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# Classroom management

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## The background

Good classroom and behaviour management is one of the key elements of successful teaching and learning, and will be crucial to your success and commitment as a teacher. Classroom management has become an increasingly important aspect of a lecturer's life, especially in further education, as government policy initiatives for the 14–19-year-old age group mean that FE colleges are taking younger students than they have in the past. Although FE colleges have always taken school-age students via school-college links, the number of such students has grown dramatically in recent years. The type of younger students coming to FE colleges has also changed, as many of them have been rejected by schools. Sometimes this is because their lack of achievement may damage the school's position in the local league tables, or because their behaviour, often described as challenging, means that they are disruptive and disturb the learning of their fellow students.

It is compulsory for students under 16 to attend education. Traditionally FE and HE students attended because they wanted to. If they were unhappy with their learning or the institution, they would usually vote with their feet and leave, rather than behave disruptively. Even for traditional FE students aged 16 and above the position has been changing.

Many such students, adults as well as 16–18-year-olds, are attending colleges with some reluctance and compulsion. Sometimes college attendance is part of the help they are being offered because they are unemployed. For example the various New Deal initiatives introduced by the Labour government have included an element of compulsory learning and training at a college. The government's latest response to growing youth unemployment caused by the recession includes benefit sanctions for those not taking up job offers or further training. Apprenticeship programmes contain an element of off-the-job training usually undertaken in a college. Adults lacking basic skills may also have to attend literacy and/or numeracy programmes or face losing benefit. Growing unemployment means that many FE students and indeed some HE students are attending colleges because they can't find work. The issues involved are unlikely to disappear, especially if the government's plans to extend compulsory learning to the age of 18 are implemented.

## Disruptive behaviour in the classroom

The majority of younger students will benefit from the adult environment of a college. However, a significant minority will misbehave in this new setting. Lecturers in the classroom increasingly report disruptive behaviour in their classes.

The Learning and Skills Development Agency, Northern Ireland, in a useful publication on behaviour management uses the term 'disruptive behaviour' to encompass a range of behaviours from the mildly irritating to those which can be dangerous.

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The Further Education and Development Agency publication *Ain't Misbehavin* defines disruptive behaviour as 'patterns of repeated behaviour which significantly interrupt the learning of others or threaten their personal security or well being.' (FEDA 1998)

Examples of disruptive behaviour include:

- not finishing work or avoiding the task set
- teasing or bullying other people
- calling out and interrupting
- coming in noisily/late
- constant talking
- refusal to comply with reasonable instruction
- mobile phone use and texting
- poor attendance or persistent lateness
- putting on make-up, combing hair
- rude, cheeky or inappropriate comments
- eating and drinking in lessons
- not respecting other people's property
- substance abuse.

These behaviours are problematic because of their frequency, severity, or duration. They undermine teaching and learning and are a significant cause of stress for all concerned.

#### WHY DO STUDENTS MISBEHAVE?

Reasons why students are disruptive in the classroom can include the following:

- They lack appropriate social skills.
- They lack basic skills to be successful.
- Their challenging behaviour has become habitual and is reinforced by the attention they receive from lecturers and peers.
- They don't want to be in college.
- Some lecturers may trigger misbehaviour by treating students with disrespect (put downs, sarcasm).

It is always worth analysing what is taking place when confronted with disruptive behaviour. When this happens in your classroom, ask the following questions:

- Where does the disruption take place?
- What form does the disruptive behaviour take?
- Who is involved?
- When does the disruption occur?
- Why does the organisation experience disruptive behaviour?

It is important to try to identify the problem as sometimes behaviour can be improved by such basic responses as changes to timetable and room allocation.

### Classroom management and/or behaviour management

Classroom management is applicable to all teaching and learning situations, whether within formal settings such as the classroom, workshop or laboratory, and within more informal settings such as libraries, resource centres and private study areas.

Behaviour management is part and parcel of classroom management, but is often focused around unacceptable and disruptive behaviour. We offer some pointers to more general and positive classroom management, which is followed by information about what to do if students behave in an unacceptable or disruptive way.



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This guidance comes from various publications and current work within the FE sector. It therefore has a bias towards FE practice and teaching. However it is likely that the examples given are relevant and transferable to higher education situations.



### CREATING A POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT

The core of classroom management is to try to establish a success-orientated environment for teaching and learning. The evidence from schools is that this works best when developed and applied consistently across the whole institution. However there are strategies that you can adopt within your own classroom which will help.

