: they end up being frustrating and self-destructive.
- Passive-aggressive students, on the other hand tend to be covertly non-compliant with requests. They frustrate you, which is the object of their behaviour.

All these behaviours are centred around the self and their own needs with little thought to others, and they all lead to poor interactions and often dysfunctional relationships.

Consider assertive behaviours, which, on the other hand, are based on a healthy respect for the self and others. Assertive behaviours engage in open, honest communication, show an acceptance of one's own and others' needs and foibles. Actions taken are for the benefit of all and generally result in positive relationships.

The insight gained from understanding these patterns of behaviour will enable you to respond assertively in order to counteract the aggressive, manipulative, passive and passive-aggressive behaviours that you may encounter, and model a way of behaving that benefits all in working towards building positive relationships

Taking all of the above factors that can affect behaviour into account should not mean specialising students who present concerning behaviours. Rather it requires gaining insight and understanding so you can apply strategies and skilful responses that will enable these students to learn to cope with whatever besets them, while learning to manage themselves, their behaviour and their relationships in the social environment of school and classroom. This may be a tall order when you commence teaching and you are likely to need some support.

Specific factors affecting behaviour

If you find you are concerned about a student's behaviour and your responses don't seem to be achieving any changes in their behaviour, it is important to give thought to the following.

Student—teacher relationship

Ensure that your manner conveys respect, honesty and trust. Enable responsibility and be skilful in your interactions.

This is the basis for a relationship in which a student would wish to respond positively to you as their teacher. Remember, the relationship between teacher and student is not about liking or being liked, but rather about trust and respect. You are a professional, and it is important to exemplify this to your students.

Basic human needs

Maslow outlines a hierarchy of needs—physiological, safety, love and belonging, self-esteem and self-actualisation. The majority of our students' basic human needs are fulfilled, although some children may come to school hungry, or feeling unloved and uncared for. In these cases, in all likelihood, you will achieve little in advancing their learning until their basic human needs are fulfilled. However, schools with caring teachers who acknowledge and value their students can help to meet these needs in various ways—for example, some schools provide breakfast clubs, others provide special equipment for students. Additional student needs (whether physical or psychological) can usually be met by the school in consultation with parents or other care-givers.

Discipline and self-discipline

Early years teachers can occasionally come across young children who don't understand the need for self-discipline. These students do not follow instructions easily, do not seem to respond to 'no', and, more often than not, they do as they please and show little consideration for others. They seem to have scant awareness

of how to behave in a social group and their behaviour is usually extremely difficult to manage. Siegel and Bryson comment that ‘Our children need repeated experiences that allow them to develop wiring in their brain that helps them delay gratification, contain urges to react aggressively toward others, and flexibly deal with not getting their way. The absence of limits and boundaries is actually quite stressful, and stressed kids are more reactive’ (Siegel & Bryson 2014, p. xxi).

The reasons for their behaviour can be varied but you can do little to control the reason behind the behaviour. Rather, your focus and responsibility should be teaching them how to manage self-discipline in the present social environment of day care, kindergarten or early primary school. The same logic applies to older students who also appear to lack a sense of discipline. The mantra to carry in your head is ‘Be firm, be fair, be kind’; that is, be courteous and considerate to your students.

⇒ Be firm, be fair, be kind.

Diagnosed or undiagnosed special needs

Students of varying abilities can be found throughout the education system. Be careful not to label; the spectrum of ‘normal’ is wide! However, if you suspect that a student’s work, demeanour and behaviour, observed over time, suggests a learning or behaviour disorder of some kind, do some research of your own before you refer the student to student services. It is helpful to become informed about the signs of common causes of learning and behaviour difficulties.

The awareness you gain from this research will enable you to spot students with special needs and refer them with confidence to whomever the school has designated to handle these referrals. This will be a well-being coordinator, school psychologist or counsellor. Speak with them about the student and ask for advice.

