

School Discipline Advisor Karen Bagwell Interviews Gaye O'Brien, Dec, 2012.

Framing: How to communicate with students to manage challenging behaviors.

A. 1. Why is it important for educators to have this strategy for how to communicate with students with challenging behaviors?

It is part of the teacher's role to assist students to behave appropriately at school. Therefore if a student misbehaves, it is the teacher's duty to help the student modify his or her behavior. If the behavior is not changed it may have a detrimental affect on the ability of the student to succeed in life, and become a valuable member of society.

Challenging behaviors framed in the context of the school environment need to be skillfully managed, to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to enjoy safe and productive lives at school.

There are many strategies that I have found useful when encouraging students to modify their behavior. Arguably the most important strategy, *positive mindset or frame of mind*, is useful for teachers to exhibit when managing all students, and particularly those with challenging behaviors. Modeling this strategy to students enables teachers to learn how to remain in control of their emotions in trying situations.

Students will learn to recognize that it is not WHAT is happening, but HOW to respond to what is happening that is important. By behaving in a rational, clear, and calm manner teachers will be modeling a very useful life skill for students to emulate.

2. What typical problems can it solve for people who work with student discipline?

It can solve problems with truancy, lateness to class, failure to perform, student non-compliance, student-to-student negotiations, student self-esteem, bullying and goal setting.

3. Of all the available resources out there, why should readers in schools care about reading about this?

Readers will be interested in reading this book because it begins at the core of teacher practice, with what teachers believe about themselves, their students, learning and teaching. The author realizes that without the right beliefs teachers will struggle to achieve success with their students.

The book encourages teachers and other stakeholders to develop or change their *beliefs* about students and to see students as capable of achieving great things with their lives. Once teachers have beliefs that serve them to achieve positive outcomes, they will have more *faith* and *confidence* in their own ability to perform. Of course successful teachers already have these beliefs and they like to be pro-active and develop rapport with their students.

Secondly this book gives teachers the skills to develop rapport and communicate more effectively with students. It provides examples of useful language strategies for teachers and those working in the discipline industry to use with students, to assist learners to communicate their needs effectively and improve performance.

The book also places a high priority on nurturing the naturally, positive emotional state of the student, to benefit learning. This strategy is much more cost effective in terms of time, energy and money than simply reacting to the student's negative emotional state after there has been an outburst of some sort.

Recognizing and catering to learning styles is also covered in great depth. As teachers respond to students' verbal and body language, and eye and language patterns they are provided with useful information about individual learning needs. This encourage teachers to differentiate the curriculum and to seek out and use appropriate resources.

I have also included some less well-known teaching and learning strategies that are extremely useful when combined with the skills and strategies described above.

B. Points to remember.

1. Why should a teacher momentarily reframe herself? What difference can it make?

It is useful for a teacher to momentarily reframe herself/himself as it gives the ability to take a breather and see the situation from another perhaps more positive, point of view. Maybe he or she is being too emotional and can't see as clearly as may be required.

Maybe the teacher might say or do something that might not be beneficial to the classroom atmosphere. By reframing themselves and reminding themselves why they are doing the job they are doing, teachers are showing students that regardless of what is happening in the classroom, they are able to continue to respond with dignity and poise, to even a challenging situation.

2. a. Please explain why it's helpful for a teacher to think about the likelihood that a student may see his challenging behavior differently than she does.

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It is helpful for a teacher to recognize that the student is misbehaving to satisfy his or her own needs. The teacher, then, doesn't need to take the situation so personally. The only exception would be in the case of revenge (so develop rapport with the student to reduce the chances of this happening).

Students may misbehave because they are:

- Seeking attention, so give them positive attention and assist them with their learning needs. You might say, "You are off to a great start with the project Sam!"
- Seeking power, then give them leadership roles during group-work activities
- Seeking avoidance of failure, therefore differentiate their learning and give them positive feedback so they gain confidence in seeking assistance with learning
- Bored so give them some opportunities to develop their creative skills.

b. Does this mean a teacher should try seeing things from a student's viewpoint?

