

Six Tips: Some practical strategies for increasing the chance of a successful student-teacher conversation about behaviour

Accompanies cards Bill handed out called :

Six tips: for better conversations with students about behaviour

Teaching is moral work that is attempted by fallible and very human people as a service to other fallible and human people, still developing fully into the adults they will become. Teachers have hopes, dreams, fears and disappointments, and so do their students. They are emotional beings. Teachers who are able to understand themselves, their colleagues and their students can help ensure that the mini-society that is their classroom, will flourish...

(George, in Kelly and Thorsborne (2014:201))

None of us likes hearing that a student thinks that they are *picking on them*. Even teachers are sensitive souls who would prefer to be liked! It's part of our *basic neural hardwiring* and if we REALLY have *zero care-factor* about what our students think of us then it's time to look at different career options, preferably a job that doesn't involve working too closely with young people.

When young people think we don't like them, it's a clear signal that the teacher-student relationship has broken down, or never existed.

However, good teaching isn't a popularity contest! Young people don't always have to agree with what we do. Believing that it's our job to always win favour with young people puts us in a *permissive* space (see the social control window). This just doesn't work in classrooms because a lack of behavioural boundaries disorients young people. Without boundaries, classrooms descend into chaos.

The Restorative / Authoritative Zone

What we know serves young people best is a teacher working from an authoritative space (see social control window).

In this space, we are clear with young people about what behaviours we expect, and we communicate this effectively through our classroom structures, our words and our deeds. More importantly, we use **restorative processes** that make it easy for young people to articulate the types of behaviours they expect from each other.

These processes extend from *circles* to discuss what students need from one another to learn best in a given setting, right through to *circles* to hold people accountable for repairing harm that has been caused by inconsiderate or thoughtless behaviour.

What we achieve in these environments are high, clearly articulated expectations of behaviour and high levels of support for students to reach these standards. When young people *get it wrong* and *cause a mess*, a helpful first response should always focus on finding out who has been affected and how the situation can be repaired, and learned from.

Through these types of approaches we provide a steady stream of feedback to young people about when they are, and are not, meeting these expectations. This is in stark contrast with systems where punishment is the only form of feedback to young people about their behaviour.

[This workshop is dedicated to the values and strategies that work best](#) when the teacher feels that it is time to have a private, (after the fact) conversation with a student about the impact of their behaviour on themselves, on others in the class, and even us as their teacher. Often, the catalyst for this style of conversation will be some form of disciplinary referral – where a student has been sent from the classroom to a ‘time out place’, ‘reflection room’, ‘detention room’ or to a senior teacher’s office.

Nowadays, most teachers know enough about behavioural science to know that poor behaviour is never ‘fixed’ by just sending a student from the room. The option to exit a student is, however, an important disciplinary procedure that should ALWAYS be an option for classroom teachers to use wisely and with professional discretion. Emotionally intelligent teachers know that removing a student from a classroom is part one of a two part process:

1. The exit itself, this always needs to be done in as dignified and private way as possible, in a best-case scenario, the only people who know that the student has been asked to leave the room is the student themselves, and the teacher – easier said than done, but always worth striving for. Screaming a student out of the room is a dreadful look for everyone involved, but most of us have been there.
2. The follow up conversation between the student and teacher to try to establish what went wrong, how things can be restored and the chance of future behaviour referrals minimised.

Many teachers *understandably shy away from this second step*. These types of conversations take an emotional toll and we have to be at our emotional best to make them go well. This is particularly true when the young person involved is struggling to see the issue from your perspective and the perspective of others, or begins the conversation in self-protection mode, feeling that too much is at stake to admit that their behaviour was wrong! Before a follow up conversation with a student, we may worry about things like:

- *What if the student rolls their eyes or crosses their arms while I try to speak with them?*
- *What if they disagree, interrupt or interject?*
- *What if they tell me that I got it wrong, that I picked on them, didn't listen, or that I acted unfairly?*
- *What if they don't take the chat seriously or mock me?*
- *What if they just look through me saying 'whatever' and 'I don't care'?*
- *What if they walk off before the conversation is finished?*

These are all valid concerns we might take into these follow up conversations with particular students, especially if we don't know them, but *do* know their reputation!