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### A USEFUL STARTING POINT

To establish a positive learning environment in your classroom, you need to create and use a working statement of principles, for example:

- Teachers have the right to teach.
- Students have the right to learn.
- We all have the right to feel safe.
- We need to make clear that rights are to be linked to responsibilities.

Classroom rules ensure that these principles and responsibilities are established. Rules should be:

- negotiated, consulted with and discussed with your students
- enforceable
- reasonable – not just to the teacher but also to the students
- framed positively
- clear, taught, and displayed
- consistently applied across all your teaching
- few in number so you and your students know what they are.

Specific subject areas may require you to establish specific rules, and procedures appropriate to that subject such as procedures for the use of tools and equipment.

Learners need to experience the consequences of their behaviour whether appropriate or inappropriate.

### PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOUR

There are a number of strategies you can adopt to promote and encourage responsible behaviour in your students. These can include:

- ensuring your lesson is well planned and prepared
- explaining things clearly
- familiarising yourself with students' names, their strengths and weaknesses
- treating all students fairly and equally
- being friendly and humorous
- ensuring that support is offered to students lacking basic skills or those for whom English is not their first language
- quickly establishing a climate of praise
- ensuring that responsible behaviour is noted (through tutorials, reports and references)
- negotiating consequences and allowing learners to experience them
- valuing opinions and showing respect to your students – not using put downs or sarcasm or allowing others to
- encouraging effective listening from the outset – one of the ground rules might be: 'we turn and face the person talking'

- developing 'positive noticing' to reinforce the idea that responsible behaviour is the norm
- keeping order by being firm but not intimidating.



### THE POSITIVE CONSEQUENCES OF APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

Research reviews show that the single most important strategy in classroom and behaviour management is reinforcement. This is praising, rewarding and otherwise, certifying, confirming and recognising learning. For example, giving students feedback on whether they have learned effectively is reinforcement. You do not have a more powerful tool at your disposal. But it's not easy to get it right. Reinforcement substantially improves the following:

- learning and attainment
- motivation
- behaviour and concentration in class
- self-belief or self-efficacy – that is the student's belief in their ability to improve, develop, and to overcome their difficulties
- self-esteem
- attitudes to learning and to your subject
- attitudes to the teacher.

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### HOW TO PRAISE AND REWARD FOR MAXIMUM EFFECT

Reinforcement requires a high level of agreement. It takes time, thought, and practice to become a good practitioner in this respect. The most effective reinforcement should be frequent.

Try and give every student at least some reinforcement every lesson. Put students who are difficult or whose progress is slow into 'intensive care'. This means recognising their effort and achievement as often as possible by smiling, talking with them in a friendly manner etc. Do this for a month, however difficult you find this, and see the results.

#### Ensure praise is task-centred not person-centred

Praise should be earned by, and focused on the student's work, not on the student. It should be earned for effort, completion of a task, achievement, the skill shown, or an appropriate strategy used. It should not be for just turning up, or for listening, unless these are achievements in themselves for that student. Praise should not be ego-centred eg: 'You are very good at this' or 'You are a very able student, I'm proud of you'. This kind of praise assumes that success is due to personal attributes and teaches students to interpret difficulties in terms of a lack of these abilities. There is, of course, nothing wrong with showing that you believe a student has the capability to achieve where that student lacks confidence in their ability.

#### Ensure praise is student-referenced

Praise should be given for what is a reasonable achievement for that student, not for that class or age group. It should not be based on a comparison with other students such as what is a good standard for the group. This is because such a praising strategy would mean that weak students would never get praise. This would deny your most potent motivator to the very students who need it most.

If the completion of an ordinary learning task earns praise, every student can get it.

#### Ensure praise is specific

You should specify what the praise is for and the value of the accomplishment. This is easier to do if it is focused on the task. Saying what the praise is for has the added benefit of ensuring that the praise is not seen as patronising. A good

example would be: 'Well done, that's a good way of solving the problem' or 'That's a good way of solving that problem. You are really concentrating well now.'

#### Ensure praise is sincere

You should sound spontaneous, and as if you really mean it. Praise should not sound like a habitual phrase just trotted out for no particular reason. It should not sound to the student as if you are using praise as a means to control them.

#### REINFORCEMENT STRATEGIES FOR TOUGH TEACHERS

Some teachers find it hard to say nice things to their students. They should work on this of course. However, knowledge of results is reinforcement. That is, simply telling students the facts about what they have done well, or giving them the results of a test, as long as the student perceives this feedback as reasonably positive.

