CHAPTER 1

The dynamics of classroom behaviour

I have never let my schooling interfere with my education.

Mark Twain

Day-to-day school teaching normally takes place in a rather unusual setting: a small room (for what we seek to enable and do), often inadequate furniture and space to move, a 50-minute time slot (or less) to cover set curriculum objectives, and 25–30 distinct, and unique, personalities, some of whom may not even want to be there. Some of our students come from very supportive homes, some go home to frequent shouting, arguing, poor diet, family dysfunction and worse … There may be diagnosed behaviour disorders in some of our students; there will certainly be students with significant learning needs.

The ability and motivation to learn by students in this formal setting of school varies enormously. It also doesn't take long for students to work out what their teachers are like and whether the teacher can "make it work …" in this place; and whether the teacher can lead and manage this space, the time we spend, the curriculum and the widely different personalities, temperaments, abilities … Why would there not be some natural, normative, stresses and strains associated with a teacher's day-to-day role?

We teach each other

Into that rather unusual setting, where students and teachers bring personal agendas, feelings and needs, and where certain obligations and rights have to be

balanced, both teacher and student are "teaching" each other through their daily relational behaviours. Also, an individual student's distracting, disruptive behaviour is significantly affected by the audience of peers and vice versa (p. 15).

It is not simply enough to detail distracting and disruptive student behaviour as a discrete issue only pertaining to the student. In any school the same students may behave differently in different settings, with different teachers over a school day. The teacher's behaviour and the student's behaviour have a reciprocal effect on each other and on the ever present "audience" of peers. *Every discipline transaction is a social transaction*.

The case examples that follow (as noted earlier) are taken directly from my work with colleagues as a mentor-teacher. These shared observations are the basis of our professional self-reflection that enable and support, and call forth the necessary skills of our behaviour leadership.

As you read these case examples I encourage you to reflect on how teacher behaviour and student behaviour act reciprocally on each other. The nature, extent and effect of disruptive behaviour, in this sense, is not simply the result of students acting disruptively; *behaviour is also learned within its context*.

"Overly vigilant" management

Corey has been described by some of his teachers as "a bit of a lazy lad", a "bit of a pain!" and worse … Any support from home for basic organisational skills and the application of day-to-day responsibility at school is limited and sporadic. In the classroom he is leaning back in his seat, a vacant look in his eyes – he's looking out of the window (to partial freedom perhaps?). His attention is hardly gripped by the task requirement in his maths class. It's his third lesson with this teacher.

The teacher walks over to him and, standing next to his table, asks, "Why haven't you started work?"

"I haven't got a pen, have I?" Corey, at least, is honest at this point.

"Don't talk to me like that!" The teacher doesn't like Corey's tone and manner ("lazy and disrespectful sod"). "Well I haven't got a pen, have I? What d'you expect me to say?" Corey folds his arms sulkily, averting his eyes from his teacher.

"Well get a pen then!" At this, Corey gets up and walks out of the classroom. The teacher hurriedly catches up with him.

"Where do you think you're going? Get back in here!"

Corey, with feigned exasperation, says, "You asked me to get a pen! – I'm just going to get one from my locker." He clicks his tongue and sighs indulgently.

"I meant get one from another student – you just don't walk out of my class." Corey slopes off towards the back of the classroom to a mate. "Hey Craig, give us a pen." Craig answers, "I'm not

giving you a pen – gees I didn't get the last one back." Corey walks back to the teacher (most of the class is now enjoying this little *contretemps*). "He won't give me a pen." He grins.

Corey's teacher says, "Look I'm sick of this. You know you're supposed to bring pens and paper …" Corey butts in, "Yeah well people forget sometimes y'know!"

"Look if you can't come to my class prepared to work, you can leave and go to Mr Smith (the year head)."

"Yeah – well I'm leaving. It's a shit class anyway!!" Corey storms out.

The teacher calls after him. "Right! I'll see you in detention!" Corey (now half-way dawn the corridor) calls back. "I don't care!"

A small incident like this, a student without a pen, becomes a major fracas. I've seen this happen with some teachers. Maybe the teacher is having a bad day (maybe the student is too) though a good deal of Corey's behaviour is about attention and "the theatre of his peers …". Maybe the teacher is characteristically petty, churlish, pedantic, sarcastic … What can be seen, though, is that the teacher's behaviour contributes as much to this incident – and its management – as that of the student.

In another classroom a similar incident is taking place. The teacher walks across to a student who has been un-engaged in his learning task for several minutes. She has given him some take-up time – after all, he may be thinking, he may just need a few minutes to get his ideas formed and focused, he may be another lad "with" ADSD (attention deficit spectrum disorder).

She greets him and says, "Bradley, I notice you're not working … can I help?" She avoids asking why he hasn't started work yet.

He says, "I haven't got a pen."

"You can have one of mine," replies his teacher.

As it is still the first few lessons of term one, the teacher still has not sorted out which students are genuinely forgetful, or maybe lazy, or maybe just seeking attention or indulging in some "game-playing" or even struggling with the classwork … She has a box of blue pens and red pens, some rulers, some spare erasers and some pencils (all taped with a 1cm band of yellow electrical tape around the tip – to track them back to the box – itself yellow). On the box, in large letters, it reads: RETURN HERE – THANKS IN ADVANCE Ms Brown.

The offer of a pen is met with "Yeah – but I haven't got a *red* pen have I?"

"There's one in my yellow box" (she points back to the teacher's table).

"Yeah, but I haven't got any paper" (he grins).

"Bradley – there's A4 lined and plain paper next to the yellow box." "OK, Bradley? – I'll come and see how you're going a little later." She finishes with a wink and she walks away giving Bradley some "take-up time". Her tone and manner indicate that she is aware of Bradley's avoidance "game-playing" but is confident that he will get what he needs and actually start some work. She comes back, a little later in the lesson, to chat with Bradley, to re-establish and check on the progress of his work and to give some encouragement and support.

> **NB**   Some teachers argue that in "giving" such students pens (and so on) we only perpetuate their irresponsibility. Would they rather simply argue? – punish? It is normally the case that only a few students come to class without pens/paper/books (and so on). My colleagues and I would rather provide such – in those critical first meetings – as we establish our leadership and relationship with the class. If the student continues to come to class without equipment (say three times in close succession), we have a one-to-one meeting to ask questions and offer support. With some students we've found it beneficial to provide a small "table pencil-case" that the student picks up at the start of the day from (say) the tutor teacher (with red and blue pen, eraser, pencil, ruler ...) and then returns at the close of the day.

A Year 3 student (diagnosed as "special needs") has a small soft toy giraffe on her table next to her daily diary-writing task. The teacher walks over and in an unnecessarily stern voice says, "You know you're not supposed to bring toys to your table, don't you?" He snatches it up and walks off. The girl (naturally) protests and he adds, "Get on with your work or you'll finish it at recess …". Who would speak to a student like that? He did. This is even more disconcerting as he has been informed she has special needs.

He could have walked over, looked at the toy, even smiled (miserable sod), and given a fair and simple "directed choice". For example:

"Danielle, that's a nice little giraffe you've got there (...), it's work time now though and I want you to put it in your locker tray or on my table" (here he could use a softer directional voice) "and carry on with your writing. I'll come and see how you're getting on soon ..."

This leaves her with both a behavioural choice, a "task-focus" and expectation of cooperation by her teacher.

A female student walks into class a few minutes late. Melissa, a Year 9 student, likes a bit of attention, she's grinning at a few of her friends as she enters. She is wearing long, "dangly" earrings (non-regulation). She is quickly noticed by her teacher.

Teacher: "Right – come here [in a sharpish voice – visibly frustrated with Melissa's lateness and '*grand dame* entrance']. Why are you late?"

Student: "I'm just a *few* minutes late."

Teacher: "Why are you wearing those … things?"

Student: "What? What things?"

Teacher: "*Those* things – you know what I'm talking about – those earrings."

Student: "Mrs Daniels [her form teacher] didn't say anything!" [Melissa's tone is sulky, indifferent – she averts her eyes. The teacher senses – yet annoyingly "creates" – a challenge.]

Teacher: "Listen, I don't care *what* Mrs Daniels did or didn't do – get them off now. You know you're not supposed to wear them!" [He's clearly getting rattled now. He believes it's an issue on which he has not only to exercise discipline – he has to *win*.]

Student: "Yeah – well how come other teachers don't hassle us about it, eh?"

Teacher: "Who do you think you're talking to?! Get them off now or you're on detention!"

Petty as this was, it happened; it still does. Some teachers believe that such teacher behaviour is "legitimate" in that it shows who is "in control" *and* it enforces the school rules. However, what message do the peer audience, and Melissa, really get from the way this teacher dealt with this "uniform misdemeanour"?