So, how concerned should we be about one of these things actually happening? Well, *it depends on what outcomes we want from the conversation.*

Outcome One

Seeking the win: to overpower and overthrow

When student behaviour is seriously irritating, it's normal to become more rigid in our thinking. Our good humour and flexibility become casualties. When we become determined to be 'right' by proving the student wrong... to re-establish our authority...expecting the student acquiesce, then perhaps we *should* be worried that some students will talk back in *snot tone*, argue, eye roll, try to justify their actions or even walk away from us before we've *finished with them*. This is what many young people (and not so young people) do when they feel that their dignity is at stake. As teachers, it's easy to employ our superior logic, verbal fluency, debating skills and **positional power** to out manoeuvre or outwit a young person.

- *This is my classroom and I will not have people behave that way...*
- *You were wrong and you always do this, it was only yesterday when you...*
- *Your behaviour was inappropriate and every time you act that way, I will...*
- *If you want to be in my classroom you will need to start...*
- *I'm not the only teacher who says you behave this way...*

When we talk like this, we never win a young person's good will. In trying to be *right*, and make a young person *wrong*, we sow the seeds of continuing stubbornness and resistance from a young person. Some students will quietly retreat and passively resent, even white-bait us. Others become resistant, even openly defiant toward us. At this extreme end they may look for any opportunity to prove that they are *more popular* with the other students than we are!

In either situation where a student has come to resent us, our *influence* over the young person is diminished. We can forget about teaching them anything!

When we aren't feeling *the love* from a student, it is easy to, out of frustration, fall back to punitive means to influence them, where our actions become *revenge based*. After all, we might feel this is all we have left to control this student – using our ability to make their time with us unpleasant in the hope that this changes their attitude. Sadly, because many of these young people have become so good at protecting their dignity, instead of backing down, their indignation boils and trust is further eroded. When a student decides we are their enemy, everybody loses.

Outcome 2

Seeking good will: the quest to win hearts and minds

What if, instead of looking for some sort of *moral victory* over the student, we were genuinely interested in their perspective and feelings about what happened? What if our desired outcome was to cultivate good will and to come to an understanding – even a compromise between what the young person wants and what we want?

What if we entered into this conversation with a willingness to compromise, to seek a solution where we could both walk away feeling *a bit better* about each other – where it is important to us that the student feel like we treated them fairly (not softly)?

If we enter a conversation with a young person with these outcomes in mind, the possibility that we will meet with some resistance seems far less frightening. Dale Carnegie, in his classic *“How to Win Friends and Influence People”* talks about the power that comes from *‘welcoming the disagreement’*. This means, being ready and interested to hear a viewpoint different to your own. This sits in stark contrast to merely wanting to *‘tell that student a thing or two about how my classroom works’*.

You will notice within these six tips, particular questions that actually invite a young person's opinion about *what happened*. When we show a young person that we are ready to hear their side, without trying to *win* the conversation, we will more often than not, over time, earn a young person's good will and trust. We will also help them think about the reasons they did what they did –

These six tips take us through things we can think, say and do, that give us the best chance of helping a young person to come through the *follow up conversation* with their dignity intact, so they are more likely to *take responsibility for their behaviour* and see us as an advocate, not the enemy!

Conveying acceptance and good-will, while challenging a person about their behaviour or performance is a seriously tricky balance, but it is what exemplary behaviour management is based on. In workplaces, effective management also relies on this ability.

The ideas and approaches in these *six tips* have drawn influence from:

- Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT)
- The work of Dr. Bill Rogers
- Restorative Practices
- Individual Psychology
- The Art of Ethical Influence (Dr. Robert Cialdini)
- Affect Script Theory (Silvan Tomkins and Donald Nathanson MD.)
- Reintegrative Shame Theory (Prof. John Braithwaite)

This session brings these theories together to help us deconstruct and then reconstruct this crucial set of skills– *following up and following through* with a young person after things have gone wrong.

Put on whiteboard 2 diagrams:

1. 'Kids we teach' pyramid
2. Social Control window

Explain the pyramid

In terms of the 'Positive Behaviour Support' data model – 85% of kids in any school, no matter where the school is, and the nature of its clientele, handle school life and learning without too much trouble. These kids aren't regularly referred to year level coordinators or other leadership staff for behavioural problems, because they have the capacity to respond well when they are redirected by classroom teachers. We do not find ourselves having the kind of interaction with them that the 6 tips teach us to do better.

Conversations where skills from the 6 tips are usually employed is with the top 15% of the pyramid: the toughest 15% of students. These are the kids who for all sorts of reasons, don't respond to lower level behaviour correction and need us to work on a *wiser* level with them.

Some schools refer to these students as their 'frequent flyers'. When I say 'work at a wiser level', I mean that these kids demand the best of our moral and professional conduct. Why? Because their behaviour and reactions to our interventions put us under more emotional pressure than the other 85% of kids we come across.