So you could use a quiz or short test to show students what they know and can do. Do this regularly for maximum effect and give warning of it. A three-minute test at the end of every lesson is an excellent review technique. You will sometimes see students punching the air in delight if they do reasonably well.

Of course, if they do badly this may not motivate them. So consider using tests and quizzes formatively. That is, give students a second chance to get right those questions they got wrong, perhaps the next day. Tell them about this of course, so they can bone up on their weaknesses. Give them the test again, but tell them just to do the questions they got wrong. Then nearly everyone does well.

Discourage students from comparing marks, it's getting a 'good-enough' mark and fixing mistakes in learning that counts. Consider asking easy questions on key material, setting a pass mark of say, 8/10, and then recording students just as 'passed' or 'not passed yet'. This is mastery learning, and it is one of the most powerful teaching methods.

#### COMPETENCES AND SELF-ASSESSMENT AS REINFORCEMENT

Any acknowledgement of learning success is reinforcement. You could set students a set of informal competences and ask them to tick themselves off as they achieve these, or ask them to self-assess against clear criteria. Almost any learning can be packaged in the competency or criteria format. It is even possible to have criteria for behaviour, and ask students to self assess or claim competence from you for this.

#### CERTIFICATION FOR REINFORCEMENT

Some programme managers give students Open College Network (OCN) certificates in, for example, first aid or customer care very early on in their programme. If students have had official success by the end of their first term or soon after, this can be a great motivator.

#### OTHER STRATEGIES

**Assessment proformas:** These give a 'medal' for what students have done satisfactorily or better.

**One-to-ones with the teacher:** Individual teacher attention is a powerful method of confirming success.

**Tracking documents or wall charts:** These allow students to record the completion of topics, assignments, tests, attendance, punctuality, or other course requirements.



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**Mastery learning:** This is a system of very easy, short tests that students mark themselves. If the student gets less than the pass mark (about 8/10) they undertake remedial work and then re-take those questions they got wrong in a new test. Alternatively remedial work is checked by peers or by the teacher.

**Displays of students' work:** A visual reminder to students of their achievement

**Reward schemes:** These reward students for appropriate behaviour, punctuality etc.



**PRIORITISING PROBLEMS**

Some problems are serious and need an immediate response. Some are longer-term or complex and need a more considered strategy. Some organisations find it useful to conduct a behaviour management audit where there is a full review of behaviour management practice across the institution, often including a survey of teaching staff to find out how they manage the classroom or what additional support they might require. The next step from the behaviour management audit is to prioritise and decide what needs to be addressed first. These problems should be addressed to your immediate managers and to the UCU branch to be taken up with institutional management.

**LISTENING TO STUDENTS**

Remember, students are not the enemy. Younger students in particular may have their own values but they too want a secure environment with clear guidelines. Students are more likely to respond if they have had some input into the process.

**SANCTIONS FOR DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOUR**

It is important for students to understand that inappropriate behaviours have consequences and require a response. Negative consequences or sanctions protect the rights of the teacher (to teach) the students (to learn) and give them a chance to make a more responsible choice in future. Sanctions that can be applied when inappropriate behaviour occurs should be created by the institution and may well vary between institutions. You will need to check with your managers to know what sanctions can be brought into force following inappropriate behaviour.

It is important that any sanctions or other consequences that result from breaking the rules or from inappropriate behaviour:

- are applied at once
- are consistent and fairly applied
- are discussed outside the classroom, in follow-up support
- are sequential, ie low level, medium level, severe
- are based on reconciliation rather than revenge.

**Whole institutional approaches to classroom and behaviour management**

Individual teacher strategies are most effective when reflected across the whole institution. Whole college policies and practices are aimed at:

- helping you to work in a positive workplace
- building consistency in how staff across an institution deal with situations in the classroom
- helping students to develop a sense of responsibility for their own behaviour and their own learning.

Behaviour management is a whole organisation's responsibility. In instances where student behaviour improves within an organisation, evidence indicates that the

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whole organisation is involved. Behaviour management is not only about learner behaviour. It is also about the behaviour of tutors and managers. Behaviour management strategies work best when the aims are made explicit and shared with the key players – learners, tutors and managers.

Tutors and managers need training and support to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to feel confident in managing student behaviour and dealing with disruptive or non-participating students. In some institutions behaviour management has traditionally been a fire-fighting activity. That is, behaviours are dealt with after they have become a problem. By this stage, unacceptable behaviour can be ingrained in individuals or in groups. Staff too can be suffering from stress and feel unable to retrieve the situation.