If a teacher's management style is this "vigilant" – unnecessarily and overly vigilant – there are many students who will naturally challenge and even "bait" the teacher (I was often tempted to myself, at that age!). Such a management stance often proceeds from the teacher's belief that they should be in *control* of the student. Not, of course, that we can "control" students; we can lead, guide, encourage, assert, even command, but the ease with which some teachers use the word *control* may well indicate a *characteristically* demanding leadership approach (see later, p. 29f, 144f).

Non-vigilance and relaxed vigilance

Walking across the playground at the end of Period Six, I noticed a couple of students riding their bikes towards the school gate doing mini-wheelies on the gravel (most students – in this school – most times, walk their bikes on school property, as per the school rule). I also noticed a colleague on end-of-day duty who couldn't have failed to see the two lads. In the brief glance (*en route* to the staff room) I noticed he looked wistful and, no doubt, tired; seemingly oblivious to the bike riders. Perhaps he was singing (to himself) one of the favourite ditties of teachers, "How many days till the end of term …?" I was about 20 yards away from the lads and I called them over.

"Fellas (...), Fellas (...)" – eventually getting some eye contact; from distance. "See you for a few minutes over here (...) Thanks."

They stopped – akimbo their bikes – near the school gate. I thought they might just ride off (that's happened before).

"What? What d'you want?!"

They looked annoyed with a "we're-in-a-hurry-don't-hassle-us" look. I wanted them to come across to me so that I could briefly chat with them away from their immediate peer audience. This approach is often preferable in playground settings. It minimises the "theatre" of the immediate peer audience.

"Gees, what?! What d' we do?!" they called back.

"You're not in trouble – a brief chat (…) now. Thanks."

I turned aside, walked a few paces and stopped facing away from them, to convey expectation (from distance) – take-up time (p. 118f, cf. p. 98).

The whole "episode" hadn't taken long at all.

I saw them walking across the playground in my direction (out of the corner of my eye).

I didn't want to message a visual stand-off; I've seen teachers call students over, and standing with fists curled on hips, legs astride, messaging (no doubt) a kind of "showdown". This was not a "showdown" issue.

They came over and stood nearby, with their bikes. They were frowning, averting their eyes, sulking … A muttered "What …?"

I tactically ignored the sighs (the sulky look, the marginal eye contact), I wanted to keep the immediate focus on the main issue (at this point) – bike-riding in school grounds. I introduced myself and asked their names.

"Adam (…) Lukas" (still sulking and sighing).

"Fellas (…) I know you're on your way home. Just a brief chat. Adam and Lukas (…) what's the school rule for bike-riding in school grounds?" (Avoid asking *why* they were riding their bikes …).

"What?" Adam wasn't sure what I was getting at initially.

I repeated the question. "What's the school rule …?"

"Other teachers don't hassle us …"

He now knew what I was on about.

"Maybe they don't." I smiled – adding a brief "partial agreement" (p. 104). I had a last go … "What's our school rule?"

This time Adam looked at me, grinned, adding "It depends who's here …"

That's the point.

Students know which teachers are "non-vigilant".

NB   Not all students will answer a "rule-directed question" (expressed as "What's our rule for …?"). If they don't, we'll "answer" it for them – making clear (and fair) what the school rule is. It is a way of raising "behaviour awareness" (p. 93f). It does make it harder to exercise reasonable consistency in a school when some teachers ignore or choose not to address these sorts of behaviours.

It is easy to fall into a kind of jaded tiredness when it comes to behaviour management, particularly in corridors and playgrounds. If such "non-vigilance" is typical across a school it makes it doubly hard for others in the team to exercise "relaxed vigilance".

Some students will "argue the toss" with the teacher when "called over" for a reminder about school rules (and so on). Some students will "do a runner". Rather than get into a heated argument, my colleagues and I have found it very helpful to use our small "behaviour monitoring book" (yellow cover; like the yellow card in soccer …). We record their names, incident, date, and so on. We can find the names from the photo chart (or from student feedback nearby). That information is then passed on to a senior colleague. In 24 to 48 hours, the initiating teacher – who was on playground duty (who recorded the issue) – will then follow up with the said student(s) concerned with a senior teacher present to heighten the seriousness and give support. We don't normally chase students (unless it is a major safety issue with young children). We have learned that it is not the severity of the consequence but *the fair certainty* of the consequence that matters. It enables a school-wide consciousness to students when teachers *will* follow up and follow through when students "do a runner".

All of us have been "non-vigilant" (in corridors, and playgrounds …) from time to time; on those days when we're tired, rushed off our feet … We don't *intentionally* mean to "ignore" inappropriate, unacceptable, behaviours; it's bad-day syndrome. What *is* disconcerting is those teachers who characteristically walk past … don't engage or address … inappropriate disruptive behaviours in these non-class settings.

Relaxed "vigilance"

As Melissa (Year 9) enters the classroom (late), to a little coterie of grins, her teacher briefly cues the class, "Excuse me class" – this acknowledges they are being inconvenienced by Melissa's lateness. She turns to Melissa and welcomes her; a passing frown is replaced by a smile: "Welcome Melissa" (her friends laugh). "I notice you're late; please take a seat." The teacher does not make an issue of the lateness or the fact that she is wearing dangling earrings at this point in the lesson. As Melissa walks to her seat (was that the gait of a supermodel?) the teacher is reclaiming whole-class attention and focusing on the lesson "as if nothing significant had happened at all", which is, of course, the case. The teacher's confident calmness and focus has minimised Melissa's initial audience-seeking entry. The teacher will address the issue of Melissa's lateness during the on-task phase of the lesson; not now, in the middle of whole-class teaching time …

Later in the on-task phase of the lesson, she calls Melissa aside (quietly) from her immediate peer audience. "Melissa – you were late last period and today … we'll need to have a brief chat after class."

Melissa moans, "Why? I couldn't help it!"

"Well perhaps you can explain that to me after class – I won't keep you long.

Nice earrings."

She quickly changes the focus.

"What?" "Nice earrings …" Melissa grins with ill-concealed "suspicion".

"Yeah?"

"What's the school rule about earrings, Melissa?"

The teacher avoids the pointless interrogative "*Why* are you …?" or "*Are you* wearing earrings?" What's the point of asking a student "why" they're doing something inappropriate if we, and they, know they're doing it?

Melissa appeals to a well-worn student ploy, "But Mrs Daniels didn't say anything in form-group about them." Here Melissa sighs, folds her arms and gives a sulky, frowning, look.

"Maybe she didn't." The teacher doesn't call Melissa a liar, nor does she pass judgement on her colleague's possible ignoring of jewellery rules. "I can check that with her." The teacher's tone is pleasant, not sarcastic or in any way provocative. She repeats the question. "What's our school rule about earrings?" By using a direct question ("what?") the teacher is directing the ownership of behaviour back to Melissa who – again – mentions Mrs Daniels. The teacher "partially agrees" (briefly) "Yes – you said that" but refocuses to the rule question.

"What's the rule for …?"

Melissa sighs, "Yeah – well … we're not supposed to." She says it, sighing, in an "I-can't-believe-why-we've-got-this-petty-rule …" kind of voice.

The teacher then says, "Alright Melissa, it's my job to remind you; you know what to do." She smiles, "I'll come and see how your work is going later."

The teacher becomes task oriented now. She signals an end to this brief rule reminder, conveying the expectation that Melissa will take the earrings off. By giving the student some take-up time (p. 98, 118f) she also minimises any forced "showdown" such as forcing Melissa to hand over the jewellery. If Melissa doesn't take them off, then the teacher knows the underlying issue is a potential power-struggle, and rather than force her to take them off will use a deferred consequence (p. 102, 190f).

The "student tribal tom-toms" convey the message around the class that this teacher will address issues that relate to school rules (even earrings) but they also appreciate the *way* this teacher does it.

Is it worth the teacher's brief effort to address the student's lateness and earrings in *this* way? The "simple" answer is yes. *Relaxed* vigilance enables workable consistency – we'll never get perfect consistency across teacher leadership, just reasonable and workable consistency. This teacher sends the clear (fair) messages about arriving to class on time and jewellery rules but in a least intrusive way that keeps the workable and respectful relationship between teacher and student intact. She also addresses the lateness at a time of *her* choosing instead of overreacting *at the point of attentional entrance*.

> **NB**   If the student is late to class, say three times in close succession, the teacher is better served setting up a one-to-one meeting with the student (say at lunch time) to check for reasons and offer support. It is also worth checking if this student is also late to other classes so that a year-level collegial response can be considered.

