



## CHAPTER 7

# MANAGEMENT IN PRACTICE

### **OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- ① articulate a personally viable set of principles for classroom management
- ② identify a range of different classroom and school management practices
- ③ evaluate the impact of school, environment, context, culture and personal factors on management practices.

*One approach to clarifying classroom management practice in Australian schools with appropriate fidelity would be to survey a large sample of teachers. A survey though would fail to capture both the rich explanatory detail and the contextual factors that make classroom management decisions complex and problematic. For this reason, this chapter focuses on a variety of primary and secondary school cases in the belief that they better reflect typical management practice.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the following six cases, four primary and two secondary school teachers relate their experiences in classroom management. The names of the teachers are pseudonyms and the schools are not identified. Apart from examining primary and secondary, effort was made to obtain a representative selection of schools. Thus the schools represent different socioeconomic areas, different cultures and even different school systems.

The great benefit of case studies as a pedagogical tool is that they are contextualised (situated in a real school context) and problematic (posing issues, uncertainties or problems) rather than presenting information as prescriptive or uniformly applicable. Case studies also encourage critical analysis, reflective practice and an appreciation of the real complexity of teaching.

Each case, crafted from meticulously collected information involving interviews and the examination of documents, is followed by a commentary or response from a highly experienced educator. These responses are not critiques. Rather they are meant to provide another perspective that will foster further consideration and dialogue. A brief survey of the cases follows.

*Lyn* teaches Grade 3/4 in a medium-size primary school where there are significant behaviour management problems often related to dysfunctional home environments. She argues, acknowledging the influence of her special education background, that the students have 'to behave first and learn second'.

*Amber* teaches in a state comprehensive boys' high school of 300 students, one-third of whom experience learning difficulties. She approaches classroom management through 'a teaching focus' involving student engagement in student-centred and intellectually challenging learning activities that combine literacy and problem solving.

*Matt* teaches Grade 4/5 in a large primary school in an affluent area. He argues the importance of management of building relationships with students, promoting their self esteem, and engaging them in meaningful learning that fosters individual creativity.

*Judy* is a beginning teacher, teaching English in a large comprehensive co-educational high school located in an upper middle-class area. While acknowledging that she is not entirely familiar with the school's sophisticated *Code of Conduct*, Judy uses a range of management strategies based on politeness and mutual respect.

*Ian* teaches Grade 2 in a small primary school in a middle-class area. He uses a variety of management strategies including preparation of lessons and resources, attention-gaining ploys, incentives and rewards, controlled movement, and games to settle squabbles.

*Sue* teaches Grade 3 in a Catholic systemic primary school of 400 students in a middle-class area. She uses a great variety of management strategies within the context of a religious ethos 'that permeates all aspects of school life'.

## LYN

Lyn's teaching priority, that she claims is a legacy of her special education background involving the development of behaviour management plans for each child, is to have the students 'behave first and learn second'. Established in 1888, the school in which she teaches is a medium-sized state primary school where many students come from dysfunctional families and experience violent relationships within the family or neighbourhood. The area has the highest rate of youth (boys) suicide in New South Wales, and the second highest rate of domestic violence. As part of a government initiative, the school was made a *School as a Community Centre* (SaCC) at the end of 2002. The role of the SaCC facilitator is to promote inter-agency and community support for a range of early intervention projects implemented to reduce the impact of socioeconomic disadvantage.

Lyn, who lives in the area, lost her own brother through suicide and believes that the school he attended failed to respond to his problems. She cites this as a reason for becoming a teacher. She has been teaching for six years; this is her second school and she teaches a Grade 3/4 class. Her approach to classroom management is based on several principles.

First, she believes that getting to know every child personally 'is the greatest step to preventing management problems'. Apart from the knowledge of students she obtains in the classroom, she chats to them on playground duty, and admits that her special education background predisposes her towards seeking a more intimate knowledge of children with significant problems. Last year, when Lyn taught an IM (intellectually moderate) class in which the boys loved car racing, Lyn would collect information from her car racing devotee husband so that she could better converse with them.

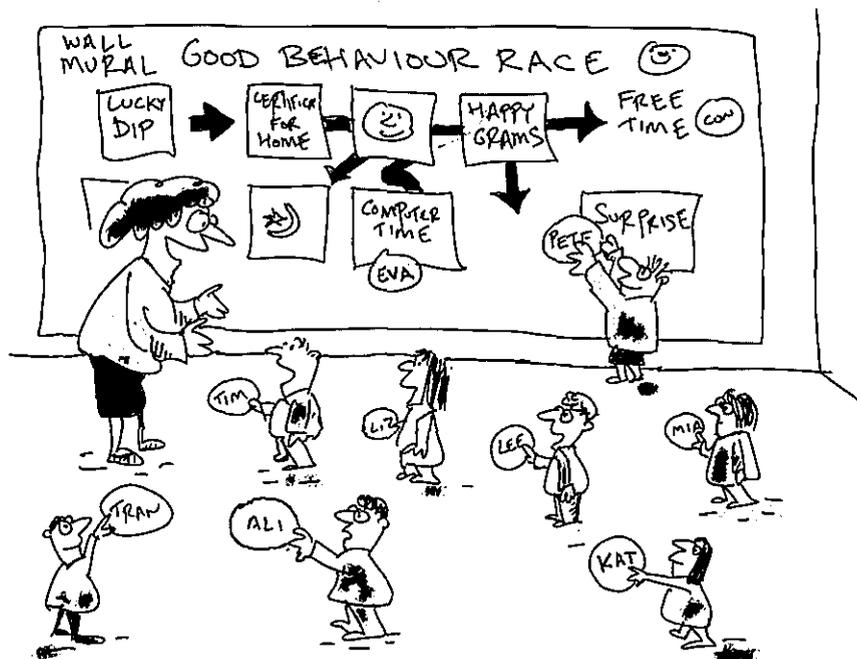
Second, Lyn uses both individual and team incentives and rewards to promote desirable behaviour. She spends her own money, laughingly claiming that 'you never say no to a freebie', to buy posters, pictures of cars (her mother-in-law is a Castrol rep), little dollies and stationery. 'Difficult children', she argues, 'learn when good behaviour is reinforced instantly'. Lyn's stock individual incentive is a continuous board game on the class wall entitled '*Wall Mural Good Behaviour Race*'. All students' names are printed on cards and attached to the board, and when worthy of a reward, they are either asked to move their name one space (younger students), or roll a dice and move their name the required spaces (older students). The squares are randomly marked with instant rewards like 'free time', 'computer time', 'lucky dip', 'happy grams' or 'certificates for home'. Her major team incentive involves 'team points' that are assigned to each of the three 'Houses' for good work and

behaviour. Lyn believes that students must learn working together, and that it is important 'to achieve a balance between individual and team awards'.

A third principle is that of preparation. Lyn relates the need to prepare well for individual lessons but also for the long term. Her special education background has impressed upon her the need for obtaining baseline assessments for students, and constantly monitoring their progress.

Fourth, Lyn believes that students respond to 'a nice approach' that expresses concern and desire to understand. She has occasionally been abused by students using obscene language, and although the school has a system of time-outs for poorly behaved students, there are some, Lyn claims, who are completely non-compliant. For these few students, she argues, it is sometimes better to 'ignore the crime and treat the problem'. She typically responds by asking 'What's the matter . . . what can I do to help?'. Avoiding open confrontation, she sends a note to the school office, and the secretaries find the best executive staff member to deal with the problem. She later speaks to offending students when they are calm. 'You have to be flexible', she states. 'Different things work for different kids'.

Fifth, Lyn endorses a consistency that involves establishing clear structures and expectations. Maintaining that many of the students do not have a secure home environment (three of her last year's students were sent to a school for students with behaviour problems), she believes that routines are doubly important. A daily timetable is clearly displayed, and Lyn spends the first week of each term reiterating her expectations of student behaviour, in particular, raising hands to speak, and not interrupting when the teacher is speaking.