Some students will already have a diagnosis, which usually recommends they have a support teacher to assist them in the class—they will also be an invaluable support person for you. As teachers, it is important to research, speak with parents and students themselves, and to work out a plan to enable students to find their place of belonging in your class and to feel valued as they learn and achieve to the best of their ability.

There are some excellent courses and books available to support teachers in inclusive classrooms. A greater understanding will not only enhance your management; your insightful responses will also enable your students to cope better in class. Remember that all children have a strong desire to belong and be appreciated in a class, and some just happen to be coping with a disadvantage. Our task is to enable them to feel valued both for themselves and for their learning.

SEE

See additional readings on inclusive classrooms in the Appendix on p. 204.



If you are concerned and wish for another person’s perspective on a student’s behaviour then refer to a senior member of staff for their suggestions with regard to managing that student. For example, a team leader, year level coordinator, well-being coordinator, deputy principal, your mentor or a teacher whose management you respect—anyone with whom you feel you can discuss the student’s behaviour.

To assist you in your discussion, record what the student does or says over a week, so you have specific behaviour examples to discuss and work on.

There are other possible reasons for those more challenging behaviours, which may concern you, particularly if your regular responses are generally ineffective in modifying these behaviours. Consider the following.

Students' unconscious needs

Dreikurs, Grunwald and Pepper, and Dinkmeyer and McKay, through their research into children's misbehaviour, introduce us to the over-riding and powerful need throughout our lives to achieve a sense of significance and belonging in whichever social group we find ourselves.

Dreikurs et al. determined that children's behaviour has a purpose, stating 'The child's basic aim is to belong and to find his place in the family or in the group in which he functions.' Through their research they observed that 'the well-adjusted child finds his way toward social acceptance through his concern for the welfare of the group, family, or school and through his useful contributions.' In this context, they also found that 'the child who misbehaves has lost his belief that he can find the belonging and recognition that he desires and that he then erroneously believes that he will find acceptance through provocative behaviour' by pursuing and adopting four mistaken goals without being aware of them. These four goals are to gain undue attention, to seek power, to seek revenge and to display inadequacy—real or assumed (Dreikurs et al. 1998, p. 13).

Dinkmeyer and McKay suggested three further goals as students move into adolescence, being the need for excitement, peer acceptance and to show superiority—all of which enable them 'to find their place in the group in which they function' (Dinkmeyer & McKay 1998, pp. 15–16).

The unconscious goals that drive their behaviour and carry faulty beliefs in students about what belonging means, result in behaviours that can bother, concern and challenge us. They tend to irritate, frustrate, provoke, hurt others or impact negatively on relationships and learning. When students repeatedly misbehave in such a way that arouses these feelings and concerns and our regular responses to their behaviour are not working, this indicates that we need to do further research to better understand these unconscious goals of misbehaviour in order to be able to effectively respond and manage the situations we face with these students.

The students are unaware of their goals but when they are disclosed to them, they are sometimes able to change their behaviour. Dreikurs et al. suggest an interesting technique they call the 'recognition reflex' whereby by describing the behaviour you see, you disclose their goal to them—for example, 'Could it be that you want me to notice you more?' (Dreikurs et al. 1998, pp. 28–9). This suggestion enables students to recognise the possible purpose of their behaviour and sometimes this insight leads them to changing their behaviour. A teacher who understands students' goals is able to choose techniques and strategies that will enable them to skilfully respond so