Inappropriate language

I was mentor-teaching in a maths class a few years ago. My colleague and I had finished the whole-class teaching phase of the lesson and we were moving around the room to encourage, assist, refocus students during on-task learning time.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw a student throw an eraser, parabolically, to another student who missed the catch. Cassie called across the room – loudly – to the student who had dropped it.

"Gees, you silly bitch!" She said this in a laughing, "matey", kind of way (had she meant her friend to catch it?).

The other girl laughed – as did many in the class. My colleague was closer to the fracas than I was but hadn't taken any action regarding the student's language so I called to Cassie, across the room, to come over to me (away from her immediate coterie). She stayed seated.

"What? What do you want?!" She gave me a sulky, frowning, look across the room.

I repeated, "See you for a minute over here thanks."

I had said this in a firm (but relaxed) way while working with another group of students. She stood up, arms folded.

"What did I do then, eh?"

I wasn't going to discuss anything across the distance of several rows of students. I had directed her away from her immediate classmates to avoid unnecessary embarrassment (to her), also to distract and divert from her coterie and also to speak to her (briefly) about her behaviour. Cassie certainly knew how to "play to the gallery".

I added for a third (and last time), "I want to see you over here. Now (…). Thanks." I turned my eyes away from Cassie (yet again), and turned aside to the group I was working with to convey "expectation" and give take-up time. (…) If she had refused to come over I would have communicated a deferred consequence (see later, p. 102, 190f).

She came over and stood next to me, with folded arms, averted eye contact, eyes raised to the ceiling and sighing … "What do you want?" she said, in a careworn voice.

It's hard to keep the focus on the "primary" issue or behaviour. *Tactically* ignoring the sulky non-verbals, I said, "I called you over so I wouldn't embarrass you in front of your classmates."

"What?" She seemed oblivious as to any "reason" why I'd need to speak to her.

"You threw an eraser at Melinda … and called across the room to her that she was a silly bitch." I'd said all this quietly. She looked at me, askance (with feigned credulity?).

"What!? She doesn't care if I call her that. She's my friend anyway….!!"

Should we simply accept this kind of "street" language, as some social commentators suggest we should? Should we accept "friendly banter" expressed in language that includes words like bitch, slut, a—hole, d—head, wanker, and so on? If I do let such language go I've tacitly said, "I don't care if you speak to each other like that in our class" (and I do care) (see later, p. 239f).

I said, "I don't know if Melissa cares ... I do." (I meant it.) She sighed and said, "So-reee!" (sorry). I briefly reminded her of our classroom agreement about respectful language. "Can I go back to my seat now?" Her tone and manner continued to evidence sulky indifference.

It would have been pointless at this point to add, "Look, you don't really mean you're sorry! Say it properly, as if you mean it!" (I've seen teachers force students, like Cassie, into face-losing or verbal slanging matches because of the tone of voice in which an "apology" is given). It's tempting to want to confront, even embarrass, students in order to "win" – but win what? All we end up doing is over-servicing the student's attentional goal.

With students like Cassie we will need to make our point with respectful assertion *in front of her peer audience* (p. 257f). This is always the issue – the social dynamics. We avoid over-servicing the student's goal of attention of power (p. 217f). In Cassie's case we also follow-up (one-to-one) after class to address her behaviour (p. 122f).

As Cassie was leaving the class later that morning she said to me, "This class was OK till you came". That was probably true (as her version of "OK" goes). The class had got used to being *very* noisy, with frequent calling out, talking loudly across the classroom, and the sort of banter I'd heard from Cassie that morning. Above all, there was clearly a lack of focus by many students during "on-task learning" time. There were several students like Cassie who hadn't had the issue of "friendly banter" addressed until this occasion. I also had a brief chat with her after class (p. 122f). She was more amenable in the following lessons. We developed a basic, respectful understanding about expectations, about learning and behaviour. It took time, effort and continued goodwill and patient communication of our expectations. The issue of disrespectful language and swearing is addressed later (pp. 239f).

> **NB**   When addressing thoughtless, inconsiderate, disrespectful, mean-spirited behaviour … *we focus on the behaviour itself*. We do so clearly, assertively (without aggressive hostility), according – obviously – to the context.
>
> "When you say things like (be specific) that shows (be specific) disrespect, discourtesy, offence …".
>
> "That's not sportsmanlike behaviour – it stops now."
>
> Or even the direct, "That's a put-down; it stops now."
>
> The student needs to hear the intensity of our "moral weight" relative to the issue, with a brief, clear, unambiguous "I" statement: "I am disgusted by … appalled by … (be briefly specific but clear about the *behaviour*) …" (see p. 257f). Or, "That is offensive (disgusting, distasteful, cruel, awardly totally unacceptable, unnecessary …)". Use an appropriate degree of, and clarity of, description (regarding the behaviour).
>
> If a student continues to speak or act in discourteous, disrespectful or derogatory ways, we will need to make the immediate (or deferred) consequences clear. This may need to occasion time-out (see pp. 180f).

Being a reflective practitioner

However many years we have been teaching, we can always benefit from some reflection on our teaching and management practice. I once had a teacher say to me, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks". My colleague was in a small group of

teachers discussing behaviour management practices and skills. I knew my colleague had management concerns, and challenges, in a number of classes (but unfortunately found it hard to share those concerns). The discussion group was a collegial forum we had established to enable a general sharing of concerns and look for collegial solutions. When she had said this, a little too defensively ("You can't teach an old dog new tricks"), I replied, "But you're not a dog; you're a human being". I respectfully noted that what we were discussing were not "tricks" but, rather, well-established practices, approaches and skills … My wry smile was returned by my colleague. "If we're willing, and see a need for fine-tuning, even change, in our management practice and if we are aware of more effective management practice, we *can* always learn … with support …". The discussion continued on about the nature of, and challenge of, change in our teacher leadership practice.

"Primary" and "secondary" behaviours

In many of the exchanges between teacher and students in this book, you will note a frequently recurring theme: that of a student's non-verbal and verbal behaviour potentially increasing the stress a teacher faces when seeking to address distracting and distruptive student behaviour. Elsewhere I have described such behaviours as "*secondary* behaviours". The student's pouting, sighing, sulking, tut-tutting, raising eyes to ceiling, and huffing behaviours and their procrastination and argumentative stance are *secondary* to the *primary* issue that the teacher addresses (Rogers 2011). These "secondary behaviours" are often as stressful – sometimes more stressfully annoying than the "primary" issue or behaviour the teacher is addressing.

A student has not cleaned up his work area and it is getting close to the "bell" (breaktime). The teacher reminds the student to clean up. The student says, "Alright, alright …" but sighs as he says it, rolls his eyes to the ceiling, leans back in his seat, leans forward again, but makes no initial move to start cleaning up. It is as if he's "saying", "Here-we-go-again"; "blah-blah-blah".

The *primary* issue (litter on the floor) is not a major discipline issue; it is however a necessary class reminder for all students. Even the words the student uses ("alright") are barely "amenable". It is the *tone* of the voice, the expelled sigh, the upward turn of the eyes; his body language appears to say, "I don't care – don't hassle me!" It is these *secondary* behaviours that appear (quickly) as more disconcerting or frustrating to the teacher than the issue of the litter itself.

These behaviours are often an expression of the student's attentional behaviour, or at times power seeking. "You can't *really* make me …" (p. 217f).

I was teaching a Year 10 social studies class a few years back (as mentor-teacher). It was my first session with this group. During the whole-class teaching phase of the lesson a student in the back row leaned back in her seat and sprayed a small can of what looked like perfume around the room. It had clearly annoyed some of the class. (I could smell the deafening, cloying, scent from the front of the classroom.) Several students (her friends) laughed. Several boys started to join in the feigned "Ahhr!! – it stinks!" It was behaviour that couldn't be ignored. I called across the room to her, by name.

"Anne (…) Anne (…)" – I'd remembered her name from roll call. She looked across the room at me with a look of (feigned?) surprise.

"Yes – what?". She leaned back in her chair, grinning, the can of perfume spray still on the desk.

"You've got a can of Impulse (that's what I thought the brand was) and you've sprayed it around the room." It helps to be specific and briefly "describe the reality of the situation" (a sort of "wavelength check"). "I want you to put it on my desk or put it away in your bag. Thanks." I gave her a directed choice rather than walk to the back of the room and either tell her to "hand it over" or just take it.

"It's not Impulse, it's Evoke," was her response. No doubt she said it to garner more group attention ("Notice me, everyone!"). Her tone of voice seemed to suggest: "Let's play verbal ping-pong shall we?"