If we choose to take on the challenge, learning to work with these kids will make *better teachers* and *better human beings* of us. Working with challenging kids well requires that we learn to regulate our own emotions, plan ahead and react with genuine compassion and interest in their wellbeing. In other words, we have to move beyond just saving these qualities for the kids we find to be *nice* or *cooperative*. Challenging students can so easily bring the worst behaviour from us and cause us to unravel – to *give into our need to overpower and overthrow*.

Teachers learning to do better with the 15%, often say that they have to work *counterintuitively*, continuously pausing to let their urge to react from 'gut' pass, and then saying or doing something that is the *opposite* to what they previously would have said or done. Eventually, teachers develop a series of 'scripts' to use with tricky students in tricky moments, in other words, they create a bank of things to say and do that tend to get positive outcomes most of the time, and at least, don't inflame a volatile situation.

The Social Control Window

You'll remember from our earlier work that the best outcomes, when it comes to kid's behaviour and their ability to make positive changes, come when teachers work in the upper right quadrant. Here we deal with students in a manner that makes clear our expectations in a respectful way. In this wonderful zone, we also follow up when young people fall short of our, and the school's expectations.

However, in this *following up*, we need to demonstrate to young people that we are still *interested* in them (as people) by asking questions, listening to their viewpoint, and even explicitly re-teaching the behaviours we want.

This is not a one-size-fits all approach, because in this quadrant, we are appropriately flexible when we have to be. Here we have systems that acknowledge and reward rule following, considerate behaviour so we are reinforcing the *right kinds* of behaviour and not spending all of our time dealing with what we don't want to see from kids.

Explain 'punitive', 'permissive' and 'neglectful' in terms of how we respond, or fail to respond to challenging behaviour.

As we go through the six tips, I want you to think about where the different ideas and responses fall within these four quadrants of the social control window. When we work with tricky kids, we have to *check ourselves* often, because these kids can push us to making too many concessions

for them, or, the alternative, we might become too rigid in our dealings with them and close off to what they are saying and give into the desire to just punish them.

Slide 4 – Newspaper Article “Secret to Making our Kids Behave”

These 6 strategies are those follow-up chats with kids after we’ve perhaps asked them to leave the room, or just ‘worn their antics’ for too long and made a decision that we must discuss our concerns about their behaviour with them privately.

Yes, that’s right, none of us likes being corrected or spoken to in a public space where others can hear, or see that we are having one of *those* conversations with someone in authority. Emotionally intelligent teachers either never form the bad habit of chastising students publicly, or quickly mature out of this habit early in their career.

Unfortunately, in many classrooms, the poor practice of publically lecturing students, or asking demeaning and belittling *questions ‘do you think that’s appropriate do you?’ or ‘I’m sick and tired of having to ask you to stop that’...* is for some reason alive and well. Call it the authoritarian culture that remains in many schools, or whatever else you like, but many of our colleagues, in anxious moments, continue to give in to the temptation to publicly (even embarrassingly) challenge or confront students in the open , or within earshot of others. Because feelings are involved, this rarely delivers the long term outcomes we were hoping for. At worst, this invites outward resistance and rebellion from a student as they scramble to save face in front of their peers. At best, resentment builds and the student will struggle to engage.

Slide 6 “Think Outcomes”

So, it’s worth asking yourself **“What outcomes do I want from this conversation?”**

- Do I want to show the student I am on their side and help them to consider the impact of their behaviour on themselves and others?
- Do I want to make them aware of something about their conduct they clearly aren’t considering?
- Do I want to hear from them the reasons they are behaving this way and explore with them what will help them make different choices?
- Am I ready for some information about my own behaviour that may not be pleasant can I deal with this with dignity?
- Do I want to show them that I am in charge?
- Do I want to assert my authority and demonstrate that I have the power to make life tough for them if they don’t behave differently
- Do I want revenge?

These questions are about our intent!

It's good to have a plan, and an idea about the outcomes we are looking for before we talk to a student about their behaviour. If we go in reasonably calmly (easier said than done), with a plan based on seeking understanding and generating goodwill, we have a *better* chance of the conversation going well because the tone of the conversation will not be oppositional (us vs. them). If we want to make the student feel dreadful (because we feel dreadful about what they are doing in our class), then it's quite obvious what will happen. We will feel bad and the student will feel bad and we will spend the conversation defending our own position and holding tightly to our dignity! In these types of conversations, neither side gives any ground.