Table 1.1 Unconscious goals for misbehaviour

Student's faulty/mistaken unconscious belief	Student's unconscious goal leading to actions/attitudes	Teacher's feelings (suggest goal): and their reactions	Student's response to teacher's reaction and/or attempts at correction	Teacher's alternative skilful responses enabling behaviour change
<p>I belong only when I am being noticed or served. <i>Notice me!</i></p>	<p>ATTENTION E.g., nuisance, shows off, lazy, gets others to do things for them, keeps teacher busy, may cry, use charm, be overeager to please. They feel they only have a place when people pay them attention.</p>	<p>Feeling: annoyed, irritated, resentful. Reaction: may feel student occupies too much of their time, gives undue service, reminds often and coaxes, shows pity.</p>	<p>Temporarily stops misbehaviour. Later resumes some behaviour or disturbs in another way.</p>	<p>E.g., coaxing, reminders, warnings only reinforce goal. Where possible ignore misbehaviour, instead give attention at times and in ways unexpected, asking 'could it be that . . .?' to reveal goal, helps self-understanding, enabling change, using humour, consequences.</p>
<p>I belong only when I am in control. <i>Make me!</i></p>	<p>POWER E.g., may be stubborn, doesn't work, argues, questions, answers back, must win, be boss. Often lies, disobeys, refuses or does opposite of what asked. They feel they only count if others do what they want them to do.</p>	<p>Feeling: provoked, angry, threatened, concerned, defeated. Reaction: to get angry, try to force student to obey, show whos is/who's boss, be determined not to let child/person get away with it. To either fight back or give in.</p>	<p>Active or passive aggressive, misbehaviour is intensified, or student submits with 'defiant compliance'.</p>	<p>E.g., avoid power struggles—withdraw from conflict, do the unexpected, and don't get hooked into anger, let consequences occur, constructive use of power—enlist student's help, give opportunity for some control, give responsibility.</p>
<p>I belong only by hurting others as I have been hurt. <i>I can hurt!</i></p>	<p>REVENGE E.g., may steal, lie, hurt others, can be cruel and destructive. Wishes to 'get even' with hurtful comments, and picks on others. Sullen, pouts, sulks, accuses others of unfairness. They feel that nobody likes them.</p>	<p>Feeling: hurt. Reaction: to get mad, retaliate or get even, hurt back. May dislike student, consider them ungrateful, want to teach a lesson; ask others to avoid them; report student to parents hoping they'll punish.</p>	<p>Seeks further revenge by intensifying misbehaviour.</p>	<p>E.g., avoid feeling hurt, retaliation, punishment. Be aware of the need for them <i>not</i> to be hurt anymore. Acknowledge their feelings, apply consequences, enable reparation, build trust and relationships.</p>

<p>I belong only by convincing others not to expect anything from me. <i>I can't do it!</i></p>	<p>To display INADEQUACY E.g., feels helpless, stupid in comparison to others. Gives up easily. Does not participate. Likes being left alone and no demands made. May set goals too high, unable to meet them so won't try.</p>	<p>Feeling: discouraged/helpless, despairing. Reaction: to try various approaches to reach student, discouraged when encountering failure, then gives up trying. Tendency to do nothing and sit back.</p>	<p>Passively responds or fails to respond to whatever is done, so no improvement made.</p>	<p>E.g., recognise deep discouragement due to overambition, competition, pressure or failure. Don't give up, pity or criticise; focus on strengths, encourage positive effort, encourage group support.</p>
<p>I belong only when I create excitement. <i>It's really dangerous!</i></p>	<p>EXCITEMENT (adolescent) E.g., avoids routine, shows interest in drugs, alcohol, promiscuous sex.</p>	<p>Feeling: concern, anxiety ... for personal safety/health and as to what will happen next. Reaction: on your guard and want to warn others.</p>	<p>Resists or continues the exciting misbehaviour (can become a power contest).</p>	<p>E.g., build positivity and student relationships; educational curriculum, community youth projects can work to meet these needs positively.</p>
<p>I belong only when I have widespread peer acceptance. <i>I'll do anything to join you!</i></p>	<p>To gain PEER ACCEPTANCE (adolescent) E.g., constant attempts, they will do anything for acceptance.</p>	<p>Feeling: concern ... if peers have negative influence on behaviour/work. Reaction: try to influence student.</p>	<p>Resists or continues to keep up with friends.</p>	<p>E.g., build positive relationships, provide a role model, be accepting and understanding of the tasks of the adolescent, affirming strengths and positive focus.</p>
<p>I belong only when I am best at everything, or at least better than most. <i>I'm better than you!</i></p>	<p>SUPERIORITY (adolescent) E.g., aims for top/best and puts others down to reassure themselves.</p>	<p>Feeling: inadequate. Reaction: attempt to put student/other person, even teacher, in place.</p>	<p>To continue striving, putting down others to defend own self-image.</p>	<p>E.g., awareness: behaviour is due to low self-esteem. Model behaviour and balance values, build positive teacher–student relationships.</p>

the student no longer has a faulty belief about what 'belonging' means. Rather the student learns to behave in a manner that is acceptable in the school environment while meeting their unconscious needs for significance through belonging in more positive ways.