These kinds of "secondary behaviours" are much more annoying to teachers than the "primary behaviours" that trigger them: the sighs, the head movements, the averted eyes or the eyes to the ceiling, the supercilious grin and, of course, the annoying time-wasting things that some students say.

It's tempting to argue: "I don't care if it's Chanel number bleedin' 9!! Put it away now or … !!" I said, "I want you to put it in your bag or on my desk", repeating the "directed choice" (p. 103, 191f). Her bag was under her table.

"But it stinks in here!" She still wanted to play verbal ping-pong. A bit of brief, partial agreement can help avoid pointless argument.

"I know it stinks." She was actually right on that score. Local factories produce some awful smells that – on a hot day – waft, almost palpably, into the classrooms at this school. I repeated the directed choice.

At that point I took the minimal risk of leaving Anne with the directed "choice", as it were, and reclaimed group attention by saying something like, "Looking up here everyone (…). Thanks." and going back to the diagram and topic I had started to address earlier. Out of the corner of my eye I noticed her slowly (ever so slowly) put the perfume in her bag.

If she had refused, full stop, to put it away, a deferred consequence would have been made clear to her (see pp. 102).

The naturally stressful challenge always, in such situations, is to communicate a sense of "calmness" and personal self-control when dealing with such "secondary behaviours". Yes, there are times when it is appropriate and necessary to communicate one's frustration and anger (Chapter 7), and to assert, but in this case, with this kind of silly attentional "game-playing", a directed choice, avoiding argument and refocusing the class are more effective. Of course, I could have:

- walked over and grabbed the perfume off the table, "Right! I'll have that!"
- demanded she hand the perfume over, "Right … give it to me … give it to me now!" What if she doesn't, what if she says, "No!! – can't make me!" and she's right.
- said "Don't you ever speak to me like that! Who the hell do you think you are?" (or words to that effect)
- been sarcastic or rude, in order to embarrass her in front of the class
- told her to leave the room.

Some of these options (above) are no doubt transitionally tempting! What I am trying to say is that we, in effect, teach each other in these episodic transactions. Anne is learning something about *appropriate* teacher authority and leadership and (where necessary) about facing the consequences of her behaviour. So are the audience of her peers.
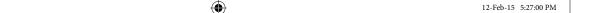

> **NB**   Every discipline transaction is a social *transaction*. When we discipline one, or a few, students in front of their peers, whatever we say is obviously heard by, and has an impact on, the audience of peers. We are not simply speaking to the individual/s who are being distracting or disruptive. There is a sense in which we are speaking to everyone about how an individual's behaviour affects others *in our class*. This is why our corrective language needs thoughtful planning (p. 97f). Merely reacting to behaviour incidents as they arise is the least effective way to exercise our behaviour leadership. It is also the least effective way to invite and engage student cooperation.

There are always many things I *could* do or say. There are always many "ifs", "could-bes" and "what-ifs" in behaviour management, particularly with challenging students (Chapter 6). There is also no guarantee that any approach will always "work" in all situations.

There needs to be, however, practices and skills that reflect our values about how we lead, guide, encourage and support young people. Later, in Chapter 3, the practices and skills of behaviour leadership are explored in some detail. This first chapter explores the natural, daily, dynamic within which we need to exercise our behaviour leadership. Behaviour is complex at times; situational and relational behaviour also has its audience-seeking effect, which can either work for the teacher's (and class's) benefit or work against the teacher.

We can ill afford to lose the goodwill of the 70 per cent (or so) of cooperative students by forcing the challenging student to lose face and thereby making it easy for the 70–80 per cent to "side" with the disruptive student or, conversely, allow ourselves to be "backed-into-a-psychological-corner".

In one of my Year 10 classes recently, I was moving around the room during on-task learning time and noticed a student with a smart phone (something I come across frequently these days) – tiny earphones in his ears and clearly enjoying the music that I could also hear, faintly, even as I worked with students nearby. Walking over to him I made eye contact and beckoned with my fingers for him to take the earphones out. He did. I could hear the pulsating, musical buzz more intensely now.

"It'll help if you turn it off," I suggested. He did. I then asked him how his work was going …

> **NB**   This is important. The first response (in an on-task learning context like this) is not to immediately ask him to hand over his smart phone. We keep such a transaction *least intrusive* by entering into the student's workspace invitationally and being task/encouragement focused. We talked about the work, I made a few suggestions, asked a few questions to extend his thinking about the task … *then* had a quiet word about the phone.

"Brock," I asked, "What's the school rule about phones in class?" Students are allowed to bring iPods or hand-held electronic games or mobile phones to this particular school but they're not supposed to use them in class – for obvious reasons one would think. It's hard to communicate to a student who, in Brock's case, has loud music going on "upstairs". And these days a student's phone, is not merely a phone, it is their "third hand" *and* it's effectively a computer that is able to access the world-wide graffiti or social media board in several seconds … Some students are not merely listening to music, or texting, they are engaging the world-wide graffiti board … The classroom is not the place for this kind of "social media".

Instead of answering the question I had asked ("What's the school rule about mobile phones in class?") Brock pointed to his regular teacher and said, "Ms Smith doesn't mind if we have them on – long as we're doing our work …" He didn't say this disrespectfully (some do); he was stating it as a matter of fact.

In my team-teaching-mentoring role in this school, l had noticed that a few teachers didn't seem to care if students brought, and played, their music from their phones or iPods (in class time) as long as they got their classwork done as well. No doubt at all – of course students can work with music coursing in their ears (even head-banging music ...); that's not the issue. The school rule is clear (and fair) and there for a reason – "no phones or iPods in class time". Students have plenty of time (outside class time) to play music and text and ...

Some teachers "over-service" a student's verbal "secondary behaviour" by entering into a pointless discussion about the veracity of what the student has said about "other teachers letting them", or they will argue against the student's view of "how stupid and unfair the rules are ...". Some teachers try to defend the reasons for the rule (generally an unwise course); "Brock … look … I don't make the rules do I?" Some teachers almost sound like they are "pleading". They present with a 'defeated', if affable and well-meaning tone. Students often read – from such "reasoning" – that whatever happens the student will have their way, despite what the *school-wide* fair rules may say. "Other teachers might let you play iPods but they're not really supposed to, *are they*?" It is pointless *asking the student to reason* (*at this point in the lesson*) about something they may see as unfair; besides it is a time-wasting exercise distracting away from the business of teaching and learning.

Some teachers become overly vigilant and defensive, and will cast aspersions on other colleagues. "Look I don't care what Ms Smith does or doesn't do! In my class you don't have personal music on – *full stop!* Now – give it to me." When students want to appeal to "what other teachers do (or let us do)" a *brief* partial agreement is helpful followed by a refocusing to the right or rule affected, or a refocusing to the task:

"Miss Donkin lets us have music on in social studies."

"Even if she does (partial agreement; it doesn't help to call the student a liar) (...) however in this class the school rule is clear. I want you to turn it off and put your phone on my table or, if you like, in your bag (or pencil case) ...". The teacher beckons to the teacher's table. "You'll get it back at the end of the lesson."

Whenever I've given this *directed choice* (at primary or secondary level), I've never had a student say (yet), "OK, I'll put my expensive phone, or iPod" (or other *objet d'art*) "on your table". If the student refuses to put it away, we will need to make the consequence (the *deferred consequence)* clear (p. 102).

Residual "secondary behaviour"

Jaydon is chewing a largish, viscous, fruity-smelling chewing gum during on-task learning time. The teacher is moving around the room, micro-teaching, encouraging, reminding, and (where necessary)

giving quiet reminders about appropriate behaviour … The teacher walks over and quietly says, "Jaydon (…)". Brief eye-contact is established.

"What?" (He looks up …). "Good morning again".

"Oh yeah. Morning."

The teacher asks how his work is going, has a brief chat about the student's progress and adds: "The bin is over there."

"What?" he asks.

"Tropical?" (She suggests the chewing gum's flavour …).

"Eh? – Yeah …"

"The bin is over there." This quiet incidental direction in part "describes the reality" (there is a bin) and invites some basic connective "behaviour awareness" (put the chewing gum in the bin) by reminding the student where the bin is. It is said respectfully, a little tongue-in-cheek, as if to say "You know that I know that you know what you should do …".

If the student engages in secondary dialogue "But other teachers don't hassle us about chewing gum. C'mon …!" (blah, time-wasting, blah), the teacher will *briefly* acknowledge and refocus.

"In this class, the school rule is clear and the bin is near … Ta." The teacher walks off expecting cooperation (or, at least, compliance) by giving the student some take-up-time (p. 118f).