Lyn acknowledges that she treats boys and girls a little differently, suggesting that her main appeal to boys is respect ('I respect you so I expect you to respect me'), whereas her appeal to girls involves care ('You know I care'). Lyn practises the following specific strategies. She:

- ⊙ gains student attention when they are in lines ready to move to the classroom by clapping her hands and then moving down the line praising individuals by name. She believes it is crucial that 'they learn to settle down before they get to class';
- ⊙ follows her line of students to the classroom, rather than leads them. She believes that this enables her to watch the students, and for them to know that they are being watched;
- ⊙ issues clear instructions when students enter the room: 'Bags down, books out';
- ⊙ positions herself directly in front of the class to begin lessons so that she can be the focus of attention;
- ⊙ begins some teaching sessions with 'quick mental' that students complete in their books. She believes that this both creates a speedy pace, ensures quiet and focuses attention. In Maths lessons in particular, she supports the use of a timer, believing that it creates routine and certainty;
- ⊙ threatens her class with staying in at lunchtime if several students are being disruptive. Endorsing the notion of students understanding the consequences of their actions, her typical response is to say, 'That's one minute on the board. You'll have to pay me back', and, 'If you really do well, we might rub the minute off';
- ⊙ implements the school management plan of time-outs. Students are given a time-out after three warnings, though Lyn typically adopts the ploy of asking misbehaving students if they need a warning, and 'gives them every chance to explain'. The student's name is recorded on the board with each warning, and time-out in the classroom follows. The student is required to sit at a special seat facing the wall, and to complete all work. If misbehaviour continues, the student experiences a time-out in the 'buddy class', and further transgression results in a time-out in the Stage Supervisor's room. Verbally abusing staff, swearing and defiance automatically lead to this latter time-out; a (Blue) letter to parents; and the intervention of the Learning Support Team (LST) comprising the principal, counsellor and learning difficulties teacher. Suspension is a further option.

Lyn offers the following advice for beginning teachers:

- ⊙ acquire a full understanding of the background, experiences and capabilities of the students;
- ⊙ show that you have power but never flaunt that power. Do it 'nicely'; and
- ⊙ avoid setting yourself up for conflict.

## Commentary

This is an interesting case study in that it presents real issues that confront teachers in economically and socially disadvantaged areas on a daily basis. Lyn is obviously highly committed to helping these students cope at school and feel happy. From her personal circumstances and past experiences she brings a strong personal perspective and empathy to her teaching. Lyn has been teaching six years, yet her professional and personal experiences appear to be quite limited. For Lyn this is something of a two-edged sword: at one level her experiences ensure that she understands the relevance of the backgrounds and interests of her students and what motivates them; and, at the other, Lyn's expectations seem to be very much anchored within her experience.

While there can be little argument that the 'behave first and learn second' credo is a logical way to face the huge behaviour management challenges Lyn encounters, perhaps a more long-term benefit for her students might come from a more direct focus on the curriculum and how it can be made more challenging and engaging. For example, the use of car racing materials to assist conversation with students could be used as a tool for some explicit teaching around various text types including reports, narratives and discussions. Magazines can be extremely useful as tools for literacy and numeracy development. Motoring journalists use road tests to report on new vehicles, often displaying bias towards various manufacturers or styles. Their use of metalanguage in reports is also worthy of analysis. The challenge is to maximise the learning outcomes from whatever material Lyn's students find interesting.

The focus on behaviour always needs to be balanced by an equally strong focus on making the curriculum relevant and accessible. Can the learning topics/themes be used to explore bigger ideas and deeper concepts and the way language is used and manipulated in different situations?

Had Lyn's approach been strongly influenced by her special education background one might have expected a greater emphasis on individual education plans. Lyn's professional learning appears to have been influenced more from the behavioural management experience rather than the meeting of specific learning needs. This feature of Lyn's teaching is likely the manifestation of survival strategies that she employs to get through each day.

Lyn's four classroom management principles are all important. Perhaps preparation could be seen as the most critical but, equally important, Lyn would always require a level of flexibility in working with her students given the uncertainty of behaviours exhibited on a daily basis. What would seem to be lacking in the case study is any explication about the exit outcomes Lyn is striving to achieve with her students. Does Lyn have any particular educational or behavioural expected outcomes for her students either individually or collectively? If you don't set yourself some targets how will you know what you've achieved?

There is a sense that the context of the school has an enormous influence on Lyn's classroom management strategies. There appears to be a clearly understood set of strategies for

collectively managing unacceptable and disruptive behaviour. The hierarchy of consequences from special seats, time-outs, letters to parents and team interventions appear supportive and consistent. Essentially though, the whole scheme rests on the skills and consistency of the class teacher in managing day-to-day incidents. It is difficult to determine the extent to which curriculum solutions are or might be explored as a way to engage students in their learning so that behaviour management solutions become secondary. To what extent is the school promoting a culture of educational success and achievement rather than just focusing on the management of student behaviour?

It appears that Lyn knows the school's behaviour management policy and implements the processes accordingly. She and other staff require a clear understanding of their duty of care responsibilities and when an incident occurs how to deal with it. The importance of the record keeping and effective communications with executive staff and parents, and where appropriate departmental authorities through the principal, cannot be underestimated.

The main issue for me is Lyn's ongoing professional experience. What opportunities has she been given to gain greater understandings and knowledge about what her colleagues are doing in similar and dissimilar school environments? From the case as described it appears that Lyn has little interaction with her colleagues to share her successes, to vent her frustrations, to discuss what works and what doesn't work with her students in her classroom, and to gain insights about what her colleagues are trying that might be worth attempting or to float ideas she might have. Lyn seems to work in professional isolation. Yet she is making valiant attempts to get to know her students well on a personal level though she is still struggling with gender issues. Lyn's approach seems very cautious and we see no evidence of pedagogical risk taking. Perhaps the culture of the school does not encourage such an approach. Lyn is still a beginning teacher in many ways with six years and two schools under her belt. Her special education background suggests that she is more inclined to focus on caring than teaching at this point. Striking the right balance between the two can only be found by practical experience in her classroom with her students and she is working her way through that. Teaching is a complex mix of numerous variants and no two classrooms are the same, so, from what is described, it appears she is doing a fine job.

However, she has not yet developed beyond the point where activities and content are the major outcomes. For her, the routine she implements keeps the children under control and despite consistently monitoring their progress there is little evidence that this information is used effectively to challenge students to strive to achieve better than average results or to implement specific programs to meet individual learning needs. I wondered if learning in Lyn's classroom was fun. With greater experience, opportunities for professional dialogue and mentoring, professional development experiences and chances to visit her colleagues' classrooms to make observations and then analyse and critique her own teaching, it is likely that Lyn will develop her teaching maturity. This maturity and a broader repertoire of

teaching and behaviour management strategies will help Lyn to become a reflective practitioner where she is able to make changes to her teaching based on evidence that she collects about her own practices and her students' learning. With time her teaching will become open and accountable and it is more likely that her students will be eager to learn, knowing that they come to a supportive yet challenging learning environment.

What are the performance standards in other schools and how are colleagues managing the curriculum content for their students? We owe it to dedicated teachers like Lyn to support their continued professional growth by collaboratively researching better ways of assisting students to achieve quality educational and social outcomes.

*John Bladen,*

*Principal; Chair, Board of the Australian National Schools Network.*

### Case questions

- 1 Discuss Lyn's teaching priority to have the students 'behave first and learn second'. How might her approach to classroom management be informed by her special education background?
- 2 Consider Lyn's four classroom management principles: getting to know students, individual and team incentives, preparation and 'a nice approach'. Which are the most important?
- 3 Appraise Lyn's classroom management strategies. To what extent might they be influenced by the context of the school?
- 4 'Better to ignore the crime and treat the problem'. When should 'a crime' in the classroom be ignored/not ignored? What is the dividing line?
- 5 Discuss the commentary on Lyn's case, focusing on areas of agreement and disagreement.