See Table 1.1 on pages 24–5.

Conclusion

With all these possible reasons for ongoing misbehaviour, it is also important to remember that no matter the reason underlying their behaviour, it does not excuse 'bad' behaviour. Rather the focus is on the need to teach with additional insight and understanding, so all students, no matter their situation or background, do learn to behave in an acceptable manner in class and at school.

For this learning experience to happen, we need to remember that students cannot change who they are, but they can change what they do and say. Therefore, we need to focus on what they do and say and—with an understanding of possible underlying causes—provide skilful responses that enable students to change their behaviour and begin to experience themselves differently.

Additionally, as with all students, mistakes are for learning and part of that learning may involve:

- facing the consequences to their words or actions as the initial part of the learning experience and
- being given the opportunity to 'put right the wrong' and to make amends, which is the second part of the learning experience.

This ability to put right the wrong, to make amends, is important for building self-worth and strengthening self-esteem in students, as well as increasing their sense of being valued and capable.

As teachers, we can change our responses when we better understand students' behaviour and therefore we can respond in a manner that is helpful to the student, and that enables them to learn to manage themselves, their behaviour, relationships and move forward into more acceptable and positive behaviour.

Establishing positive relationships

On entering school, you don a professional cloak, as you leave aside your personal life and move into your role of teacher. That professional cloak, although invisible, protects and strengthens you, because it can carry in each of its many pockets, a strategy or skill for you to draw on when needed during your day, as you interact with your students.

The positive mindset pocket is very important as it enables you to enter a classroom with a smile, a warm greeting and clear expectations for a good day. This welcoming entrance into a class creates the working atmosphere and provides the beginnings for a future positive relationship with your students.

This positive mindset also leads you to naturally focus on positive expectations for your students, acknowledging what your students *can* do, and enables you to build from there.

Analogy of mirrors

Let's consider that each student standing in your class is standing in the centre of their world surrounded by mirrors, with each mirror representing a significant person in their life—mother, father, brother, sister, or other family member—and from each mirror a child builds their identity. When they enter school you, as their teacher, join that circle of mirrors. Corkille Briggs comments, 'no child can "see" himself directly; he only sees himself from the reflections of others. Their "mirrors" literally mold his self-image' (Corkille Briggs 1970, p. 20).

Students learn a great deal about who they are from the messages we send them—what we do and say in response to their behaviour becomes part of their self-image. Their growing self-image is built upon the words, body language, attitudes and judgments of all those mirrors surrounding them. And as a result, how they feel about themselves—that is, their self-esteem—will govern how they behave, relate to others and take up the challenges of learning.

As teachers, we need to be aware of those mirrors and what they reflect back; that is, a compilation of the messages we send to our students. Do not underestimate your role and the impact your responses can have on the lives of your students. However, be aware that even with the best of intentions to encourage and motivate our students, some messages can be detrimental and do the opposite and both students' self-belief and our relationship with them falter. Consider the following.

Younger students, with both limited knowledge and little experience to measure against, are vulnerable to believing those messages. Therefore, if the messages are negative or not really true and the student lacks the insight or skills to counteract such messages, the student will tend to believe those messages and end up doubting themselves.

Older students, despite having greater knowledge, experience and discernment, when faced with distorted mirrors, can still be susceptible and doubt themselves.

Again, with older students, messages that are intended as positive but do not support reality as the student knows it, or has experienced it so far, will likely result in the student doubting the veracity of the sender of the message and teach them not to trust their judgment. For example, the teacher trying to encourage saying, 'Come on, you can do that!' but the student's experience to date has shown them that they can't.

