



Helen McMahon considers one of the most confronting issues for almost all teachers...

Of all the issues confronting beginning teachers, perhaps the most challenging is managing the behaviour of students. It is important to note from the outset that there are system and whole school responsibilities for managing behaviour.

While student behaviour is best managed in a collaborative manner throughout the school, rather than viewed solely as the responsibility of an individual, each teacher must develop a set of skills that ensure that his or her classroom is an orderly learning environment. Acceptable behaviour management strategies must be applied consistently and constantly in every situation.

Put simply, there is a standard of behaviour that should be expected of all students and applied throughout the school each day by everyone. While public schools accept all students this does not mean that all behaviours are accepted.

Students have a right to learn and teachers have a right to teach. No individual has a right to threaten those rights by engaging in disruptive behaviour. Similarly, parents have an expectation that the adults to whom they have entrusted the education and care of their children will ensure the learning environment is safe and productive.

The following ideas may assist those early career teachers and those with responsibility for mentoring beginning teachers. The resources attached have been gathered and 'borrowed' from a range of sources, adapted, and have been used at sessions for beginning teachers at induction courses.

Policies and personnel

A starting point for each teacher is to be given a clear understanding what levels of support exist within a school and the key policies and personnel that underpin that support. However, teachers must not only be supported but be seen to be supported when it comes to managing students who engage in unacceptable behaviour.

An important inclusion in any induction program should be an understanding of state-wide Department of Education policies. From that, school student welfare and behaviour policies and procedures should be explored and discussed in detail. Many school-based policies may articulate issues such as procedural fairness and the need for documentation. They should also define the roles of key personnel within a school, how students can be referred to someone in higher authority and under what circumstances.

As student misbehaviour should be dealt with promptly, it is vital that a referring teacher understands when and how they will be provided with feedback, ideally by the end of the school day unless there are exceptional circumstances. Intervention delayed is far less effective.



Lesson planning as a key

Experienced teachers understand that the underlying cause of most misbehaviour is a student's lack of self-esteem due to poor academic ability. A fear of failure can cause a student to resort to negative learned behaviour such as work avoidance, poor attendance, acting out and a failure to bring the correct equipment. However, there is evidence that inclusive teaching and learning strategies can be very powerful in minimising disruptive behaviour.

See attachment 1 below: *Ten strategies for reducing problem behaviours with good academic management*

Avoiding confrontation

Confrontational behaviour that challenges a teacher is one of the most emotionally stressful situations a teacher will experience. When a teacher is ignored or verbally insulted, it can be humiliating and debilitating. It is little comfort at the time to know that the student is likely to be experiencing conflict in a range of situations, with peers or family or any number of circumstances external to the class. As teachers gain in experience they become more adept at responding in a professionally detached manner. For early career teachers, the first rule is to try to remain calm and in control, and to seek support where possible. An emotional response may only cause the situation to escalate.

See attachment 2 below: *Dealing with confrontation*

Preventing poor behaviour from escalating

Conflict situations can quickly escalate and become more difficult to manage and create a series of secondary issues unrelated to the original offence. One of the skills that teachers develop is to lower the heat in conflict so as to reduce the likelihood of the conflict escalating and becoming more complex.

See attachment 3 below: *Twenty key points for preventing a situation from escalating*

Some general advice

Early career teachers will be just as likely to enter teaching employed as a casual relief or in a temporary block but similar principles of effective classroom management can be applied in most situations.

- Learn the names of your students as quickly as possible.
- Assert your control of the classroom environment: the seating, the lights, the heater, the blinds, where students are to sit. Some students will challenge this. Be alert.
- Be confident in your language and actions as you enter the room. This sets the tone.
- Know your subject matter but also show students you love what you teach. Enthusiasm is catching.
- Be well-prepared and bring spares of everything – handouts, texts, pens, paper etc.
- Have an interesting extension activity ready for those that complete the work quickly.
- Articulate at the beginning of the lesson an overview of what you expect to be achieved that day.



- Have back-up plans. Data projectors and laptops will fail at some point or a library may be double-booked.
- Use humour when you can (but never sarcasm) to lighten the mood.
- Be consistent in your insistence on high standards of behaviour every lesson. Students like routine.
- Know your students well - their interests, their hobbies, their favourite sporting team.
- Keep a professional distance at all times: be friendly but never a friend.
- Always follow-up unacceptable behaviour, preferably in ways that do not disrupt the flow of the lesson.
- Learn from your mistakes and seek advice from supportive colleagues.

And, finally, remember: what you allow, you teach.

Helen McMahon has taught in a range of public schools across NSW and in a diversity of positions from classroom teacher to principal.

Attachment 1 – Ten strategies for reducing problem behaviours with good academic management

Attachment 2 – Dealing with confrontation

Attachment 3 – Twenty key points for preventing a situation from escalating