Whole institutional policies need to be developed so there is a consistent line across an institution. They need to be cascaded through an organisation to departmental, faculty and school level to ensure there is consistency of approach.

**WHO ARE THE KEY PLAYERS?**

Modern approaches to behaviour management promote the democratic as opposed to the authoritarian. This means listening to learners. If learners are on the wrong courses, or their abilities and preferences have been ignored, then behaviour problems are more likely. Rules and regulations are more likely to be kept if learners are involved in their design.

Teaching is potentially a stressful situation. Teachers want to maximise the learning that takes place in the classroom and teaching is most effective when it is practised in an environment of mutual respect. This is made possible when learners and teachers have clear guidelines and expectations of what is and isn't acceptable within the institution. Managers have responsibilities for both learners and teachers. They tend to hold power when it comes to the allocation of resources and the identification of priorities.

Although there are things you can do as a teacher in terms of classroom and behaviour management, whole institutional policies in these areas are the best means of dealing with the issues. The most effective approach is for management to implement strategies for resolving these issues across an institution. UCU branches and members should be pressing for such policies and their effective implementation, including proper training and professional development as well as managerial and departmental support.

Behaviour has been an issue in schools for a long time. Many schools and some local authorities have undertaken a great deal of work and training around behaviour policies and have some very good initiatives in this area. However post-compulsory education institutions, which have not been part of local authority structures since the early 1990s, may not have been involved with, or even know about, these initiatives. It will be worth UCU branches pointing this out to management. FE colleges should, at the very least, be informed of the behaviour policies of the schools who are sending them students, and should as far as possible be seeking to co-ordinate their own policies so they are consistent with their partner schools.

**Equality issues**

Classroom and behaviour management policies and their implementation must take on many issues around equality and diversity. Disruptive behaviour may partly stem from underlying issues of sexism, racism and discrimination based around students' perceived mental and physical disability or sexuality. Teacher expectations and



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stereotyping can be based on shared but erroneous perceptions, cultures and practices. Institutional discrimination is now recognised as taking place across organisations and services. For example the incidence of school exclusions and school pupils defined as having behaviour problems is significantly higher for pupils from black and minority ethnic communities. It is only 30 years ago that black school pupils were being routinely assessed as being 'educational sub-normal'. Staffroom culture can exert a powerful influence over teacher and lecturer expectations and perceptions of both individual students and groups of students.

Similarly gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality and perceived physical and mental ability may affect the kinds of behaviour that certain students display. Sometimes the behaviour may be overtly challenging, sometimes it may be the very reverse of this, with some students withdrawing from classroom activity, or falling into depression and almost total inactivity. Such behaviour will often require very different responses.

### A final word

The issue of classroom and behaviour management is an extremely important one for all teachers and lecturers. It is also an area where there needs to be great care and sensitivity. We would emphasise, however, that although individual teachers have responsibilities in this area, and there are actions that they can take, these issues are the responsibility of management who should be creating and implementing whole institutional policies that are accompanied by training and continuing professional development.

### USEFUL LINKS

#### Classroom and behaviour management in FE

- 1 LSDA, 2008, *Behaviour management*:  
[www.itslifejimbutnotasweknowit.org.uk/files/BehMgt\\_LSDA.pdf](http://www.itslifejimbutnotasweknowit.org.uk/files/BehMgt_LSDA.pdf)
- 2 LSDA, 2007, *What's your problem?*:  
[www.itslifejimbutnotasweknowit.org.uk/files/LSDA\\_WhatsyourProblem.pdf](http://www.itslifejimbutnotasweknowit.org.uk/files/LSDA_WhatsyourProblem.pdf)
- 3 FEDA, 1998, *Ain't Misbehavin*: <http://bit.ly/b3ZavW>
- 4 Paul Blum, *Anger and conflict management*: <http://bit.ly/cJsaYd>

#### Classroom and behaviour management in schools

- 1 DfES, Sept 2004, *Pedagogy and Practice: teaching and learning in secondary schools Unit 20 Classroom management*:  
[http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/5707/1/sec\\_pptI044304u20classmanage.pdf](http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/5707/1/sec_pptI044304u20classmanage.pdf)
- 2 DSCF website dedicated to behaviour management  
[www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/behaviour](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/behaviour)
- 3 DCF, 2005, *Learning Behaviour Principles and Practice – What Works in Schools*:  
<http://bit.ly/atBVpk>



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