If so, why and if not, what does it mean for a teacher?

It is very useful for teachers to see things from a student's point of view. Teachers, who are considered to teach very well, consider HOW, WHAT and WHY the students would want to learn.

It also makes the teacher appear to be more humane, pace the lesson according to student needs, use key words and phrases that students can relate to, develop rapport with students, tell stories, share humor, and generally enjoy the day more.

A good salesman always considers things from his client's point of view. Because he develops rapport he is more likely to make the sale. Teachers too have to sell their product, learning, to the student. Students are more likely to buy when they "like" (or have developed rapport with) the teacher.

3. a. How does it improve discipline to avoid labeling the student?

It is generally accepted today in education circles that the child is much more than the behavior he/she exhibits in a particular context. People behave differently in different contexts, students included. Most disciplinary systems practice behavior modification strategies, rather than simply labeling the child as being innately "naughty".

If the student is labeled as being for example, lazy, hyperactive, loud etc., the focus is on the student, and not on the behavior. Consequently the student will tend to act the way he has been branded and be less likely to consider the positive changes being suggested to him/her to modify or improve his/her behavior. He may also be angry about the fact that he has been labeled and that may distract him from wanting to improve his behavior.

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b. Blaming the student?

Everybody needs to be taught to take responsibility for his/her actions, including students and teachers. If teachers can admit their mistakes and inadequacies to students in appropriate circumstances, then students will be more likely to accept responsibility for their own actions. By learning to accept blame or responsibility for a situation, progress can be made and lessons learnt from the experience.

If teachers blame the students for poor academic results, then there may be less possibility that they will examine their own teaching practice to see how they can improve their performance.

Also if teachers blame students or their family background for the disruptive behaviors at school they are less likely to examine their relationship with the student and make changes as to how they can interact more effectively with the student to improve his/her outcomes.

Effective teachers ask, "How can I be more effective today?"

c. How does this interfere with effective discipline?

If a teacher concentrates on blaming a student, rather than looking at the situation in context, then it may not be as easy for the teacher to learn from the circumstance. Even if the student has made a mistake, avoid using an accusative tone of voice.

Instead discuss exactly what happened without using emotive language. For example, say to the student, "Mary says that you have pushed her. Is that correct? Is there anything you would like to share with me about this?"

C. How can a teacher "reframe" a student? (*Ch 7, 46.)

A student's behavior can be reframed in terms of *context*. What happens in one environment may not be appropriate in another situation. Behavior can also be reframed in terms of *content* by viewing the behavior in another way. In other words by seeing the behavior in terms of student needs rather than in terms of teacher needs.

1. a. What are some ways a teacher can (pace a student to) build rapport?

Pacing students goes on all day long and it is something that all effective communicators do whether consciously or not. It relates to engaging and extending the learning relationship with the student through:

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- Conversation
- Explanation using visual, auditory and kinesthetic stimuli
- Open questioning to check for understanding (not closed questioning with a “yes or no” answer)
- Passive and active listening (paraphrasing back to the student what they have just said)
- Responding to questions and statement in an open and non-committal way. For example, say
 “Tell me about it,” Or “What would you like assistance with?”
 If a student says, “ I can’t do this.” Say, “What prevents you?” Or “What would happen if you could?”
- Using effective body language – exhibiting steady eye contact and displaying postures and gestures congruent with beliefs
- Speaking with a casual tone of voice, and varying the volume, rhythm and stress to add interest
- Using language in context and relevant to the student’s level of development.
- Linking new subject concepts in a planned and sequential manner, chunking information
- Establishing and maintaining routines and boundaries with students
- Letting students know that making mistakes is part of the learning process and always giving supportive feedback. For example say, “I’m glad you asked that question. Let’s see if we can work out the answer together.”
- *Leading* students to the learning content, once pacing and rapport have been established
- Telling *social stories* or narratives that describe students doing appropriate things in different scenarios.