Ten seconds or so later the student shuffles off to the bin sighing and muttering. "I'll put it in the bin, I'll put it in the bin, n'yah, n'yah (in a sotto voce whine) …"

The teacher *tactically* ignores this "residual secondary behaviour" and observes (out of the corner of his eye) that the student has slumped in his seat, drawn-out sigh, and slowly restarted work (more residual "secondary behaviour"). A little later he goes over to the student and re-establishes the working relationship by focusing on the task. "So, how's it going then? Let's have a look. Where are you up to?"

You can imagine what could happen if the teacher over-services all those residual "secondary" behaviours. "Look!! When you put chewing gum in the bin, you put it in the bin *without* a fanfare – alright?!" or, "Why can't you do a simple thing like put chewing gum in the bin without making a song-and-dance about it?!" That would unnecessarily re-escalate any residual tension as well as over-servicing this kind of attentional behaviour. I have seen many teachers overly engage such behaviours, ending up arguing or even threatening students with detention.

Some teachers try to ameliorate what they see as the perceived upsetness of the student. They take the huffing and puffing and muttering as an indication they've upset the student; they take it *personally*. "Troy, Troy, I don't make the rules do I … be reasonable … *please*". This kind of "intended goodwill" only over-services the sulkiness and pouting. It is generally better to *tactically* ignore such "secondary" behaviours *until* the student is back on task, as it were, and then have a brief "re-establishing" that focuses on the task (the classwork) at hand (p. 116f).

If a student"s "secondary behaviour" is overly disrespectful, or disturbingly distracting, in tone or manner, it will need to be addressed, briefly and firmly, and

with a focus on the unacceptable *behaviour* and then refocus the student back to the task or expected behaviour: "I'm not speaking to you disrespectfully, I don't expect you to speak to me like that". This to a student whose tone of voice is cocky or arrogant. At this point it is also prudent to give "take-up time" as the student sulks off back to his seat.

It will also be helpful to follow-up with the student, after class, one-to-one (away from his peer audience) to speak with him about the tone/manner … of his behaviour (p. 122f). In this one-to-one context we can make clear to the student what we see in their "secondary behaviour". Some students are not always aware of how their tone of voice, manner, body language "come across". If such follow-up is carried out early in the teacher–student relationship – with supportive respect – it can go a long way to seeing a reduction in residual "secondary behaviours".

We will also come across students who, through their behaviour, say (in effect), "You can't make me!" or "I don't have to do what you say …". I have seen some infant students really upset their teachers by turning aside and refusing to look at them after the teacher has specifically given a direction: "Bronson (…) Bronson (…) Look at me. Look-at-me!!" I've seen teachers put their hand under a child's chin and force it up to engage attentional eye contact. I've seen teachers bodily turn young children around so they are facing their teacher. If the teacher is getting frustrated and *forcing* the child's head up, the resistant child may well be saying (through his/her behaviour) "You can't make me!", or "I can do what I want and you can't stop me". The child's "private logic" is for him – at this point – "true". *Who is controlling whom?* The issue of this kind of challenging children is addressed more fully in Chapter 6.

- At younger primary age, children are not always aware of their "secondary" behaviours. It will help to have a chat with them later (one-to-one) to explain and even briefly "model" such behaviours to them (see p. 128/235f).[1]
- Sometimes "secondary behaviours" are the result of habit; the student may be unaware that their non-verbal behaviours appears as sulky, pouty, indifferent, testy – displaying a "chip on the shoulder" (with some students there is "a bucket of attitudinal chips"!). In these cases, early and thoughtful follow-up to acknowledge the teacher's concern and gain some shared understanding, and then working with the student to support behaviour change, are crucial (p. 122f).
- Sometimes such behaviour is the student's bad-day syndrome; sensitivity by the teacher will acknowledge this (privately) and encourage the student to be more aware of their behaviour in the future.
- Sometimes such behaviour is provoked by the teacher through their own insensitive, petty, even confrontational behaviour.

- Sometimes the student, too, will use their secondary behaviours in a provocative way to "test" out the psychological, relational, "territory" of the classroom and their teacher. Such behaviour is sometimes used as a territorial posturing, particularly in males.
- For some students their secondary behaviour may be a form of "exitatory stimulation", where the student uses his attentional behaviour as a form of "conditioned stimulation" – the "theatre" of attention and power (p. 217f).[2]

One of the harder messages I had to learn as a younger teacher was that I cannot simply and easily "control" others' behaviour. Nor can I simply decide what students will do regarding their behaviour … I can decide what I will do in response; I can control myself *in* the teaching and management situation (although that, too, is not always easy …). To the extent that I thoughtfully control myself, my language, my "manner" and my approach to the students, is the degree to which I can invite cooperation or, conversely, finding my students becoming difficult, or even resistant. The skills addressed later in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 specifically address the issue of effective teaching, behaviour leadership and discipline.

I have also learned not to make demands on the daily reality of teaching that reality won't bear.

Our "explanatory style" in behaviour management: creating or managing stress

Some teachers bring an *overly* demanding "explanatory style" to classroom management and discipline; a *characteristic* way of defining and explaining social, relational, reality. One's explanatory style cannot only affect how one relates to others, but can also affect one's emotional state and well-being (Bernard 1990; Seligman 1991; Rogers 2012).

When stressful events come to us, it is not only – or *simply* – the stressful event that directly causes how we feel, and how effectively we cope and manage. Our "explanatory style", our "working beliefs" about behaviour – what students *should* and *shouldn't* do – also contribute significantly to how effectively we manage stressful situations.

Unhelpful, demandingly assumptive, beliefs, of themselves, can actually increase one's stress and impede one's ability to engage student cooperation. Such beliefs are directly related to *how we perceive and explain* what is happening when a student is attentionally demanding, rude, arrogant, lazy or indifferent. "Secondary behaviour" is a typical case in point. When a student
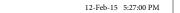
slouches, sighs, rolls his eyes to the ceiling or gives a malevolent grin, some teachers will "automatically" react to such "secondary behaviours" in a stressful way, often saying (later) that "Children *must not* question, or disagree or argue with their teachers" (their superiors), or "Children *should* do what I say the *first time*", or "Children *should not* answer back". The most common belief statement I hear is, "Children *should not* be rude, they *should* respect their teachers. I *deserve* respect" (full stop).

The "should" and "must" and *deserve* part of the explanatory style is often the problem. There is an imperative here; a demand on reality that is often unrealistic – and unrewarded in daily reality, particularly in more challenging schools. There are many children who show disrespect, who do not respond, comply, or "obey" the first time, who answer back, who are *un*civil. It is unpleasant of course, and frustrating when this happens and – yes – we need to address such behaviours. However, when we say, "students *must* obey me …", "*must* not answer back …" or "*must* respect me … I *deserve* respect ...", we are making *absolute demands* that, if not met, contribute directly to the level of our stress and also to how effectively we handle distracting, disruptive behaviour situations. If we say, "He *shouldn't* answer back to me" when he did (in reality), the internal self-speech can increase the amount of stress one feels at that point, particularly if the intensity of cognitive demand (shouldn't!) is a *characteristic* way that one explains such naturally stressful reality.

I have seen different teachers managing the same challenging behaviour issues, in much the same situations and contexts, and seen quite different degrees of effectiveness in management and teacher coping. This is not explained simply through personality style alone (Rogers 2012). A more *realistic* belief avoids *absolutistic* imperatives: "*I can't stand it when* …!!" is different – in kind – from statements such as "*It's annoying, frustrating, unpleasant* when … *but I can cope when* I do X, Y, Z". We might still feel stressed holding this belief (it's *annoying* rather than "I can't stand it.") *and* explaining difficult events in this way, but we won't be *as* stressed for *as* long. Of course our beliefs need to be buttressed and supported by skills of coping, and leadership, in management contexts. It is the *balance* between realistic beliefs and management skill that enables less stressful, more positive, coping day after day.

A *cognitive fixation* about receiving (indeed, demanding) respect can alter how we perceive, interpret and manage the sorts of "secondary behaviours" noted earlier. Whether we like it or not, we have to "earn" respect from our students by the effectiveness of our teaching (Chapter 4), our confident leadership and by the effort we make to build and sustain workable relationships with our students. It is self-defeating to simply, or merely, *demand* respect.

Beliefs and standards

The belief "Children *must* not swear …" is not the same as having a standard about respectful language. Having a more realistic and appropriately flexible belief about inappropriate language, including swearing – "I *don't like most swearing*, however I won't let it unnecessarily stress me, while at the same time I will need to address it accordingly to situation, and circumstance" – will occasion a less stressful state of mind and (with some prior skill) enable a more effective management of inappropriate student language, including swearing (see p. 239f).