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### AMBER

'What drives my attitude to classroom management', Amber claims, 'is being prepared and teaching really well. Without great preparation, all hell breaks loose.' She believes that management is particularly difficult at the school because of a high staff turnover, the relatively small number of experienced teachers, and the low level of literacy among students.

The school is a state comprehensive boys' high school of 300 students, one-third of whom experience learning difficulties. Situated in a depressed socioeconomic area, the school population is 99.5 per cent NESB. More than 85 per cent are Lebanese, and the remainder are predominantly Pacific islanders. In both the SNAP test (Maths) and the ELLA test (Literacy), administered early in the year to Grade 7, more than 70 per cent of the current year's students were in the lower two bands. Several students arrive at the school functionally illiterate.

'I consider the whole school to be ESL', Amber claims, and reports that money granted the school from the *Priority Action Schools Project* was spent on hiring three more teachers. The average class size is less than 20 students, which Amber claims enables fewer teacher-dominated lessons.

Amber has been teaching for only six years, but was recently appointed Head Teacher Learning Support. There are very few such positions in the state. She teaches English that is often integrated with other learning areas. The following are included among Amber's management strategies. She:

① prepares thoroughly and structures learning activities to engage students. Amber describes her stance as a 'teaching focus rather than a management focus'. For instance, she produced a 117-page book of teaching activities on rainforests for her Grade 7 Geography class. The activities, combining literacy skills and problem solving, constitute a radical departure from the students' traditional fare of directed teaching. In one activity, students work in groups of twos and threes that subsequently combine (jigsaw groups) to learn and teach each other about the rainforest layers of emergents, canopy, understorey and forest floor.

The book contains information and a variety of activities. These include word maps or pictures with empty surrounding boxes requiring written information (for example, a bird picture with information to be provided on size, habitat, special features and comparisons with other birds), and graphic organisers or mind maps by which student response to an initial question leads them on a voyage of discovery through different charted pathways. Students may, for instance, select a bird or animal, and begin their research with the question 'Does it live in the canopy?' Both a 'yes' and 'no' response provide further questions (respectively, 'Does it mainly climb or jump through the canopy?', and 'Can it be mainly found in rainforest streams?'). Further questions are contingent upon the answers to these.

This workbook, and others she has produced that include labelling, classification, cloze, word banks, report and story writing, true-false interpretive exercises and values clarification have been acknowledged by university experts as publishable. She argues that engagement results from meaningful intellectual challenge, and effective communication between partners. So she explicitly teaches the skills of listening, presenting and negotiating;

- ✓ ② defines her own expectations and details them for students. 'Knowing where we are going—me and them' is one prerequisite for engagement;
- ✓ ③ keeps her lessons moving at a fast pace. Believing that 'momentum is important', she avoids interrupting the flow of the lesson to draw attention to an off-task student. If she is explaining or issuing instructions, and a student is not attentive, she will state his name mid-sentence and continue, often raising an admonitory finger. She claims

to use her hands frequently to point to meaning. Clicking her fingers is a favoured attention-gaining ploy;

- ✓ ☉ gives consistent praise as a means of engaging, but claims that it is only given when fully justified;
- ✓ ☉ cultivates a classroom culture of zero tolerance in relation to any behaviour that interferes with learning. She consistently tells her students that 'what is happening is so important, we can't afford to waste time';
- ☉ acknowledges the importance of relationship-building by greeting all students by name as they are lined up waiting to enter the room. Once they enter, students know that they must be ready quickly for the lesson to begin. Amber believes that both creating and maintaining the pace of lessons is important for classroom management;
- ☉ uses a sense of humour, not only to engage, but to relieve tension and reduce potential disruption. She will sometimes smile and say quirkily, 'Even if you're rude to me, I'm going to be nice back'. Such a statement is an expression of her belief in the importance of relationship-building in teaching;
- ☉ moves to the source of disruption both when she is conducting the formal phase of a lesson (explaining) or facilitating students at work;
- ☉ moves students to other desks after two warnings. She does not send students from the room, believing that they are more disruptive when left idle outside, though she does send them to the door where she can talk to them confidentially and at the same time 'keep an eye on the class'.

In her six years at the school, Amber has been sworn at, and was sexually harassed in her first year by a group of 20 Year 8 boys who made lewd comments to her in the school playground. There are many and varied management challenges posed by individual students. One Year 10 boy, with mental and emotional problems that are often expressed in severe anger, will come to Amber as soon as he experiences anger. She will often talk quietly or take him for a walk, but rather than confront will leave it to him to initiate discussion. Amber is undertaking an anger awareness program with him once a week. She manages a bright and hyperactive Year 7 boy who is highly disruptive when not focused, by ensuring that he is actively engaged and placed in group leadership roles. This strategy is complemented by praise and encouragement: 'You're to be in charge of this group because I know you'll do it really well'.

The student welfare policy, and discipline policy that forms a part of it, are currently under review. The school uses a Level System. Level 1 is enforced by individual classroom teachers without assistance from school executive staff; Level 2 (Blue Card) involves the Year Adviser or Head Teacher Welfare monitoring the students' progress in all learning areas;

and Level 3 (Green Card) operates for students returning from suspension, and involves an interview with the deputy principal and parents. Re-offending students on Level 3 are often suspended again.

Amber refers to the school rules as the 3Cs: courtesy, cooperation and consideration, and cites them consistently in her classroom as guides for desirable behaviour.

## Commentary

The context in which Amber works at this school is one which can help to mould brilliant teachers at one extreme, and at the other can break the spirit of all but the most resilient, young and old. Every school context provides a challenge but the layers created by a 'depressed socioeconomic area' and cultural diversity create unique challenges.

Amber utilises time-honoured practice which can support teachers in any school context. It would be interesting to know the extent to which she can 'unpack' and articulate what she does. It is more likely that she is driven by a thorough understanding of what works and what doesn't. Passing this understanding to younger teachers is a most difficult professional support and development task.

Yet this is what we must do and it might be interesting to match Amber's practice against widely accepted models of effective learning and teaching. In New South Wales the yardstick is *Quality Teaching in New South Wales*, developed in recent times by Dr James Ladwig and Professor Jennifer Gore from the University of Newcastle (adapted from the Queensland School of Reform Longitudinal Study framework reported in Chapter 4). The development of this document draws not only on best practice elsewhere but in close cooperation with teachers and principals in NSW.

Amber's structured learning activities reflect the three dimensions of the NSW model:

- 1 **Intellectual quality** is demonstrated in the manner in which students construct knowledge and communicate substantially about what they are learning. Amber doesn't feed information to students; her lessons are built around creative ways to encourage them to ask the questions and attempt higher order thinking. In the process students communicate and learn from each other.
- 2 A **quality learning environment** is promoted by Amber's belief that the focus on learning and teaching in her classroom creates the right environment and, in the process, helps resolve the management issues which may arise. Her emphasis on a productive learning environment with high expectations, momentum and engagement serves to minimise disruptions while creating a culture which values learning above all else.
- 3 The third dimension is **significance**, which is probably helped by what appears to be reasonable student choice of activities. At the same time there is considerable scope to enhance learning by creating strong connections with students' prior knowledge and

identities. Despite the depressingly overcrowded curriculum, it is very important for teachers to make these links and tap into background knowledge and cultural knowledge of young people.

Amber's thorough preparation is one of the keys to her apparent success. She argues that 'engagement results from meaningful intellectual challenge.' Just as important—she has experienced that for herself—to the extent that others regard her teaching material as publishable. Good classroom teachers often take a lot of convincing that their material is 'up there' with the best commercial resources. The reality is that it is better, because teachers such as Amber experience their own excitement and commitment to learning and can better transmit this to their students.

Amber's classroom management is engaging in every important sense of that word. Her praise is measured, she develops a relationship with every learner, she uses humour in a disarming fashion but, when necessary, will not hesitate to deal with individual students who may be disruptive. It is hardly surprising that in the school she is used to support students with emotional and related problems.