Avoid: warning, threatening, moralizing, judging, criticizing, disagreeing blaming, name-calling, ridiculing, shaming and interrogating as it may affect rapport with the students.

Negative, reactive responses tend to be based on our learned behavior patterns from childhood situations with our parents and teachers. It is more effective for teachers to articulate more practiced, professional responses.

b. Would this step come before the student misbehaves or after?

Rapport would need to be developed before the misbehavior has occurred. The student may need to be removed from the classroom if his behavior escalates and he becomes a safety issue or he is interfering with the learning needs of other students. Once the student has calmed down and he has returned to the classroom, the relationship can be re-established using rapport.

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2. a. How should a teacher proceed to identify challenging behavior?

Challenging behavior disrupts the class and so is easy to identify. It includes: talking while teacher is talking, walking around the class, making inappropriate noises, not following teacher instructions, inappropriate body language, swinging on chair, turning around to distract others, using electronic devices indiscriminately etc.

b. Would this step come after a student misbehaves?

Generally this is the case, although there will be some signs such as being late to class, eating in class, chewing gum in class, refusing to line up outside class or sit in designated seat that may happen, before real misbehavior occurs.

c. What do you mean by using precise sensory-based language?

Using precise sensory language means describing the action or behavior that occurs in a particular context. What was seen, heard, felt, touched or tasted? The information comes from the senses and not from assumptions. It is not based on value judgments, opinions or conclusions.

For example, one might say, "Because you are late to class, you have missed some of the lesson and will need to catch up." (This refers to the action and the consequence.)

Don't say, "You have deliberately come late to class to miss out on work." (This is based on an assumption that the student has chosen to be late to class. This comment may affect rapport with the student and will also not teach the student that there is a consequence for his actions.)

3. a. Why does using "I" statements work?

It describes how you feel. If you don't state how you feel then the listener is only guessing or "mindreading" and may misinterpret what you are saying. For example, "*I feel frustrated when you disrupt the class because it may distract other students from learning.*"

b. This step would obviously come after the misbehavior, how do the other steps fit in related to when a student misbehaves and just relating on a daily basis?

Positive mindset, pacing and leading are used to create a great class atmosphere, and to provide learning opportunities and will minimize misbehavior in the classroom.

I statements, active listening, reframing, anchoring and sensory based language can be used very effectively with misbehaviors.

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c. What's important about prefacing a clear behavior instruction with "I expect you to"... ?

It is often useful to preface a clear behavior instruction with "I expect you to..." as it sends a very clear communication message to the student about your expectations of their behavior in class.

4. a. How should a teacher respond to a student who misbehaves or disrupts class?

The strategies that I use work well where teachers have consciously examined their own belief systems and changed their beliefs where needed to support maximum student learning and positive interactions with the students. Developing supportive language patterns is also useful with maintaining and extending rapport and opening communication channels with students.

Make sure the students are settled before allowing them into the classroom. Make good use of *effective language scripts*, *pro-active teacher belief systems* and *a positive mindset* to maintain rapport with students (I provide **online modules and webinars** to assist with the development of these skills.)

Once a student disrupts the class, make it very clear to the student that you expect them to respect your class. Use *I statements*, *active listening*, *sensory-based language* patterns and the *anchoring* technique.

If the student continues to disrupt, different schools use varying behavior management strategy. In some schools a Responsible Thinking model is employed where students are asked a series of questions including, "What are you doing?" "What should you be doing?" "What will happen if you continue to disrupt?" If the student refuses to answer the questions then he/she is sent to the Responsible Thinking Room to reflect on their behavior. The student is then only allowed to return to class once he or she has completed a learning plan for that particular class.