It can help to learn to "tune into" and "dispute" unhelpful, self-defeating beliefs and explanatory styles that are often couched in "must" and "should" language ("I *should* be able to control these kids!!"). By "reframing" the demands to preferences based on reality, we tune into workable reality without "dropping our standards". We also reduce insistence-focused statements about reality ("He *must* …", "I *must* …", "Others *must* …") that can increase emotional stress levels. At the end of the day, social reality has no obligation to simply obey our *demands*.

This is not mere badinage. Talking, even self-talking, is an action, and actions have effects. If I characteristically say to myself "I'm no good", that is over-generalising. If I have an insistent cognitive demand behind such thoughts ("I *must* get it right all the time"), I'll set an impossible personal standard. If, however, I say "Look, I'm having difficulty with (a given student or class group)" and "What skills and support do I need?", that is *accurate* self-talk. It is also honestly realistic. Being more accurate, reasonable and realistic about our daily social and professional reality will help me in addressing my goals and managing inevitable, natural, stress in my day-to-day teaching and behaviour leadership.

Inaccurate, inflexible, demanding and negative self-talk can become an unreflective habit. If not addressed, it may become so *characteristic* that it is no longer a conscious activity. And while past performance and past experience may have interred our characteristic self-talk, it is in the present that we are using it and in the present that changes need to be made. By consciously reflecting on our characteristic self-talk (in stressful contexts) we can learn to reframe *unrealistic demands* to enable realistic self-talk that is *preferential*, and realistic, rather than demanding.

The bad-day syndrome

There will be days (naturally) when normative tiredness and concerns arising from one's personal life, the issues of the day and one's state of health will affect the quality of our day-to-day teaching and behaviour management. Even those days

when we just feel "out-of-sorts" will have this effect. It is easy on those days for *our* frustration to spill over into our behaviour. We may become short-tempered, snappy and even angry.

It is important to telegraph to students when we're having a bad day. "You can probably tell I'm not feeling the best today. It's not your fault. ["Well it is a bit", you might be tempted to say!] I don't want to go into it all – but I'm a bit annoyed (or cheesed off). If you see me getting a bit "snappier" today you'll know why …".

If we are unwell, it will be important to explain briefly "I've got a bad headache, or …". If it is a more personal issue, it is normally unwise to share details; it is generally enough to just telegraph the fact we're having a bad day. Most students cannot really cope with such personal information (nor should they have to). I am amazed at how much private and personal information some teachers are apparently willing (and comfortable) to share with children – even primary-aged children: information about a teacher's relationships, their divorce details, their financial hassles and even concerns they have about their fellow teachers!

Children enjoy the sort of sharing about a teacher's childhood experiences ("When I was a boy we did …") but it is inappropriate to use the teacher–student relationship to either "offload" one's personal frustrations or to make students inappropriate confidantes.

We don't need to go into details on our bad days; it is enough to let them know so that they can have some basic awareness of how we're feeling, even on occasion some sympathy with our shared humanity! Children understand that *everybody* has bad days.

There are also those bad days where we might say something inappropriate, or thoughtless, to a student; a throwaway line that we didn't intend to use; a sharper tone; even an insensitive, churlish or petty comment. Tiredness, stress, being rushed and hurried (and harried) by others can easily chip away at our goodwill and patience. On such days we are wise and professional – human – to remember to acknowledge and apologise. Having done so, it will then be important not to engage in self-blame and to move on.

This is to be distinguished from teachers who *characteristically* discipline and manage in petulant, petty, mean-spirited ways; destined (it seems) to create, even sustain, unnecessary anxiety and unacceptable control over their students. While such teachers may still (in some schools) get "results", they do so at a great cost to student well-being and self-esteem. I have worked with teachers who have refused to forgive students (even students who have made an attempt to apologise). I have seen teachers refuse to apologise when it was the right and proper thing to do, or who nurse a grudge against a student for a long, long time. They forget that we are

all fallible. Such teaching and management behaviour – where characteristic – in a teacher's practice, will need to be professionally confronted.

It is also important to remember that teaching is our profession not our life. Yes, it is a profession that will have a significant impact on the lives of the children we teach and it carries significant responsibilities. It will also naturally bring frustration, tiredness and anger at times.

Many first-year teachers, well over half my age, say how tired they get as beginning teachers. This is natural as we begin the teaching journey and deal with the challenges of preparation, differentiation, marking, discipline and its follow-up, students with significant learning needs and behaviour disorders ... and monitoring of students' work and the looming incursion of OFSTED ...

Colleague support enables us to see beyond our own resources, to know, and receive assurances, from shared experience, knowledge and skill. Our colleagues' moral support ("We're all in the same boat ..." "It's not just me ..." We've all been there ..."); their professionalism, goodwill; the way in which we give direct support (as in time-out situations) can all help ameliorate the bad-day syndrome.

Coping with our personal, psychological, junk mail

Bad days, failure and self-criticism often seem to go together. We can at times be quite hard on ourselves, unfairly hard, when we don't perform well or as well as we think we should.

I've sat and talked with many teachers who, having got angry with a student or a class, say things like "I *shouldn't* have got angry like that …". Why ever not? There are many situations where we will get frustrated – even angry – with our students. The problem may well be the "like that" aspect of our anger. Frustration and anger are normal, natural in the stressful dynamic of behaviour management and discipline. Yes, there are more effective ways of managing anger than shouting or yelling, but we *did* get angry. We are not a failure for that. We can always do something about poorly expressed anger (Chapter 7).

Psychological junk mail comes loaded with global, "stable", self-talk: "I *shouldn't* have!" (we did); "It's *not fair*!" (really?); "I *always* get it wrong!" (always?); "I'll *never* get through to them" (never?). Maybe we *shouldn't* have done, or said, X, Y, Z, *but we did*; that's the reality. If we add to such self-talk repetitions of, and ruminations about, our failure ("I *shouldn't*!", or comments such as, "*I'm an idiot*", "*I'm* stupid, a *total failure*" – total?, "I *never* get a fair deal") we will naturally feel worse and cope less effectively with our failure, and our struggle.

I'm not suggesting a kind of cognitive "shrugging it off" by saying it doesn't really matter when it does; *our struggle and real (or perceived) failure can and does hurt at times*. It *does* matter when we fail, when we get things wrong; but *repetitive self-talk* (like that above) acts like psychological junk mail and we will feel worse than we need to feel.

Feelings of failure are normal, natural and even appropriate. Learning to fail meaningfully means we acknowledge our fallibility (in ourselves *and* others). It will help to label the failure for what it is – a mistake, a lapse in judgement (even a lack of skills) – and instead of excusing the failure we ask what can be learned from it: "Do I need to apologise to anyone?" (probably); "What do I need to do?" (specifically); "Do I need support or help to move beyond this?" Colleague support will always help …We can learn as much, at times, from what goes wrong as what goes right a message we frequently tell our students.

By *relabelling* failure and *refocusing* – "OK, I *did* get it wrong. I should have done X, Y, Z" – and then asking "*What* can I do now and what can I do *next time* in a similar situation?", we *redirect the emotional energy* that can easily be eaten up by "mentally kicking oneself" (Edwards 1997). Tuning into negative self-talk is not easy; like any skill it needs to be acknowledged and practised as a kind of inner self-checking "mechanism" – whenever we catch ourselves "posting psychological junk mail upstairs". Maybe we can't take control of the first negative and self-defeating thought that comes into our head but we can *learn* to take control of *subsequent* thinking and our internal dialogue. We're likely to be using negative self-talk when we're experiencing emotions such as frustration, anger or ongoing anxiety, a sense of "powerlessness", or residual jadedness towards someone or about some situation or circumstance. The reason for disputing erroneous and self-defeating thinking is that it can bring about a more effective way of coping; both emotional and practical coping. We will need to ask ourselves if our current thoughts – the way we explain hurtful or bad and stressful events to ourselves – is actually helping to deal with our struggle, our failure. What are the consequences, the outcome, of *this* kind of thinking? How can I reframe my characteristic thinking about the natural stresses I face …?

Professor Martin Seligman, a leading researcher on *learned* helplessness and *learned* optimism has said:

Failure makes everyone at least *momentarily* helpless. It's like a punch in the stomach. It hurts, but the hurt goes away – for some people almost instantly … for others the hurt lasts, it seethes, it roils, it congeals into a grudge … they remain helpless for days or perhaps months, even after

only small setbacks. After major defeats they may never come back. (1991: 45)

According to Seligman *learned* helplessness derives from an explanatory style that believes, and explains, difficult and bad events in several dimensions: permanence, pervasiveness and personalisation. "It's *me …*" (or, "It's *them*!"), "I *never* get it right … it will last *forever* … it will affect *everything* I do …".