There are many 'Ambers' in our schools. They are committed, hard working, highly valued in the school (but not sufficiently in the community) and form the backbone of a quality teaching profession. They battle against the odds of often disinterested students, dysfunctional families and a broader community which makes judgements about schools and teachers based on meaningless single index measures of success such as the UAI (Universities Admission Index). Despite all this, Amber would surely get the biggest buzz out of making a difference in the lives of young people. That is why we teach.

*Chris Bonnor,*

*Principal; President, NSW Secondary Principals' Council.*

## Case questions

- 1 Identify and discuss school context factors that might inform potential management problems.
- 2 Amber describes her approach to classroom management as 'a teaching focus rather than a management focus'. Discuss the relationship between the two. How important for management is quality curriculum and quality teaching?
- 3 Appraise Amber's classroom management strategies. Which would you adopt?
- 4 Comment on Amber's tactic of managing the Year 10 boy who has severe anger. How would you do it?
- 5 Discuss the commentary on Amber's case, focusing on areas of agreement and disagreement.

## MATT

Matt teaches at a relatively large state primary school of 650 students in an upper middle-class area with very motivated and often over-anxious parents. The staff, Matt claims, is highly committed and the students are both well behaved and bright. They score particularly well on the Basic Skills Tests, and in the University of NSW Science, Maths, English and Computer competitions. Established in 1903, the school is strong in swimming (it has won the district competition for 31 consecutive years), and music (there are four bands and a string ensemble, each with a specialist conductor).

Matt has been teaching for 23 years, a period broken by a foray into the more lucrative computer area. At this, his sixth school, he teaches a Grade 4/5 composite class of 30 students.

Three main principles underpin Matt's approach to classroom management. The first, a generic principle relating to teaching, is relationship-building. Developing a relationship between teacher and student based on trust, care and understanding is essential for Matt. He believes that the more he knows and understands his students, the easier management becomes. So he works at developing a deep understanding of his students' backgrounds, personalities and capabilities, and he explores his initial perceptions of their abilities by using Gardner's seven multiple intelligences to identify their strengths. Recently, he asked his students to identify their own aptitudes according to Gardner's seven areas. For Matt, building relationships is 'the bridge between teacher and student by which teaching can happen'. And if the connection is made, 'real teaching and learning can occur, and management is easier'.

In describing the need for relationship-building, Matt refers to the transforming power of love: not a romantic or physical love, but 'a caring emotion expressed by a giver who wants the best for another person'. He acknowledges his love for his students and laments the fact that many teachers would interpret such a view as 'namby-pamby'.

The second principle is the promotion of student self-esteem. Matt acknowledges the best efforts of students so that they know they will be rewarded if they do the best they can. This fostering of self-esteem involves him in comparing a student's performance over time, rather than making comparisons between students. Much of the work he sets involves the students in 'personal projects' that allow them to explore their own creativity. 'If they feel good about themselves', Matt claims, 'there will be fewer management problems'.

Matt's third principle is engagement. He believes that if students are involved in 'interesting and fun lessons', they are less likely to be management problems. Acknowledging the quality work that students do, he rues the fact that classes often produce 30 identical pieces of work, and he therefore encourages difference. The engaging activities he has used include the building of egg protection devices that were completed individually or in pairs, and that were tested in front of invited parents by being dropped from a two-metre balcony; and a

'Dad's Day' during which fathers were involved in learning activities with six groups of five students. Each group, operating as a publishing company, was required to produce a book on space that would interest children their own age. The students were assigned roles (project manager, time manager, text coordinator, picture coordinator), and the fathers were appointed to groups as consultants. Other recent engaging activities included the building of 3D shapes from straws, plasticine and pipe cleaners, and bush poetry with visiting performers.

Apart from these principles of managing students, Matt uses some particular strategies to manage student behaviour. He:

- ⊙ gains attention by asking for quiet, and counting down from five, using hand signals for each number. He argues that insisting upon instant quiet or cessation of work isn't realistic, and that the five-second period allows students to finish what they were writing or saying in discussion;
- ⊙ stresses for students that if he is critical of their behaviour, they should not interpret that as personal dislike;
- ⊙ 'draws students back to work gently', claiming that it is inevitable that students will 'cross boundaries' occasionally, and that 'teachers who bellow, do so because they need to get rid of angst rather than for what will be effective in the situation, or is for the benefit of the students';
- ⊙ speaks to disruptive students individually and confidentially, often by calling the student to his desk;
- ⊙ keeps his voice volume to a minimum;
- ⊙ speaks to the class (initially or throughout a lesson) 'only when I have something to say'.
- ⊙ consults with significant others—the parents, previous teachers, deputy principal and principal.

Last year Matt experienced the most difficult management problem of his career. Lance refused to work, broke things, 'pestered other children' and was constantly angry and 'oppositional'. He even responded to praise by tearing up merit certificates in front of Matt. In consultation with the itinerant Behaviour Disorder Teacher, Matt implemented a card system: if Lance was behaving inappropriately, a card reading 'Your behaviour is unacceptable' was placed on his table; and if the behaviour continued, the card was reversed to read 'Your behaviour is still unacceptable'. As the card could be displayed silently, it reduced overt conflict between teacher and student. If Lance continued with unacceptable behaviour, Matt called the deputy principal who removed him from the class. Matt persisted, consistently applying his management practices to the extent that he obtained information about a famous Wallaby footballer revered by Lance so that he could acquire common ground for discussion. Matt would even watch Lance play football. Eventually, Lance settled down though Matt

admits that his own behaviour wasn't always exemplary. For instance, one day when Lance refused to pick up his pencil case that he had deliberately dropped in front of the classroom, Matt in sheer frustration, kicked it away, scattering pens and pencils across the room.

There are no classroom rules. Matt claims that his one tacit rule is, 'if I'm talking, be quiet'. There is, however, a laminated *School Code of Behaviour* displayed in every classroom. The students' rights and responsibilities include: 'Be an active learner'; 'Be respectful of people and property and the school's good name'; and 'Be cooperative and honest with staff and school leaders'. Matt discusses these rules with his class at the beginning of the year, but admits to focusing on other aphorisms:

- ⊙ never feel badly about making mistakes—as long as you learn from them;
- ⊙ learning things is not as important as what you do with them;
- ⊙ whatever you learn has a purpose—though you may not know it at the time;
- ⊙ as long as you have the sense of laughter, you have nothing to fear;
- ⊙ whenever you learn something, the whole world becomes richer.

*The School Code of Behaviour* may be enforced through the School Discipline Policy that includes the use of time-outs. If students are given time-out, they remain in the classroom, and report the second half of lunchtime to the time-out room where they are requested to complete written explanations. Matt has not yet used this option.

## Commentary

Matt's management style encompasses some important aspects of good teaching. Building a good relationship with students is not essential for helping them to learn, but certainly improves the prospect of them wanting to learn and enjoying the subject. The teacher/student relationship can be a very strong determining factor in achievement, commitment, subject choice and behaviour. Many students will relate how they liked or disliked a particular year at school. When questioned about this it often is because of the relationship with their teachers.

Matt perceives the bases of this relationship as trust, care and understanding. Students want to be able to trust and respect their teacher and they want their teacher to be fair. Students will often be far more disruptive if they do not perceive their teachers as fair and trustworthy.

Also, students' knowledge that the teacher cares about them influences their willingness to learn and to cooperate. Many students will not want to hand in a substandard piece of work or disrupt the class of a teacher who expects them to work to their potential and whom they respect. They are more likely to work for such a teacher's approval and therefore not be openly defiant or disruptive.

Another aspect of Matt's relationship-building, understanding, is perhaps the most



important aspect. It is through understanding a student's strengths and weaknesses that a teacher can most assist a student to reach his/her potential. A student who is frustrated because he doesn't understand or cannot do the task will often resort to disruptive or non-compliant behaviour. For example, a student who has a reading difficulty will often not want others to know, so will try to disguise it. A teacher who draws attention to the problem by asking the student to read to the class or giving tasks that are too difficult will not only embarrass the student but will also damage their relationship. If this occurs, the student is less likely to be cooperative and will be less amenable to help.