A buddy system may also be used where funding is not available to staff a Timeout Room. In this situation students who disrupt the class are sent to a buddy teacher's classroom to work. If they continue to disrupt they are then sent to the Administrative Team.

b. Suppose the teacher briefly expresses that the student interfered, how it affected her and the class, and not to do it, and then says, "Do you understand?" If the student says "no" or ignores the question and keeps acting out, how should the

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teacher handle that?

Firstly, chances are that she will gain the respect and empathy of the class, because she has honestly expressed her feelings in a calm and caring way, about the students' right to learn in the classroom environment.

Secondly she may take the student by surprise because he will probably be expecting to be treated the way he may be at home or by other teachers, such as by being:

- Able to maintain a power position and defy authority
- Ignored and not having his needs met
- Treated with disrespect and labeled as disruptive

If the student continues to disrupt the class, and it will probably continue to happen until the anchor is established, then use current school practices and maintain self-dignity.

As I say in the book, it may take several times for the anchor to take effect, but keep practicing. The rewards of being able to manage the class effectively will be well worth the effort.

c. Please explain or provide an example of putting on a performance that demonstrates superior status.

This requires the teacher to have congruent thoughts, feelings and actions. The teacher will need to really believe that it is both her right and privilege to teach the class and that the students have the right to excel at school. She will really need to feel proud of teaching successful students. Follow that empowering feeling through with determined, decisive action.

Use strong, erect, determined posture that supports belief in your students' desires to do at school. The offending student will feel your sense of purpose.

C. Anchors

1. Please give an example of how you used a physical motion to get a student's attention and later employ it as a cue to stop misbehaving without disrupting instruction.

I have used an anchor, a physical stimulus in the classroom by emphasizing my voice on the word *NOT* and tapping my foot at the same time. I have then repeated it later to get the student's attention again when they have been tempted to disrupt the class.

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Everybody responds to anchors. Notice how people respond when the telephone rings. People jump to answer it before they even have had time to think about it.

D. Please provide a brief example of a situation in which you used these steps and they worked with a student.

I have said to a student when they have disrupted the class, "I am teaching the students. I find it irritating when you call out and distract the class while I am instructing them. Do *NOT* (tap foot at same time) speak while I am speaking. Is that clear?"

E. Other –

1. What is a statement that sums up the value of having a good communication strategy for working with challenging student behaviors, for use as a quote?

"If you want to save time, energy and money then consider developing or accessing a repertoire of powerful language scripts that will see you through most challenging situations in life. The only other thing you need then is determination to succeed and congruent body language." Gaye O'Brien 2012.

2. What is left out that's also important to mention or answer on this topic?

I haven't included any information about students who need to be referred to specialist agencies for counseling.

3. Is there anything you would like to emphasize?

The most important thing is developing and maintaining a healthy mindset in staff and students.

4. Is it OK to use your email in a contact line with the article?

My email is gaye@nlpessentials.com

Readers may also like to check out my website address, www.nlpessentials.com There is a contact page where readers can leave their details and query and I will get back to them.

5. What's your current title? Are you currently teaching, or associated with an educational agency or organization?

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I lead a Special Education Facility for adolescents, attached to a secondary program. I manage teachers, paraprofessionals and teach two classes so I have hands-on practice with teaching.

I am also conducting an NLP project with teachers to assist them with improving their outcomes for students using the NLP techniques, described above.

6. What other discipline or safety challenges do you think K-12 school administrators and teachers should be paying more attention to? What other issues could use advice about? Are there any schools in the U.S. where you know of a discipline program that's working particularly well? (This is not for publication, just future story ideas.)

From my experience the Responsible Thinking Process works particularly well with students at the pointy end of disengagement and it gives teachers and students a change to re-establish their relationship after the initial class disruption.

I believe the NLP techniques described in NLP Essentials for Teachers works very well as a preventive measure, to assist teachers to develop rapport building techniques and in the early stages of students disrupting the class activities.

I think agencies and governments need to be paying more attention to *preventative* measures, as more students will benefit from this.

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