Of course, it's not always possible or practical to take a student aside; you might only need to give them a quick reminder of a rule. It's impossible to always correct students in private when you consider how much happens at one time in classrooms, of course! What I am talking about here is the more formal one to one chats that we need to have when the behaviour has been *too much*, or gone on for *too long*. These are the conversations that need to take place when our ability to effectively teach with, or around a student has reached an obvious impasse and their behaviour has reached a point of intensity, or frequency where things just can't go on the way they have been.

Slide 7: Reflection Time

I want you to try to remember the last time you felt publicly told off, or reprimanded by someone, perhaps it wasn't an actual telling off, maybe you were just contradicted or *proven wrong* in front of others by someone who was your superior. How did it feel? And more importantly, how did this change the way you feel about that person? Did you feel angry or resentful toward that person, angry at others for not sticking up for you, or ashamed of yourself?

The truth is that nobody likes a telling off. It doesn't matter whether you are five, or fifty five, being reprimanded feels awful. This is true for all of us regardless of age, gender, race or class. Being the one to communicate to another person that they have somehow fallen short of our expectations is tricky business because of the emotions (mainly *shame* and *embarrassment* that we will discuss later) are always present in these moments.

The types of teacher-students conversation that we are talking about today is a fine art in human relations and emotional intelligence.

Slide 8: The six Tips

Summary of the six tips – just read them through

Slide 9: Prepare yourself emotionally

Decide to be the adult in the conversation and take the emotional lead

Before you take a student aside to talk with them about 'what happened', you might consider having a chat with yourself first!

- Have you had some friendly encounters with this young person? In other words, are there any 'dollars in the emotional bank account'? Have you ever had a friendly conversation with them? At least, Perhaps a few lessons that have smoothly (if you teach them in a specialist lesson situation).
- Or, have the only times you've directly spoken to this young person been when you've had to ask them to 'quieten down' or 'begin their work' or some other kind of corrective language.
- How might some *friendly small talk* before you get into the *hard stuff* with them work. Regardless of the kind of relationship you have with a young person, some friendly chatter is highly advised in any situation like this. Even if it's simply checking their name with them and introducing yourself personally with a handshake! If you want to take a moment to go a step further. You could:
 - Comment on their shoes, stickers on their laptop or bag, something they are wearing that gives you a clue as to their hobbies or interests.
 - Invite them to tell you something about themselves and listen for a few moments. Show your interest. Smile, nod, *connect* and ask them questions as if they can teach you a thing or two.
- Ask yourself – from their response to your friendly start to the chat, does it seem likely that they will cope when you raise the main reason for why you have asked them to stay back for a moment, or join you in detention. Do you believe they will be able to take some responsibility for their behaviour and admit that their choices were *not so great*, or might they duck, weave, lie, deny, struggle to own up, or blame others "*I wasn't the only one, what about..., I wasn't...I didn't...?*"
- If they begin to react defensively when you start with
 - "Hey, I don't want to keep you too long, but I want to talk about..."
 - "*The reason I wanted to talk with you is...*"
 - "I know it's a pain to stay back and talk but I'm concerned about..."
 - "Your time is important; I'd better get to the point..."
 - "This isn't *major crime stuff*, but I want to talk with you about..."

Remind yourself who you're dealing with...just a kid!

Here's where some self-administered CBT really comes in handy. If we fear a tense interaction with a *teen*, it's handy to remind yourself of this:

*When you look beneath the bravado and the cheek, before you is a young human who is struggling with adolescent developmental tasks. Their poor choices are evidence of their social awkwardness, their anxiety about where they fit in and their deep worries about whether they are liked by peers or teachers. Their eye rolling, tongue clicking, muttering, smirking, folded arms and keen willingness to argue with you in **snout tone** shows you that this moment is shameful for them and that they are fearful that you will be another teacher who will confirm their fears that they are no good. Because their brain is under construction, and very likely experiencing some developmental delays, they are years away from understanding any of this about themselves.*

Michael Grose goes as far as to remind us that if we want to understand a 13 year old's behaviour from a brain development standpoint, deduct ten years from their age, because on many levels, you are dealing with a three year old!

If the young person's demeanor is particularly tricky, remind yourself that you are a grown up with qualifications, a mortgage, a car, a steady income and the right to stay out as late as you like! This young person can't take that from you no matter how they react! Say to yourself:

- *"I was a scared and cocky kid once –I came out the other end –I've been there, done that!*
- *I am going to take hold of this conversation and show this kid I want to work with them!"*

Slide 10: Defaced Teacher

Frightening picture isn't it! Chances are that most of us in the room have had something written about us, texted, passed as a note around the room, scratched under a desk or on the back of the toilet door or these days, emailed or posted on Facebook. None of us want to have a student to take a picture of us and then post it. But, you know you could be the best teacher in the world and have this happen because relationships with kids won't always go smoothly! Being a teacher places you in a position of power and you won't please everyone all of the time.