For Matt, developing self-esteem is an important part not only of good teaching but of assisting the student to cope with life generally. A student with good self-esteem will attempt learning activities and is far less likely to suffer from anxiety and depression. Building good self-esteem is part of building resilience. Students with poor self-esteem don't usually care about themselves and can't understand why others would. In Lance's scenario, his self-esteem was probably low and that is why he tore up the certificate that he probably didn't feel he deserved. Students with low self-esteem already feel bad about themselves, so getting into trouble and getting low marks only reinforces their own self-perception. Matt is correct to believe that there will be fewer management problems with students who have good self-concepts.

Engagement, another of Matt's criteria, is important for good teaching but is probably more difficult to maintain on a daily basis, as some lessons/subjects do not arouse the interest of all students. However, students are more likely to be cooperative throughout what they consider the boring aspects of their day if they know that there will be many lessons that are interesting. Students can produce very creative pieces of work if they are motivated by the topic. A teacher's approach to a subject/topic can either engage the student in learning or 'turn a student off'.

Perhaps the main aspect of the particular strategies Matt uses to manage the class is that he is realistic and respectful of students. Giving students time to complete their sentence within a definite time limit, not shouting, and speaking to students individually instead of humiliating or putting them down in front of the class, creates a respectful, positive atmosphere that will certainly assist in discouraging students from being non-compliant and rude.

It was noted in the case of Lance that Matt's usual strategies were not initially enough to have Lance comply. Lance, like many students, may have issues involving home, previous teachers or other students that have an impact on his behaviour.

Matt implemented a program with the assistance of the Behaviour Disorder Teacher. Such strategies are only successful, however, if they are used consistently. Matt appears to have used the card system in this way and was not afraid to implement the next discipline strategy if that was necessary. A consistent and persistent approach, as well as still developing a relationship, helped Matt achieve his goal. The student would never have known if Matt had disliked him. He would have perceived Matt as being someone he could trust and someone who cared enough about him to come and watch him play football. Matt's determination to help Lance was evident and eventually effective.

Students with difficult natures or circumstances will sometimes have a history of being in classes where they were often in trouble. However, there will be other years when there was very little reported about their behaviour. Often one of the key differences between these classes and years is the different teachers' management styles.

*Jenny James,*

*District School Counsellor; Psychologist.*

## Case questions

- 1 Discuss the importance of (i) engagement and (ii) relationship-building for classroom management. Comment on Matt's claim of loving his students
- 2 Appraise Matt's classroom management strategies. Which would you adopt?
- 3 What do you think of the card system used with Lance? How else would you respond to such 'oppositional' behaviour?

- 4 Consider the five 'aphorisms' that Matt provides at the end of the case. Do you endorse them as guides to teaching and engagement?
- 5 Discuss the commentary on Matt's case, focusing on areas of agreement and disagreement.

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## JUDY

'Management is the most difficult thing to master when you come to a new school', Judy claims. 'It's difficult to learn until you are thrown in . . . you can have all the theory, but need to put it into practice.' Judy, who has only been teaching for eight months, reports that her parents, both teachers with more than 20 years of teaching experience, 'are still coming to terms with class management'. Keeping students on task, fairness and consistency are the management principles Judy endorses.

Judy teaches English at a large comprehensive co-educational high school of 800 students in an upper middle-class area. Established in 1972, the school enjoys sound parent support and is particularly strong in the performing and creative arts, and sport.

Judy uses a variety of strategies to manage her class. She:

- ⊙ asks for attention when students have entered the room, always politely and always with a 'please'. She then waits for silence, claiming that looking intently at talkers is sufficient to hush them. If students talk throughout the lesson, she will stop and say, 'I won't continue until you are quiet';
- ⊙ moves to the desks of talkative or distracted students to attract their attention. She argues that even taking a couple of steps towards and looking intently at a talking student usually produces silence;
- ⊙ does not sit during lessons but walks around the class, both during the formal phase of a lesson (explaining or discussing) and the informal phase when students are working at a task;
- ⊙ engages disruptive and potentially disruptive students by diversions. These students may be required to read to the class so 'they feel they are doing something worthwhile'. Judy acknowledges though that 'there is a delicate balance between engaging the disruptive student and creating resentment in the productive student who feels left out'. Invoking her principle of fairness, she claims that 'students on-task get frustrated with those who are not';
- ⊙ calls repeatedly disruptive students to her desk to indicate firmly appropriate behaviour. Judy doesn't approve of criticising a student in front of the class. She may remove the student outside the classroom where she asks her stock question, 'Is there something you need to tell me'. She claims that the students generally say no, but are usually suitably chastened;

- ⊗ requires younger repeat offenders (Grades 7 and 8) to stay in for half of recess or lunchtime and, typically, clean the desks. School policy does not allow the students to be kept for more than half the time.

In managing her class, Judy uses some school-wide strategies. She:

- ⊗ issues 'orange slips' to offending students, requiring them to clean the playground for ten minutes. These slips have to be signed by the teacher on duty and, as Judy claims, involves the teacher issuing the slip in follow-up;
- ⊗ requests the assistance of the English head teacher. Earlier in the year, Judy experienced some management problems with her Year 12. Five students were so disruptive that on-task students complained that they were not learning. After consultation with the head teacher and then the deputy principal, the students were temporarily removed from the class and were only allowed to return when their work was complete. They were also required to write letters of apology to the class. 'I really appreciated the support of the head teacher and deputy principal', Judy reports;
- ⊗ completes a 'Letter of Concern', or threatens to do so. The school has a proforma that involves the teacher ticking one of six boxes (including 'failure to submit homework/assignments', 'poor punctuality/class attendance', 'an unwillingness to settle down in the classroom to make a serious, productive effort', and 'neglecting to bring the necessary books/equipment'). There is a space for detailing the problem and suggesting solutions, and the form, signed by the teacher, head teacher and principal, must also be signed by the parent. There is a corresponding 'Letter of Commendation', and both letters can be used at the discretion of the classroom teacher.

Judy believes her greatest management challenge is her Year 8 class, in which there are four ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder) students, and which she teaches last period on Friday. She sometimes raises her voice and uses the previously mentioned management strategies. She is determined to redress the balance of indicating her displeasure of disruptive students by commending those who are working. She also reports on her Year 12 students talking about sex 'to get a reaction', but claims that such talk is quickly managed with a statement like 'This isn't appropriate . . . it's offending me and other students, and I don't want to hear it'.

*The Student Handbook and Code of Conduct* outlines the school's Level System. Placement on Level 0 may involve either a verbal reprimand, written contract, detention, isolation within the classroom, or a 'Letter of Concern'. Placement on Level 1 (Blue Card) involves a letter sent to parents in consultation with the head teacher, a daily check arranged by the head teacher, and the informing of the year adviser. Level 2 (Pink Card) involves a student interview with the head teacher, notification of parents by the head teacher, implementation of a

daily Conduct Program signed by the parents, and exclusion from school representation and excursions. Level 3 (Green Card) involves a student interview by the year adviser and deputy principal, a letter to parents, a parent meeting with the deputy and year adviser, the implementation of a daily Conduct Program, a Behaviour Contract, and exclusion from excursions and school representation. Level 4 (Yellow Card) involves an interview with the principal, a letter to, and interview with, parents, a Behaviour Contract, suspension (at home or in school), and on return from suspension, placement on a daily contract program that is signed by parents and checked by the year adviser daily.

Students are also provided with details concerning the conditions of suspension that are automatically enforced for possession of illegal drugs or a prohibited weapon, and violence or threatened physical violence. The principal can impose a short suspension of up to four days or a long suspension of up to 20 days.

While the student handbook specifies requirements relating to smoking, truancy, bullying, drugs, alcohol, weapons, cruelty to animals and mobile phones, Judy admits to be still familiarising herself with these procedures, and claims that she has not placed any of her students on the levels.

## Commentary

As I read Judy's case, three key themes emerged for me:

- 1 the importance of context;
- 2 the consistent application of a variety of classroom management strategies; and
- 3 support for student ownership of and responsibility for their own learning.