An *optimistic explanatory style* acknowledges the annoyance, even pain, in failure, but avoids using abiding traits to explain the failure and bad events. Using honest, and realistic, qualifiers helps to reorient: "Yes, I do *sometimes* get it wrong", "*lately* I haven't been up to scratch with my lesson plans" and "it is *annoying* that I missed out on my promotion, so what do I need to do to improve or change?" The more optimistic explanatory style *acknowledges frustrating reality, but reframes* it, seeing the failure as having transient rather than permanent and pervasive causes. Further, the optimistic explanatory style avoids recumbent self-blame, or other blame: "It's *me …*", "I'll *never* change …" and "I'll *never* get it right …". Acknowledging one's *temporary* stupidity, ineptness, laziness, lack of forethought and planning is, in short, acknowledging one's humanity (Rogers 2012)!

It is the *habits* of explanation that lie at the heart of "explanatory styles" and personal self-talk. It is not simply the explanation we make in interpreting our episodic stresses; it is the *characteristic residual* explanatory style one falls back on in seeking to cope with, understand and manage stressful events. Seligman's research into learned helplessness and learned optimism is a positive and very practical resource in stress management and coping.

Contrast "I *never …*", "I *always …*", "I *can't* stand it …" and "*Everybody* in this class is …", with "I *sometimes* fail; *however …*", "*Some* people *are difficult* to work, with while others are not …", "It may be *difficult* (rather than "I *can't stand it*") … *but* when I …", "It *will* get better *when …*", "If I do *X* and *Y*, things will improve …" and "Even if *I've failed, I am not a failure …*". Private (internal) speech clearly has a self-guiding and self-regulatory function.

Failure doesn't mean we *are* a failure. Defining failure in global and stable terms, rather than in situational and specific terms, changes our perception of both ourselves and those situations and relationships in which we experience stress and a significant sense of failure.

Adaptive, and maladaptive, thinking behaviours *are learned as well as habituated* from our personal history (Rogers 2012). These thinking skills (and self-talk skills) when matched with behaviour leadership and teacher skills enable effective coping and even enjoyable and effective teaching (bad days notwithstanding p. 22f).

You control us! Who controls whom and what?

Working with a new Year 9 class once, I struggled to communicate the difficult message that it was *their* job to control *their* behaviour. Apparently their previous teacher (on stress leave) had battled with this class, week in and week out, and now it was my turn.

At the classroom meeting I conducted with this class, I raised the issue of their perception of "control" (p. 29f). Many students had said that it was "the teacher's job to control the class", "It's the teacher's job to make us behave".

I asked "how?", and in the ensuing (and lively) discussion students' comments about teacher control ranged from "shouting" behaviours through to "intimidation" and "detentions". I further asked if they *liked* that kind of teacher behaviour, and if they believed such behaviour was fair and helpful. As we teased this out they agreed that it wasn't helpful to anyone really – being *forced* to behave through the "controlling" behaviour of teachers. What it amounted to is that these students effectively wanted the teachers to "control us" but part of *that* arrangement meant that they would make it a challenge for the teachers to control them: "you've got to prove you can control us". When students talk like this there is also the more important underlying message of security: they expect their teachers to be able to lead, manage and direct the day-to-day complexities of 25–30 students in a small room, engaged in teaching, learning and socialisation. To this extent their "cry of control" is valid; but our role is also to lead the students beyond mere simplistic, external, control to appropriate "self" and "shared" control.

It took a while but we finally managed to shift their thinking and (in part) their "game-playing" towards a new understanding: "As students … we control ourselves … You (our teacher) lead, guide and support us to manage ourselves. We give you that right and that responsibility to lead us in that way." This was the understanding I was trying to develop with them.

This shift in thinking in our students is not merely a teaching exercise. Teachers need to be able to call on student cooperation through:

- shared understandings of core rights and responsibilities. This was expressed through a collaborative classroom agreement (see Chapter 2 and Appendix A)
- the teacher's effort to teach with some enthusiasm, skill and willingness to address a wide range of student ability and to consider a range of teaching approaches (Chapter 4)

- the teacher's effort to communicate respect and care, particularly when they discipline (Chapter 3)
- the teacher's willingness to reach individuals as well as class groups; even a brief effort to get to know, and assist, an individual has a powerful effect on teacher–student cooperation.

I have many, many, times discussed the issue of teacher management and discipline with students. They are able to sum up how confident, sure, "together", able, (and so on) a teacher is. They seem to gain this knowledge by *how* a teacher *initially* expresses themselves in their management and their discipline, and how effectively the teacher manages to teach (Chapters 2 and 3). Those first impressions, in those first meetings with the class, significantly determine how the class group defines the teacher's subsequent role. As one student wrote about taking teachers on the first impression (he passed the note on to me – it was a class where I had been mentoring a colleague …):

> When you can see that you can get away with things with a teacher you often be stupid [sic] and go to other people's desks and don't take any notice of them [the teacher …]

This student is saying, in effect, that a "good" teacher needs to control the classroom environment and *situation* in which students behave. They normally then discuss (as this student does) how and why students do (or don't) "take notice" of teachers. Having notice taken of one's leadership and authority is primarily related to how relaxed one appears, how confident one's leadership style appears when *encouraging and directing* group *and individual behaviour* (see Chapters 3 and 4). One's confidence is significantly increased by having a plan for those first meetings with our class(es). This is discussed in the section on the establishment phase and in the later section on language skills of behaviour management (Chapter 3) and effective teaching (Chapter 4).

Don't smile until Christmas

This is not the clearest, most helpful, maxim in teaching! I remember being told a version of this many years ago. Imagine standing in front of a group (in the corridor before you lead your class in or in the classroom) with a tense, frowning, face – perhaps impatient breathing – rocking back and forth on the toes, frowning, "expecting" trouble …(?) … Such non-verbal behaviour will – more than anything – indicate

a lack of confidence in one's authority and "status". It may even provoke unnecessary, contestable, behaviour in some of our students. If a teacher stands in front of a class group looking anxious, arms folded in a protective – closed – body language, or a hesitant and sheepish smile that says, in effect, "please be nice to me …", students may well read "indecisiveness", and, again, a lack of confidence.

A confident, pleasant, relaxed smile, *while we are communicating* (not a sycophantic smile) can telegraph a potential confidence in student cooperation. Of course, what we *then* do, *and say,* is essential to how we are able to *initiate and sustain* class attention and focus … This is addressed at length in Chapter 3.

Of course, what the maxim is meant to say is that one needs to be firm and clear in our leadership at the outset of our ongoing relationship with a new class about behaviour and learning. There is truth in this. It is much harder to reclaim unfocused, off-task, distracting behaviours than to establish positive, clear norms from day one and reinforce that by positive and confident behaviour leadership – the first meetings are crucial (p. 37f, 55f).

I have heard teachers say that they, in effect, "lost" the class because they tried to be "too friendly"; in effect trying to be their "buddy"/"mate" from the first meeting with the class. We are their teacher/leader; we are not their "mate" or "buddy"; we can, and should, be friendly, kind and generous of spirit, *respectful*, but we are their *teacher*, we are not a "substitute" parent, or carer …

The 70–80 per cent

I have seen teachers lose the goodwill and potential cooperation of a significant percentage of the class by the way they treat certain individuals and the group. Some teachers are surprised when the bulk of the class becomes resentful if the teacher treats any *one* individual with characteristic disrespect or fosters unresolved conflict. I have seen teachers use whole-class detentions to seek to put pressure on several disruptive students only to initially frustrate and then alienate the 70–80 per cent of cooperative students when they continue to use such detentions.

While it is natural to get frustrated by some individuals in a class group, we need the cooperation of the 70–80 per cent to successfully manage and support the 20–30 per cent of more attentional, difficult or challenging students.

What we can, and can't, "control"

When I write, here in this book, about managing or leading students, I'm not speaking about *controlling* our students; it's surprising the ease, the facility, with

which we say, "I *made* the student put his hand up …", or "I *took* the student aside and told him to …". We can't simply *make* a student do anything, or *take* a student anywhere, unless of course he or she is either naturally cooperative, highly compliant or obedient, or unquestioningly compliant or obedient (which are not necessarily healthy personality behaviour traits at all). I have always discouraged our own children to "*simply* obey your teacher *because* they are a teacher". (Mind you, I've taught them skilful ways to address unfair or even unjust teacher behaviour as well.)