However, I'm happy to risk suggesting that if kids find us consistently unfair, emotionally inaccessible, or demeaning of them, we run a far greater risk of being the recipient of this type of attention. It's truly ugly stuff and I've been involved in many schools in helping to manage the devastating emotional fallout of this when it occurs and causes people harm.

Undying good will

This is hard because we have specialised brain cells called *mirror neurones* that cause us to literally mirror back the emotions we are seeing from another person. Mirror neurones are what create what the experts call 'social contagion' or 'affective resonance'. They are what cause an angry mob to form

and spin out of control. Mirror neurones are also responsible for the very uncomfortable moment when someone's anguish causes us to cry along with them.

However, in the moment when we are face to face with a young person who may be feeling resentful and angry towards us, we *catch* these emotions and often reflect them right back at them. This is why you are so exhausted after that tricky class walk out of the classroom door, you have been **regulating your own emotional responses** for 50 minutes, using your neo-cortex to override limbic responses, thinking twice, taking deep breaths, biting your tongue, thinking ahead, playing 'what if' with yourself.

When we fall victim to mirroring emotion, raised voice causes another raised voice; a comment *dripping with sarcasm* invites an antagonistic reply and before we know it, we have lowered our *moral threshold* and have been drawn into a tit for tat exchange with a young person as we try to defend our position, or our very personhood!

- *Don't look at me with that look on your face...*
- *I suggest you change your tone, NOW...*
- *How about saying that loud enough so I can hear it...*
- *Look at me when I'm talking to you*
- *Stand up straight, and while we're at it, those shoes are against dress code...*
- *Tuck your shirt in please...*
- *You waste my time, I'll waste yours...*
- *Don't you think I've got more important things to do than ask you to act your age?*

Why can I rattle off so many of these with such fluency? It's because I'm a *recovering confrontationist*! Yes, I once (and sometimes still get trapped) in these types of exchanges when my mirror neurones and amygdala bypass my neo cortex and I become the same mental age as the young person I'm trying to work with.

When a boss of mine, a wonderful Principal at an alternative secondary school I worked at, talked with me about *showing undying good will*, I thought, at the time that this was permissive:

- *If I'm kind, the kids will think they've won – gotten one over on me*
- *I have my position as the teacher to protect*
- *This kid needs to know they have stepped over MY line and it's my job to tell them*
- *I don't like her tone, and I'm going to mention it!*

Slide 11: It's not about the Hat

Let's have a look at a teacher who shows no goodwill to a young person. It's confronting, so be prepared.

Show "It's not about the hat – Boston 24-7

1.25 - ending

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9_WwuGF4dM (or on laptop on iLivid)

This poor teacher makes a set of glaringly obvious mistakes in this interaction with young Mr Wilkins.

- *In pairs, discuss how you would have started this conversation differently*

Allow time for feedback to the group

Slide 12: Kid with headphones

It's crucial to show a young person that you *like* them as a person, if you don't like them, try hard to pretend that you do! Some people take *moral umbrage* to this suggestion, hung up about the ethics of pretending to like people that you don't really like.

I suggest that thinking one thing about a person, but treating them with friendliness, respect and dignity is part of being a grownup.

Further things to consider:

- Sometimes, because displaying fury and hostility has got kids what they've wanted in the past, kids can become stuck at being angry to show their displeasure or to get their way. Remember your mirror neurones and don't fall victim to them!
- Educators who do best intuitively know that their students' emotional stability is keenly connected to theirs, and to remain effective they avoid being caught up in the vortex of emotional chaos which often surround these children.

Slide 13: Affective Statements

Affective statements, (also named the *feedback sandwich*) is essentially a piece of feedback that challenges a student about their behaviour, but is delivered in a warm and friendly manner where the teacher also points out positive things about the young person. It is an emotionally intelligent way to help a person manage the 'sting' (shame) of negative feedback. This approach dates back as far as you wish to delve into the literature on managing people. Dale Carnegie in 'How to Win Friends and Influence People' talks of how legendary leaders like Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln were skilled in the art of using *feedback sandwiches* with their subordinates, whom they so urgently depended on.