It is not surprising that even after more than 20 years of teaching experience, Judy's parents are still developing their classroom management practices. The schools in which we teach are dynamic contexts for learning and teaching, and youth culture always is changing. As teachers, we don't stop learning about educational theory and how this can inform our practice, even after years of experience, because ideas about classroom management aren't static. What works in one situation at one time with a particular student or group of students may not be as effective in another context, so we need to be seeking to increase our understanding of the individuals we teach. Students are 'switched on' to teachers who are genuinely interested in them, who listen and whose respect is sincere. Usually this respect is returned. When we are able to make such connections with students, we are in a position to better develop relevant and meaningful learning contexts, in which we can negotiate the curriculum. Within significant contexts, students are more willing to engage with both the content and processes of learning because there is a clear purpose and reason for doing so. In my own teaching experience, this is the most powerful and effective approach to classroom management, because it is focused on the learning context, rather than an isolated strategy that is imposed or controlled by the teacher.

The changing contexts in which we teach make it vital to develop continually a variety of integrated strategies for classroom management that are embedded in the learning environment. Judy's case illustrates that as a beginning teacher, she is aware of the need to employ a range of strategies. She appears to be experiencing success in her attempts to create a fair and supportive learning environment for all of her students, including those who are on-task. This success may be because Judy is predictably and consistently applying these strategies, within a clear school-wide framework where there are explicit consequences for students. Some of her strategies clearly rely on students' pro-social skills and respect for their peers and for Judy herself. Her management of students talking about sex is an example of such a strategy. Varying voice volume is an essential tactic to engage students, but teachers need to be aware that raising the volume too greatly may potentially undermine the relationship a teacher seeks to build with students, and the positive classroom learning environment. Students tend to switch off when teachers frequently shout and rapport is diminished. So Judy needs to ensure that she does not raise her voice too much with her Year 8 class, lest the effectiveness of lessons that rely on pro-social skills and mutual respect is diminished.

As teachers, our management strategies ideally should be supportive and encouraging of students taking responsibility for their own learning. Judy's 'stock' question, 'Is there something you need to tell me?', indicates that she is wanting students to make decisions regarding their own actions and to be accountable for these. Use of such a strategy is likely to contribute positively to the overall climate of learning and to result in the on-task engagement that Judy desires. Teachers also in similar situations to Judy's may choose to use punitive measures, such as keeping students in to clean desks. If teachers choose such a punishment, it is important to be aware that such measures are removed from the cause of the behaviour or the focus of learning, and may increase students' resentment towards classroom activities rather than promoting positive engagement with learning. In considering an approach to classroom management, our focus should be on creating classroom environments that students *want* to be a part of and this means that our management strategies should include opportunities for negotiation and choice. This in turn supports students taking responsibility for their learning, and enables them to care about and own this process in an encouraging school environment.

*Kimberley Pressick-Kilborn,  
University Lecturer, Learning and Practice-based Education.*

## Case questions

- 1 Consider the likely value of the 'Letter of Concern' as a management strategy.
- 2 Appraise Judy's other classroom management strategies. Which would you adopt?

- 3 Comment on Judy's response to the Year 12 boys talking about sex in her lesson. Would you react differently?
- 4 Discuss the Level System outlined in the *Student Handbook and Code of Conduct* at Judy's school.
- 5 Discuss the commentary on Judy's case, focusing on areas of agreement and disagreement.

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## IAN

Ian believes that management permeates almost everything a teacher does: the behaviour of students during lessons; moving from lines to class; 'setting up' for lessons; determining where students will sit; handing out books; and deciding what should happen when the bell rings. All these management situations, he claims, involve consistency, fairness and clear expectations for the students.

Ian is one of the assistant principals in a medium-sized, middle-class school of 330 students. There is only a small NESB population, and the parents are involved and supportive. The school, established in 1957, boasts a Technology Centre, a school intranet and a school band. Ian has 11 years of teaching experience and currently teaches a Grade 2 class of 27 students (17 girls and 10 boys that he laughingly claims is the right balance).

He lists the following classroom management strategies. He:

- ☉ raises his voice to get attention, but only slightly. When the children are lining up to enter the room, he simply says 'ding dong' and the children have learned to hush immediately;
- ☉ looks directly at an inattentive child, claiming 'you can control with your eyes';
- ☉ uses clapping patterns that children have to imitate to refocus their attention;
- ☉ ensures that books and pencils are always on desks prior to lessons (or before children return to their desks from the mat);
- ☉ prepares extension sheets so that children who complete their work before others will not be idle and potentially disruptive;
- ☉ implements 'gradual movement' to regulate the number of children leaving the room or beginning work at once. His selection strategy is often novel and random ('all blue-eyed children'; 'everyone wearing a head band');
- ☉ settles minor squabbles between two or three students by having them play 'paper, scissors, rock'. 'Even if they lose', Ian claims, 'they see it as fair';
- ☉ issues stickers, sometimes putting them in the children's books, but more often distributing them by hand;
- ☉ gives 'raffle tickets' for good work or behaviour. The raffles, drawn every second Friday, yield four or five prizes, and no single child can win more than one prize;

- ☉ discusses what could have been done when a child misbehaves by insisting that the child reflects on the undesirable behaviour;
- ☉ points, usually silently, to a particular class rule (attached to the inside front door) when it is being ignored. The rule may be 'Listen quietly when others are talking', 'Work quietly without distracting others', or 'Put your hand up and wait to have your turn'.

Ian's classroom management is also informed by a number of management strategies that are used throughout the school:

- ☉ house points that are awarded for good work and behaviour, culminating in an end of year citizenship award.
- ☉ assemblies at which children in every infants' class are the recipients of two awards, for either work or behaviour.
- ☉ 'Aussie of the Month', a status conferred by the whole staff voting on class nominations.

Ian has one student, whom he admits 'wears me down'. Dale, who is taking medication for ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder), often calls out, consistently wants attention, and gets very upset when his work is incorrect. 'Everything is a drama', Ian explains. 'He is over-the-top with his reactions.' Dale engages in odd behaviour (like insisting on wearing his shoes on the wrong feet), and he has poor social skills (can't smile or look others in the eyes).

Admitting to the use of some odd or even desperate management ploys such as sending Dale on messages, or getting him to beat his record time for running three times around the oval (his classroom is adjacent to the oval), Ian tries to be consistent and calm in detailing his expectations and relating them to the school rules. He encourages Dale to stop and think, and he focuses on the positive. 'You can't be too confrontationalist', Ian explains, 'or he'll withdraw and sulk'. If Dale meets Ian's expectations, he is rewarded with free time or computer time. Because other children 'trigger him off', Ian needs to train the rest of the class to behave towards Dale in appropriate ways.

Two other documents inform the nature of management at the school: the school rules, and *Strategies For Managing Unacceptable Behaviour*. The school rules are printed on laminated cards and are displayed in each classroom. On four cards, each a different colour, there are three columns respectively headed 'The Right', 'The Rule' and 'My Responsibilities'. 'The Right' is a single generic statement ('I have the right to be treated with respect and courtesy'); and 'The Rule' is also a single statement ('Treat others as you would like to be treated'). To underline the notion that every right carries responsibilities, the third column, has six to eight detailed responsibilities.

*Strategies For Managing Unacceptable Behaviour* has a sequence of steps for staff to follow in dealing with unacceptable behaviour. After displaying and discussing the classroom rules with children, aberrant behaviour is treated by observing the following graded steps:

- ⊙ the child is given up to three warnings (usually recorded on the board);
- ⊙ a 60-second encounter occurs (discussion between child and teacher);
- ⊙ the child is moved to a time-out area (not for longer than one session) to complete a reflection sheet. This sheet requires the student to indicate both the nature of the misbehaviour, a more acceptable alternative, and how to prepare for the more desirable behaviour. The sheet, signed by teacher and student, is then discussed between the two;
- ⊙ the child is sent to a buddy class to work alone;
- ⊙ the child is sent to the stage supervisor who may impose a lunchtime detention involving the completion of an incident record sheet, and subsequent recording by the principal;
- ⊙ the child is sent to the principal.