All of the above are not helpful for students, no matter how well-intentioned the sender of such messages is. In addition, this kind of messaging inhibits building trust and respect, which lies at the heart of all positive relationships.

HINT Polish your mirror to enable a clear reflection for the student to see.

Self-esteem

In order to better understand and communicate messages that are honest and positive and, most importantly, helpful for students and your relationship with them, it is important to clarify in your mind what is truly meant by self-esteem.

Dorothy Corkille Briggs states that ‘High self-esteem is not a noisy conceit. It is a quiet sense of self-respect, a feeling of self-worth.’ (Corkille Briggs 1970, p. 3).

As a result of his research into low self-esteem and depression, Martin Seligman became aware that parents and teachers in ‘trying to bolster their children’s self-esteem tended to erode their self-worth’ because their focus was on how a child feels at the expense of what the child does; that is, focusing on making a child feel good as opposed to them gaining mastery (Seligman 2007, pp. 44–5).

He further commented that, the premium we put on ‘feeling good’ in itself is not peculiarly modern, referring to Aristotle’s timeless view of happiness as an emotion that cannot be separated from what we do. And, Seligman amplifies this by saying ‘Happiness is not a separable feeling-state that can be obtained in any other way save as part and parcel of right action.’ Seligman emphasises that ‘feelings of self-esteem in particular, and happiness in general, develop as side effects’ arising from, ‘mastering challenges, working successfully, overcoming frustration and boredom, and winning’. In summary, feeling good is a by-product of doing well (Seligman 2007, p. 34).

From this we can see that self-esteem would appear today to have two aspects to it—the ‘feeling good’ and the ‘doing well’.

Those who are guided by the popular ‘feeling good’ viewpoint will be always ready to intervene to make the child feel better. For example, when a child faces a possible failure of some kind, resulting in ‘bad feelings—an admixture of anxiety, sadness and anger’ (Seligman 2007, p. 44) and we try and make them feel better, we are inadvertently encouraging what Seligman calls ‘learned helplessness’ (Seligman 2007, p. 279). In other words, they are learning to cope by avoiding those bad feelings, either by avoiding a task or by removing themselves from a situation through our responses to their feelings.

However, if we skilfully respond by acknowledging a student’s anxiety or frustration, encouraging tolerance, rewarding persistence and affirming smaller achievements, we are then building the student’s strength and ability to cope. These are examples of what Seligman calls ‘mastery’.

When we focus on appreciating our students and acknowledging what they are capable of doing and achieving not only do we develop their self-worth and enhance their self-esteem, but we can also create a pervasive feeling of well-being.

Self-esteem and behaviour

When considering self-esteem and behaviour, it is often the student with low self-esteem who concerns and hassles us, who misbehaves, who won't try and often refuses help when offered an opportunity. These students are vulnerable because they have little positivity to balance out the negative in their lives.

On the other hand, students with high self-esteem do not need to act out and misbehave, as their sense of worth and competence opens them to accepting challenges and trying. They tend to be positive, focused and self-motivated.

As educators ... what does this mean for us?

Enabling, not rescuing

All students need is to feel competent to handle themselves and their environment. They need to feel they have something to offer others. Our task is to teach them and enable them to do it for themselves.

So, do not rescue your students, for they are likely to begin to acquire a feeling of helplessness.

HINT

Do not do for students what they can do for themselves, for if they can do it why are you?

Even though in the short-term it may appear a quicker way to achieve your goal, enabling students to do things for themselves will not only save time in the long-term, but you will also gain time once they become adept at doing things for themselves. In addition, students are also gaining a feeling of value and a sense of 'mastery', and so their self-esteem is enhanced.

So how can we enable and not rescue to build self-esteem in our students?

One young teacher gave an interesting perspective, in saying that students need to feel that 'you are there for them'.