When you get good at affective statements, you will improve, or transform your relationships with the challenging kids you teach. You might think of affective statements as a slap on the face between 2 warm hugs!

Slide 14: The RPs Continuum

The Restorative Practices continuum (showing affective statements).

One principle of Restorative Practices is to directly confront wrongdoing or harmful behaviour, but do so in a way that supports the intrinsic human worth of the person being challenged.

Slide 15 and 16: Chialdini's Research on Ethical Influence + Barry Field's Research

Professor Robert Chialdini's research found that if people believe we like them, they are much more likely to like us in return. The payoff is increased trust and a greater likelihood that they will comply with our desires. If you are interested, Google Chialdini and find out about the other five principles of ethical influence.

Show Chialdini clip from 7:40 – 9:05, clarify the principle of liking

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cFdCzN7RYbw>

Slide 17: Conveying Liking

Conveying *liking* to young student is easy! Most of them are little *love sponges* who soak up our love and then leak it out all over us again. An adolescent student on the other hand can be dicey business because adolescents are deeply sensitive to how they look to their peers. Although they have a yearning to be liked and positively regarded by teachers, many need to balance this need with not looking *too friendly* with teachers. That's just uncool! Here are some sensible ideas to help you do this without embarrassing the student or yourself!

- Put your focus on what a young person (or class) does right – what you pay attention to will grow
- Learn students' names as quickly as you can and use them when you speak to them
- Written positive feedback on returned student work is extremely effective
- Greet students politely on their way in to the room and say 'goodbye' on their way out
- Show interest in something a student is interested in. Act naive about it and invite them to teach you!
- Use proximity praise – keep it short and punchy
- Be careful about public praise – for many 15%ers it will have the opposite effect you are looking for
- Use non-verbal praise – a discrete nod, thumbs up or even a wink
- Don't be afraid to make yourself look a bit goofy with adolescents – they may publically give you a hard time but will inwardly appreciate your efforts

Slide 18: Shame and Humiliation

To understand *Reintegrative Shaming Theory* in any depth, some background reading in *Affect Script Psychology* and the work of Criminologist John Braithwaite will help.

What is easy to understand however is that when we have a tough conversation with a student about their behaviour, **we will trigger shame in the student, and ourselves!** A student from the 15% won't usually look like what being guilty or ashamed *should* look like as they answer back, deny, or act cocky to defend themselves. However DON'T BE FOOLED! Rest assured, these behaviours are seated in their scripted responses to *shame*. Nathanson's *Compass of Shame* explains in some detail the behaviours we see students use to defend themselves when they feel ashamed.

The research: If a person doesn't like themselves or feel liked by you, your words of correction will just make them more ashamed and they will NOT be able to change their behaviour. They will only spiral deeper into their unhelpful behaviours.

These young people will defend themselves by going to any one of the 4 poles on the *compass of shame*. They might get into behavioural patterns of socially withdrawing, they might get into self-loathing, attacking themselves, they may get into avoidance of shame – showing off, being fake, substance abuse or the last option, when nothing else relieves the shame-pain, they will turn the tables and try to reduce the self-esteem of another by attacking them (attack other) through put downs, bullying, violence. This area requires some further reading to better understand.

Slide 19: Braithwaite and Reintegrative Shame

Criminology research confirms this stuff!

Slide 20: Socratic Questioning

Asking questions shows our willingness to let a young person speak. Don't cut them off / interrupt / contradict– even if you don't agree with what they are saying – this is the road to destruction. We are modelling to young people when we interact with them in this way.

Slide 21: 15%ers may...

Prepare yourself for the likely scenario that a student from the 15% will:

- Probably not see their behaviour as a problem in the same way you do
 - “What’s the big deal, I can’t believe you put me in detention over that”
 - “I always say that, other teachers don’t have a problem with it”
 - “Are you serious? Why are you picking on me for? This sucks”
 - “I was just talking with my friends, Jeez, what’s your problem?”
 -

- May blame us or others for their behaviour
 - “Well if you hadn’t of ... I wouldn’t have...”
 - “If you weren’t on my back all of the time I’d get more work done”
 - “You’re so uptight, none of the other teachers care when I... Chill out!”
- Perhaps stretch the truth, sanitize, sugar coat, perhaps completely lie and deny!
 - “I was just mucking around”
 - “I went back to my desk as soon as you asked me to”
 - “I was just over there checking about some work that I wasn’t sure about”
 - “I left the room because Mrs... said she wanted to see me in the front office”

Slide 22: The Socratic Style – Restorative Questions

These questions make up what we call the ‘individual restorative conference script’. You see the *individual conference* at the 2nd stop on the restorative practices continuum.