Rather than asking myself how can I more effectively "control my students", it is more appropriate – and much more constructive – to ask "How can I be a more effective teacher leader?" and "What can I do to bring more effective control *to* the teaching and learning context?" The way I manage myself and my thinking and attitude have a significant (even lasting) effect on how students behave (cooperatively or uncooperatively) when I am with them.

The approaches, and skills, developed in this book are a means to *that* end.

Intent and relationships

Students hear and see the teacher's intention in a teacher's discipline and management of behaviour – beyond the words. If the *intention* read is one where the teacher is perceived as wanting to *merely* control, embarrass, shame or cause emotional "hurt" to the child, then the acceptance of such discipline will be (naturally) resented and often lead to an unworkable teacher–student relationship. For example, where a teacher emphasises the intentional severity of the consequence, rather than the certainty, then that is all the child will focus on (p. 127) – where the teacher uses the one-to-one follow-up consequential time (behaviour interview/detention, etc.) to "get back at" the student. It is very unfortunate to have to address such teacher behaviour but I've seen it happen.

If it is our intention to enable a student to take responsibility for his or her behaviour and to actively consider others' rights, and if our discipline has that as its aim, the child will more likely hear and see that intention in the kind of language and manner we use when we address their behaviour in the "public" domain of the classroom and in any one-to-one behaviour consequence time. The degree of cooperation, even compliance, in student behaviour, also depends on the kind of relationship existing between teacher and student.

In the establishment phase of the year, the teacher is seeking to build a workable relationship with the whole class, as a group, and also with the individuals. Even

deceptively mundane expressions of humanity, such as learning (and using) a student's name (at all times), positive greetings to the group and individuals (even out of class), remembering aspects and details of their individuality (a student's hobbies, special interests, events and birthdays) are all indicators of a teacher's effort to build and sustain positive working relationships.

Being pleasant and respectful (not sycophantic) to "unlikeable" students; going out of one's way to say "hello" (even, at times, to an unreturned or muttered response); not holding grudges and starting each day afresh are all aspects of relational teacher behaviour that children soon acknowledge, affirm and respond to in a positive way.

When students get to know that we care about them as individuals (as persons with needs, concerns, feelings), then our discipline is judged and accepted within the understanding that their teacher cares about, and for them.

Building relationships

It is, generally speaking, the positive relationships we develop with our students that we remember long after they have forgotten the history of the Tudors, or positive and negative integers. When I used to ask our own children, "What was maths (or French, or history) like today?" Sometimes they would talk about the subject matter, but more often they talked about the *kind* of teacher they had and what happened in the relational dynamics of the classroom. Our children quickly "sorted" out which teachers could manage which classes (and why); which teachers taught well (and interestingly); which were fair and considerate; and which were normally patient, had a sense of humour and, above all, cared.

I went to a high school in St Albans (England) for six months (aged 15). I was running late for my science class one morning. The bus was late. I arrived at the classroom door huffing and puffing, anxious because Mr Brown was not the most empathetic teacher in the school. Entering the classroom I saw a *new* teacher; a supply teacher? (I wasn't sure). He approached me at the door, smiling, and said, "You look a bit puffed out …" (I'd been running). "I'm Mr Ryland. What's your name?" His tone and manner immediately put me at ease. He spoke to me quietly, away from the class (and the immediate hearing of others). "Who do you normally sit next to?" Having told him I sat next to Roger (a friend), he explained we were doing an experiment on Archimedes' principle (displacement of mass in water; Eureka!). "Roger will fill you in, eh? Catch your breath Billy. I'll come over and see how you're going later." Not only did I feel better (less anxious and less

embarrassed), but I was also more motivated (in a subject that wasn't a favourite). Not only did I remember Archimedes' principle, but I remembered the difference a teacher can make to how one feels and "works" as a student.

Contrast Mr Ryland's treatment of my lateness and this personal account written by our eldest daughter when she was in high school (Year 9).

Vicki and I were sitting on the wall (where we usually wait for the lift home from Vicki's grandpa) at the end of the school day. Miss Brown (Vicki's maths teacher) came over to us and said, "Have you made any effort to get that maths book yet?" And before Vicki could answer she said, "No, I don't think you have. I told you to wait behind on Friday and someone told me you only waited five minutes!"

"I couldn't wait because my grandpa didn't know I was staying behind and he would be worried."

I chipped in at this point, trying to help out. "And it's a bit hard to stay behind because we go home in a car pool."

And Miss Brown said, "I don't think this has anything to do with you! I don't think you know what this is about so I think you should just keep out of this!"

Well I just shut up (being the generally angelic and compliant student I am) but the truth is I knew a damn sight more than she did and instantly made up my mind I did not like this teacher.

Respect:

- means respecting the essential dignity of the individual.
- is based on equality and mutuality of rights; this is at the core of the UN Charter on the rights of the child (and on human rights generally). Respect is intrinsically related to fundamental human rights. It is the basis for building cooperative classrooms and schools. In being aware of, and considering, others' rights, we (in effect) affirm and acknowledge our own rights. We can stand up for our rights – firmly and respectfully – without trampling on others' rights. The teacher's modelling of mutual respect is essential in building a rights-enhancing and rights-protecting school community.
- means recognising the equality of human beings (in gender, race, background, individual differences, knowledge, position …).
- means that even when we need to discipline a student we do not reject him as a person. This is probably the most challenging belief and practice we seek to hold as teachers. It means we can (and should) balance firmness with kindness; assertion with not holding grudges. It means (and this is also very difficult) starting each day afresh with the student as it were. I would further argue that we don't have to *like* all our students (some students will be much easier to *like* than others …). Respect is about our behaviour towards others, the way we

treat them … It is pointless *trying to force* ourselves to like a student whose behaviour (at times) can be obnoxious … Respect is about a mindset and *one's behaviour* towards the "unlikeable".

(For a sustained discussion on respect with the teacher–student/s relationship see Rogers 2011: 225–7.)

The conveying of respect does not mean the excusing of a student's irresponsible and wrong behaviour; it is an essential prerequisite in resolving conflict and initiating restitution.

How might he have felt …?

A colleague of mine found this missive on the worldwide graffiti board (you know – the Internet). It describes so well the normative frustrations of a teacher; frustrations that even Jesus must have felt:

The joy of teaching

Then Jesus took his disciples up the mountain and gathering them around him, He taught them saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are they that mourn. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are they that thirst for justice. Blessed are you when persecuted. Blessed are you when you suffer. Be glad and rejoice for your reward is great in heaven." Then Simon Peter said, "Are we supposed to know this?" And Andrew said, "Do we have to write this down?" And James said, "Will we have a test on this?" And Phillip said, "I don't have any paper!" And Bartholomew said, "Do we have to turn this in?" And John said, "The other disciples didn't have to learn this!" And Matthew said, "May I go to the toilet?" Then one of the Pharisees who was present asked to see Jesus's lesson plan and inquired of Jesus, "Where is your anticipatory set and your objectives in the cognitive domain?" And Jesus wept.

(Anon)

Reflection

- When you reflect on your own experiences at school, as a student, what qualities, attributes, of any of your teachers, do you remember with affection (or disaffection and pain!)?

- When you look at the dynamics of your classes how does the concept of "relaxed vigilance" relate to your *characteristic* behaviour leadership (p. 7f)? How do you respond to the concept of "control" noted in this chapter (p. 29f)?
- How aware are you of "primary" and "secondary" behaviours in some of your students (p. 12f)? How do you conceive this "secondary behaviour" reality? What skills and practices enable you when you address such behaviours in your students?
- In reflecting on your normative stress – how aware are you of your "characteristic explanatory style" in coping with and managing stress (p. 20f)?

Notes

1   The issue of *briefly* modelling or "behaviour mirroring" (Rogers 2003a) a student's behaviour back to them (*only* in a one-to-one relationship and in non-classroom time) should always be prefaced by a request "Do you mind if I show you what it looks (or sounds) like when you …?" Also, such "mirroring" should not be conducted with children with autism spectrum disorder – it may only confuse or unnecessarily upset them.

2   This is an interesting theory proposed by Mills (in Robertson 1997). Some children, according to Mills, use such behaviours to "ward off" feelings of depression or stress. In their home background they may well be in a situation of high arousal (a loud home – quarrelling and shouting, significant sibling tension, television blaring …). The "excitation" sought at school may well be compensatory. Robertson notes that the crucial factor in *any* effectiveness in dealing with such pupils is the calm attitude a teacher conveys (Chapter 5, see also pp. 60–62).

Visit **https://study.sagepub.com/rogers4e** for additional resources to help you better manage classroom behaviour. You'll also be able to hear from Bill himself as he talks you through common behaviour management scenarios.