They need to know that you will work with them and for them, that you will challenge them and pull them up when they go too far, that you will acknowledge their strengths, and support them in their weaknesses, but you will never rescue them, nor 'do it for them'. Rather you will teach and enable them to learn to do it for themselves, always acknowledging a job well done. For when students know you are there for them and trust you have their best interests at heart they will act accordingly. And if they have misbehaved they will be given the opportunity to make amends and put the situation right so they can hold their head high with dignity, which is maintained on both sides, so they have opportunities to build a sense of worth and feel valued and capable. This will build a sense of well-being in both students and teacher.

Positive mindset

Entering class with a positive mindset makes it easy for you to express positive expectations for behaviour. Your mindset will allow you to instinctively focus on what is going right and acknowledge those who are ready to learn. In addition, you will

automatically generate positive interactions with your students and the atmosphere you create will draw them into the same positive frame of mind.

Continuing in this positive mindset is equally important throughout daily interactions with students. Taking a moment to pause prior to correcting a student will allow you to rephrase your words into a positive expectation, which not only changes the mood of the moment but will also encourage your students. For example, if you were the student, which of these responses—either A or B—would encourage you and produce the best outcome for both student and teacher?

Teacher A: You've got three answers wrong in that exercise.

Teacher B: I see you've got five answers correct.

Teacher A: Stop chatting. You're disrupting others. Sit up and get on with your work.

Teacher B: It's great to see some people working quietly.

When we carry a positive mindset, as Teacher B did, we become enthusiastic, which is contagious. We also tend to focus outwards on our students and achieve the tasks for the day. Conversely, a negative mindset creates a negative mood and feelings that can overshadow and interfere with our focus and makes us less effective.

Students can detect if there is something else on your mind and often interpret negativity as disinterest, which could result in attention-seeking behaviour. If you are already feeling negative, this kind of behaviour can result in further irritation and frustration, especially if you are just reacting to the situation, instead of managing it.

We all have bad days—students included—but remember your cloak, as it enables you to cope with those days.

≡ A positive mindset feeds off itself. It produces great results.

Always remember you represent your profession and, although we no longer wear academic gowns—like a doctor in a white coat or a lawyer in robes—your profession is an esteemed one. Your teaching helps create future generations of thinkers and doers—contingent on your ability to acknowledge and inspire them.

What next?

Now that you are well prepared, have laid the foundations for a positive learning environment and are thinking and working proactively, it is time to focus on building those skilful responses that enable you to manage your students and the behaviours you are likely to meet in your daily teaching. So let's turn to the next chapter on managing interactions.

A quick reminder....

Creating a positive learning environment

1. Organise the learning space—for best learning and ease in teaching.
 - i. Check the arrangement of furniture, organisation of desks/tables, allocation of open space and general organisation of the learning space.
 - ii. Check that all equipment, including technology, is well placed and working.
 - iii. Check that all teaching and learning requirements are ready and easily accessible.
 - iv. Check that all additional equipment such as whiteboards, display boards, materials, etc. are ready.
2. Plan for behaviour—keep it brief and simple.
 - i. Have ready three or four expectations for behaviour on the first day.
 - ii. Set aside time to build relationships—get to know your students.
 - iii. In the first week, establish a few daily routine procedures and practise them.
 - iv. In the second week, having observed classes, establish guidelines for behaviour.
3. Understand behaviour.
 - i. If a student persistently misbehaves, take note and ask yourself:
Am I responding in a manner that enables the student to behave appropriately or are my responses ineffective and is the student not cooperating or learning in class?
Could there be other factors (health, family, learning environment, learning difficulties, special needs) affecting their behaviour?
Does their behaviour reflect any unconscious goals for misbehaviour? If the answer is yes, then follow up by doing your own research and reflection in order to better manage the student so they can learn to better manage themselves in class. Acknowledge when they do.
4. Carry a positive mindset.
 - i. Ask yourself, do I need to frame your mindset to be more positive in your outlook and expectations?
 - ii. And do I need to focus more on ‘catching them doing it right’, rather than focusing on the things they’re doing wrong?

⇒ Behaviour is a message. Tune in.
Acknowledge your students.

⇒ Be positive and plan for behaviour,
for both will prevent issues arising.