We call this questioning based approach of interaction ‘Socratic style’. When we politely ask students questions, instead of lecturing, we engage completely different neural circuitry in their brains, and in doing so, strengthen more empathic and considerate thinking styles. Because these types of questions, when asked respectfully don’t trigger shame and anger, they also help students in the 15% to get past their scripted shame responses so they can reflect better on the impact their behaviours are having on others.

We are in the business of *conscience building* as we ask kids to consider the effect of their choices on those around them. The rule of thumb is whenever you can, **ask, not tell**.

Telling somebody off breeds resentment. Gently asking a young person questions about their choices and what impact they may have had on others is much gentler, and is more likely to reach an end where a young person can *admit* to themselves that perhaps they might have chosen a different way.

Don’t be confused, our goal is not to force an admission of guilt.

Slide 23: WARM Questioning

When asking these questions, follow the WARM principle. WARM, first developed by Greg Jansen and Richard Matla, the directors of *Restorative Schools* in New Zealand, is a handy acronym to help us get it right when using restorative questioning.

The word ‘warm’ takes on a dual meaning. Firstly, it describes the manner that works best when questioning a young person about their behaviour. We should aim to come across as *warm* in our manner and *warm* in our intent. This shouldn’t be confused with being *sooky or sycophantic*. Put

another way, we use a tone of 'polite inquiry' when speaking to the young person and we allow ourselves time to listen intently and respectfully to their responses. We don't need to always respond to their answers to our questions, we can just acknowledge their responses, pause and ask the next question.

What's happened? *Questions you might ask are:*

- What's been the problem from your side?
- Do you know why I asked you to stay back for a chat?
- What do you think has been going wrong for you in our maths class?
- Can you talk me through what you were thinking in English today when you..?

Affect: How have people been affected? *Questions you might ask are:*

- Who do you think has been affected by that behaviour
- Who was affected when you ...
- How are people in our class affected when others behave that way?
- How is learning affected when people behave this way?
- How does that affect how successful you are in this class?
- Which class rule is affected by those sorts of choices?

Repair: How can the harm be repaired? *Questions you might ask are:*

- What will sort this problem out?
- What needs to happen to improve this situation?
- What do you think needs to happen next?
- What will fix this?

Move forward: How can we move forward? *Questions you might ask are:*

- How can we move forward from this?
- What would you like to see change for you in this class?
- What is the best way you can make this change happen?
- What should be our plan next time we are together in this class again?

WARM helps us stay on track with the order, language and intent of using these restorative questions.

Never underestimate the importance of pausing and allowing young people ample time to respond to these types of questions. There are many reasons people need time to respond to these questions:

- They require some thought
- The young person is battling 'cognitive shock' from the *shame* of the conversation itself
- The young person has slow processing of language
- The young person has developed a strategy of *giving the silent treatment* until the teacher becomes agitated and switches to lecture mode.

- The young person wants you to get angry so they will be *let off the emotional hook* and morally permit themselves to get angry back at you.

Long spells of silence in these conversations are unnerving when we are new to this questioning style. Stick with it and stay as calm as you can. You can calmly repeat or rephrase the question after a few moments, accepting that sometimes students will need clarification, or more time. Above are many different ways to rephrase these questions so you can ask again without sounding like a *broken record*.

Slide 24

This shows where in the continuum that this questioning style sits on the continuum of restorative responses to behaviour.

Slide 25 – Work through stretches of the truth

There are many reasons young people will have a different version of events to us. They are not necessarily being dishonest. When there is a *difference in perception* (let's be polite) between theirs and our view of events, we have an incredible opportunity to teach students how to handle these types of moments.

If we blow it, they will think we are calling them a liar! If we do believe they are lying, do we HAVE to point this out? Can we preserve their dignity by sidestepping a little? Can we respectfully maintain that *we just saw it differently* and leave it there? Of course we can. Remember, the outcome is not to seek the win, overpower and overthrow the student.

There's a handy little approach that clever teachers use called *discrepancy assertion*. Simply put, the teacher says "*on one hand you are telling me this, but on the other, I saw (or heard)... help me understand this?*" Use this if you feel compelled, but with a very challenging student, it still may not bring agreement. What this approach does do is respectfully make clear that there's a *discrepancy* between what the young person is saying and what you saw happen. Simple as that. Deliver it without sarcasm or malice and you may be pleasantly surprised with what comes next.