After three incidents per term involving the supervisor or principal, an interview is arranged with the child's parents. To encourage self-discipline, children who are feeling angry or stressed may also go voluntarily to the time-out area in the classroom.



## Commentary

Ian places a high value on organised classroom management. Teachers such as Ian are often revered by parents and senior educators as exemplary models. We must ensure that in each management approach, the needs of all learners are respected and that a 'one size fits all' approach doesn't marginalise students with special needs.

There are three things that students require to perform to their potential. First, teacher modelling of adult behaviour; second, teacher acknowledgement of appropriate student behaviour; and finally, emotional support from warm, friendly and interested teachers. Management models must be inclusive and respect the personal qualities of the students they involve. They should not be 'mechanically structured' to alienate students with particular learning and behavioural needs. Similarly, they need to take account of the developmental/social needs of the learner.

Teachers also need to be proactive from the start. Establishing rules, rewards and consequences creates a positive classroom culture. Following are some comments on the management strategies used by Ian.

Class rules should be kept to 3-5 positive, basic rules, prominently displayed and reinforced daily. They need to be explicitly explained and proactively taught by reinforcing students who follow them. By early and active acknowledgement of students who display appropriate behaviour, a teacher develops a positive rapport with the class and an ongoing influence over future student behaviour.

When students test the boundaries, the teacher is able to follow through with the consequences rather than just ignore inappropriate behaviour. Consistent teacher correction is crucial in supporting students who threaten to establish a pattern of ongoing disruptive behaviour, and in the worst-case scenarios, deterring an 'at risk' class from 'popcorn cooking': one student misbehaving after another.

Students need to learn social skills in sharing, turn-taking and playing by the rules. Resolving peer conflict between young students provides an opportunity for children to enhance their social skills. Ian's frequent use of the game 'paper, scissors, rock' to settle minor peer conflict may provide a short-term solution. However, it may not always assure a fair outcome and may fail to guide student development in learning the higher order social skills of empathy, fairness and conflict resolution. It may lead to an increase in disputes of a similar nature, and a delay in learning the strategies that underpin the solving of more complex problems. Perhaps a classroom display presenting conflict resolution strategies in both written and pictorial format might empower students with the language skills to resolve minor conflicts.

Looking at inattentive students as a corrective is often effective, but teachers need to be aware that directly looking at an inattentive student experiencing an oppositional phase may produce an escalation from inattentive behaviour to power struggle. Furthermore, students

with high attention needs may have their inattentive behaviour reinforced by eye contact. Using their inattentive behaviour to attract attention may outweigh their need to attend to the task. Students could be cued back on-task by publicly acknowledging nearby appropriately responding students. Moving towards an inattentive student while favourably commenting about on-task students, can also provide an effective and unobtrusive strategy.

Ian's use of clapping patterns to 'tune in' a class works well for students in early schooling. A complementary proactive strategy to sustain on-task attention is to acknowledge the entire class when they are focused ('You are all working well . . . this is very grown-up behaviour').

Before issuing extension work to early finishers, teachers should check completed work. This provides positive feedback. There is also a likelihood that capable students might slow their rate of work to avoid extension activities.

One method of organising classroom departure is to select students who have followed the rules or have improved, and name them publicly before they are given priority in leaving the class. This practice highlights appropriate and improved behaviour and makes for a less congested exit. Ian's novel and random selection strategy is an effective reward but only if all the students are behaving appropriately.

Regarding Ian's use of stickers for good work, I would attach work-related stickers next to the relevant activity or page to acknowledge and reinforce student effort, and combine the awarding of each sticker with facial and verbal reinforcement.

Students generally see themselves from the feedback they receive, and 'live up to' those expectations. Viewing students in a positive light is a powerful catalyst to reinforce positive behaviours. Encouraging them to reflect on their undesirable behaviour may reinforce the inappropriate behaviour we are trying to extinguish. The general rule to improve behaviour is to provide the student with a ratio of 4:1 (four positive messages to each correctional message). If a student is experiencing a behavioural difficulty, plan to catch the student performing appropriate acts, and provide reinforcement. Consider positive scripting at the start of the day, by telling the student the behaviour you will acknowledge.

For Dale, the use of 'build-up errands' can be valuable in two ways. First, when Dale's behaviour suggests that he needs time out, sending him on a fictitious message can provide him with a behavioural circuit breaker. Second, pre-arranging for teachers to provide Dale with positive feedback when delivering his messages reinforces the strategy. This approach allows Dale to return to class having had a short sensory break with a 'feel-good' experience attached. Over time, accumulation of such build-up errands should produce more positive behaviour.

I'd suggest managing Dale's behaviour by starting each day afresh with a positive greeting, a smile and a warm welcome. At the start of each session I'd positively script Dale by telling him the appropriate behaviours I'd be seeking to acknowledge (raise hand to answer question,

work quietly). During the on-task learning phase, I'd provide Dale with positive tracking by readily acknowledging the appropriate behaviours using verbal, non-verbal and token reinforcement, especially those behaviours for which Dale was scripted. Before classroom breaks, I'd provide Dale with positive feedback by acknowledging his pleasing behaviour. 'Round Robin Praise', publicly praising Dale with two or three other students who have established reputations as 'model' students, is a highly believable form of reinforcement.

With teacher correction, sensitivity is required to avoid Dale's tendency to over-react. I'd avoid negative, public and command-based language such as 'Why aren't you . . .', 'Can't you . . .'. These methods label and distance your relationship. Instead, gain attention with a positive comment ('Thanks for looking at me', 'Thanks for listening Dale'); redirect using an unemotional voice ('You need to . . .', 'The rule is . . .'), provide wait time of 3–5 seconds, and then use the broken record technique; provide choice options without being emotional ('If you choose not to . . . *state the consequence*'); and acknowledge compliance or follow through with the consequence.

*Mark Miller,*

*Head, Behaviour Team, NSW Department of Education and Training.*

## Case questions

- 1 Consider Ian's frequent use of the game 'paper, scissors, rock' to settle minor disputes. Are there advantages and disadvantages?
- 2 Appraise Ian's classroom management strategies. Which would you adopt?
- 3 Comment on Ian's management of Dale. At times, in sheer frustration, he sends Dale to run around the oval or do messages. Should there be time-out for teachers?
- 4 Discuss the value of the sequence of management steps outlined in *Strategies For Managing Unacceptable Behaviour*.
- 5 Discuss the commentary on Ian's case, focusing on areas of agreement and disagreement.

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## SUE

Sue's subsuming principle for classroom management is 'to enable the children to assume ownership of their actions, to identify what prompted those actions, and to ensure that undesirable actions are not repeated'. This principle is a fitting expression of the school student management policy which aims to 'implement student management practices that assist students to develop themselves towards growth in self-discipline'; 'to provide a supportive environment that fosters self-esteem, responsibility, dignity and integrity'; and 'to promote honesty, forgiveness, reconciliation and the opportunity to begin again'.

Sue, an executive staff member, has 20 years of teaching experience, and currently teaches Year 3 in a Catholic systemic primary school of 400 students in a middle-class area. While the suburb has a very high NESB population, the school does not. Opened in 1925, the school appointed its first lay principal in 1976, and staff claim that 'the religious dimension permeates all aspects of school life'. The parish priest is highly visible, not only at grade and whole school masses, but in interacting with students in the school playground and attending staff morning teas. The school boasts a strong Religious Education program that 'assists each child to know Jesus and understand his teachings'.