I've seen teachers make the deadly mistake of *hammering* young people on small details of the story that really have little impact on the bigger picture.

- "*No, that happened just after I...*"
- "*No, that's not right, my exact words to you were...*" (How the heck would you remember your exact words anyhow?)
- "*No, your exact words to me were...*"
- "*No, they were on the edge of the table, not near the middle like you said...*"

The consequence of this *nit-picking* is obvious; it creates an interrogative feel to the conversation and conveys mistrust and suspicion. Try to keep your focus on the *big picture* in these conversations. If you give a student some leeway, you have a better chance of getting some leeway in return.

If you must pick up on the finer details, at least try not to start your sentence with the word “no”. Perhaps try something like “*what I thought I heard was...*” instead.

Remember – undying good will helps people take a greater level responsibility for the past choices they are not proud of.

Slide 26: Be specific about behaviour

When naming the problem behaviours – try to really name them. Describe exactly what you saw or heard to the student but do this respectfully.

- *Can I tell you what I saw? Thanks, I saw you walk over to your desk and drop your books down from about this high. It made a loud noise that startled some people.*

Avoid broad and abstract labels to describe behaviours:

- “*You acted inappropriately*”
- “*You were rude*”
- “*you were insolent*”
- “*You showed me attitude*”
- “*You were violent*”

These sorts of behavioural descriptions have been used by teachers to *stitch up* challenging kids for centuries. The unfair thing to our kids in the 15% is that when we describe their behaviour in such *loose and broad* ways, we don’t describe what they did clearly enough for them to understand. Broad terms such as these don’t give kids clear *mental pictures* of what parts of their behaviour caused the problem. They do not make them more self aware. If they don’t know, they can’t change it.

Remember that kids from the 15% don’t have a good idea of what they look and sound like to others – this lack of self-awareness (or blind spot), is a big part of the reason they have such difficulty at school.

When trying to describe what they did or said, ask them if you can show them what they did and how it looked by mirroring (acting it) in front of them. However, always ask a student’s permission and don’t try for an Oscar.

Model with a colleague how a teacher will mirror a student’s behaviour

Slide 27: Be brave enough to admit your mistakes

Admit your mistakes. This is the best of restorative behaviour. Kids won't normally chastise you for this; they will respect you for it. I'm yet to meet a teacher who has been sued because they admitted a mistake or misjudgement to a student.

Being brave enough to admit your own errors in judgement is nothing short of a gift we can give to young people. It is utterly disarming for an angry person, who is ready for an argument, to have their *perceived opponent* openly acknowledge an error in their actions, or even apologise. Try it and see.

It is almost impossible that doing this will invite further scorn from a young person. Usually, it will have the complete opposite effect. It will drastically alter the young person's demeanour and they will be far, far more willing to then admit where they may have done wrong as well.

This models humility and courage to a young person. We are after all, in the business of modelling moral conduct.

Slide 28: BEWARE Body Language

Men especially – learn to be acutely aware of your volume, posture, position and proximity in relation to students when you have these conversations.

If you activate a student's brain's threat centres, you will see the student run tried and true *scripts* (learned behaviours) to protect themselves and the conversation may be unsalvageable from that point, unless you are a very skilled practitioner with students from the 15%.

Aggressive body language can send a kid (particularly a traumatised one) into *defensive brain chemistry* and they will not process anything you say from then on because their brain will have switched to protection mode and they are in fight, flight or freeze mode. Here are a few things to think about while you have a conversation with a young person:

- How close to the young person am I?
- Am I watching their body language to gauge their level of comfort with my proximity to them.
- Am I towering over them?
- Am I sitting so far away that I'm coming across distant or emotionally removed?
- Is my voice louder or quieter than normal?
- Are my hands relaxed or clenched
- Am I clenching my jaw or is my face looking relaxed?
- Have I accidentally blocked their *escape route* by being between them and the door? If so, I need to move.
- Am I sitting directly facing them, or am I at their side, where the eye contact isn't so intense?

Boys are particularly sensitive to any body language that may be physically threatening. Someone once said, evolutionarily speaking, *teenagers are not far from the jungle*. They are at an age where their brain has a hair trigger when it comes to potential threat from others. If you can, try not to

approach boys front on, or sit or stand directly facing them. Use the angles and you will have a more relaxed young man to work with.

Slide 29: Kung Fu with Bill Rogers

Let's have a look at a personal Hero of Mine – Bill Rogers, in the DVD series 'Cracking the Challenging Class'. Bill has given me permission to show this to teachers in this context.

Bill Rogers FUFT conversations clip

End.