Claiming that the learning environment 'has to be challenging, comfortable, and that students must feel they can ask questions and take risks', Sue itemises several of her basic classroom management strategies. She:

- ⊙ varies the volume of her voice by lowering rather than raising it, thereby requiring students to listen more attentively or focus their attention;
- ⊙ adopts clapping rhythms that the students are required to imitate. This is done strategically throughout the lesson and particularly when there are signs of restlessness to divert students;
- ⊙ attracts attention by standing silently in front of the class, and performing hand movements that the students are required to imitate (for example, placing both hands on her head, shoulders, knees and head again). This serves the purpose of redirecting student attention;
- ⊙ enthuses in a demonstrative way, conveying enthusiasm for the learning task;
- ⊙ moves towards distracted students without halting the presentation of the lesson, fixating them with a look as she moves. If the distracted student remains so when she has arrived, she may tap the student's desk repetitively to gain attention;
- ⊙ questions, particularly distracted students, about the progress of the lesson. She believes that an ingenuous 'What do you think' is more effective than a damning 'You weren't listening';
- ⊙ uses the 'peel off' technique by which different groups or clusters of students are set to work separately. This strategy minimises the noise involved in a whole class moving or beginning at once;
- ⊙ employs ability groups in her class, believing that homogeneous groups cause less disruption;
- ⊙ plays games to redirect attention (for instance, rapid-fire spelling and tables games in which a student who makes an error sits down until only one remains standing), or 'buzz' games which are less threatening because they involve random elimination;
- ⊙ insists on time-outs for off-task students. These are usually no more than five minutes, and there is no particular chair or place. The school policy doesn't support sending children outside the room.

Sue claims that the school has very few behaviour problems, but Brett does pose a management challenge to her Grade 3 class. Brett engages in 'impulsive and inappropriate behaviour', often gets rough and over-excited, can't sit still, interrupts, and 'talks over the top' of other students. He is having fortnightly visits to a psychologist who is teaching him to think before he acts and to express his emotions.

'He needs scaffolding all the time', Sue argues. She provides this before, during and after each lesson, detailing her expectations and 'pumping him up' ('Today you are going to be my best boy'). Once her expectations have been established, Sue is honest with Brett about the quality of his work and behaviour. She insists that if he misbehaves, he apologise so that 'he owns his actions'. Asking him 'for what' (he is apologising) is a necessary step in this ownership. Sue often allows Brett to sit on the fit-ball during lessons so that he can express his over-activity in gentle bouncing. Of course other children also want their turn on the fitball.

The management of an autistic boy poses challenges to the way Sue teaches. 'I need to know what will set him off', she claims. 'I have to find creative ways of knowing how he understands'. As the boy reacts negatively to misspelling words or being incorrect with algorithms, Sue has abandoned some of the more formal testing that may draw attention to the achievement of individuals.

Sue's classroom management is consistent with the school's *Student Management Policy*, the details of which she knows well. In particular, her practice exemplifies the following guidelines:

- ⊙ 'Expectations regarding student behaviour are communicated clearly to students at the commencement of the school year, and at appropriate times throughout . . .'
- ⊙ 'Staff are expected to be consistent and proactive in the management of student behaviour, employing preventive strategies in preference to reactive strategies.'
- ⊙ 'Consequences delivered by staff will be positive in orientation, purposeful, just and enforceable, fostering the student's sense of responsibility for his/her actions.'

The five school rules, including 'Try to do as Jesus would do', 'Respect self, others and property' and 'Be the best person I can be' sound the same positive note. There are no detentions. Each breach of discipline involves the teacher addressing the problem in discussion with the student. Discussion with the assistant principal is a further resort.

Other aspects of the school's teaching and culture reflect the concern for others that translates into appropriate classroom behaviour. A values program in the RE (Religious Education) syllabus addresses relationship issues; awards are given at assembly for addressing desirable values; and the school has a buddy system by which children from one grade are paired with children from another. In 'buddy time', usually once each fortnight, the older buddies will often assist their younger partners in craft or reading, or they will simply play together.

To achieve effective management throughout a school, Sue acknowledges the role of leadership and a sense of community.

## Commentary

The following comments (in no specific order) are offered as a commentary:

- ☉ 'To enable the children to assume ownership of their actions . . .—this precept, which encourages students to take responsibility for their behaviour, is imbedded in William Glasser's 'Choice Theory' (Reality Therapy/Control Theory). It appears it may be a basis for the development of the principles of the school's student management policy.
- ☉ There is congruence between:
  - (i) The school's strong sense of values and community.
  - (ii) The school's stated policies.
  - (iii) The visible presence of the parish priest.

Combined, these factors send a strong communal message. Sue reinforces this message by her day-to-day classroom and individual student behaviour management style. She has effectively put policy into practice.

I have found that when this type of culture exists, then learning is enhanced and behaviour management is less time consuming.

- ☉ The use of non-verbal techniques helps maintain effective classroom management. The closer a teacher is to a student, the less likely the student is to misbehave.
- ☉ Body cues communicate strong messages. The 'teacher look' and gestures are important 'tricks from the teaching bag'.
- ☉ The tone, pitch and rhythm of a teacher's voice communicates the importance of what is being said. Yelling and a high-pitched voice tend to excite rather than calm students. An effective use of the voice can convey caring, empathy and warmth as well as a love of teaching and students. Quiet classrooms are often led by calmly spoken teachers.
- ☉ Sue's strategy of using clapping rhythms to gain student attention can also be used for much larger group situations, for example stage/grade groups and assemblies.
- ☉ The best teachers I have seen and worked with in my 30-plus years in education are those who showed enthusiasm: enthusiasm for the job, enthusiasm for learning, enthusiasm for being and working with children. Teachers who display this quality, combined with well-planned, engaging and meaningful teaching/learning strategies almost always have fewer classroom management difficulties.
- ☉ It is also important to note that teachers should not feel that they are alone. Teaching colleagues and those in positions of leadership are there to support one another. By reflecting critically and talking with another teacher or supervisor, a teacher can improve/solve some of the classroom management issues/problems that they may be

experiencing. I have found that teachers are usually willing to help a fellow teacher who might be having difficulty with a challenging student or an aspect of behaviour/classroom management.

- ③ The notion of high expectations for students in both behaviour and learning tasks is crucial in helping to ensure that effective classroom management occurs. Children need to be explicitly encouraged to do their best, to try hard, to take risks and to be recognised for doing so. This helps create a quality learning environment.

*Bob Newman,  
Principal, Erina Heights Public School.*

### Case questions

- 1 Discuss Sue's priority for classroom management: 'to enable the children to assume ownership of their actions . . .'
- 2 To what extent and how might the culture/context of the school influence student behaviour?
- 3 Appraise Sue's classroom management strategies. Which would you adopt?
- 4 To 'be the best person I can be': school rule, aim of schooling, or quest in life?
- 5 Discuss the commentary on Sue's case, focusing on areas of agreement and disagreement.

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### SUMMARY

- ③ Six cases present classroom management practice as contextualised (situated in different school contexts) and problematic (posing questions rather than being prescriptive as to what is correct).
- ③ The four primary and two secondary cases report on a variety of classroom management strategies, focusing on the principles the respective teachers espouse, and the strategies both they and the school implement.
- ③ The cases exemplify not only the behaviour management strategies that teachers adopt as interventions, but preventive classroom management involving engagement in learning experiences, lesson preparation, the promotion of self-esteem and building relationships between teacher and taught.
- ③ While there are commonalities between the cases, there are differences that might be attributed to different contexts, and differences between primary and secondary schools.

## QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

- 1 Appraise the importance of context to classroom management. Examine in particular the contexts in which Lyn, Amber and Sue teach, and generate a list of contextual factors that you believe impact upon classroom management.
- 2 Are there some general differences in classroom management practices between primary and secondary schools? Identify similarities and differences.
- 3 Develop two lists. The first should itemise all the teacher interventions (what teachers do to address off-task behaviour) reported in the cases. The second should list the teacher preventive strategies reported in the cases. Rate each strategy according to its usefulness for you.
- 4 Lyn claims that students have to 'behave first and learn second'. Amber describes her approach as 'a teaching focus rather than a management focus'. Are these statements contradictory? Discuss.
- 5 Given the different detailing of the school's discipline policies or codes of conduct, which do you prefer? Develop your own school-wide discipline policy.