

## The Richmond Framework: Nine professional conversations concerning behaviour management

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### Abstract

*Good relationships are the core of effective teaching.* This statement, which is undeniably true, also inspires guilt, accurately illustrating the problem that classroom teachers face as they struggle to be marginally effective with disenfranchised learners. It is an act of daily courage for teachers to maintain their energy and enthusiasm for the profession in the rough and tumble of daily interactions with (and concerning) these students. Teachers logically want to reduce the disruptive behaviour of those who challenge; indeed, it is essential for engagement. However, when *focussing on controlling other people's behaviour* becomes a slippery slope into counterproductive, time-consuming and energy-sapping interactions, it robs everyone of the joy of learning. Among those who are most vulnerable (in terms of their difficulty accessing an education) are the students with serious learning and behaviour problems who are referred to your case loads.

While it is plainly unfair to expect teachers to plunge into the classroom without adequately preparing them for the most important aspect of their careers ... (how to elicit enthusiastic cooperation from a large group of coerced students who display a range of social and learning competencies), this is too often the case. Playing catch up after teachers have tried, failed and become despondent is a painful and expensive process for the entire community ... and that is *your* daily grind as specialist support staff.

Many of the papers at this conference specifically address your on-going need for the latest information concerning students with behavioural and learning characteristics that prevent them from easily accessing the learning environment. This paper does not. Instead, it focuses on contributing to your collegial helping strategies.

Students belong to a coerced population. They have no choice but to be in a certain place, mix with a particular group of people, and undertake prescribed activities for a set period. A perfectly understandable response to coercion of any kind is resistance. Managing the politics of resistance in class takes more than talent, common-sense and good-will, although all these characteristics certainly help. Effectiveness takes a particular kind of *relationship literacy* that has its own meanings, grammar and dialects. It is learnable, but not all teachers have been exposed to the language of behaviour management in ways that assist them to make intelligent responses rather than emotional reactions, especially when they are under pressure.

When students are difficult to engage and a teacher knows that his or her best efforts have failed, it feels horrible (one might even describe it as “punitive”). In these situations, it is logical to try whatever one can to stop the problem. In difficult situations, people tend to do the best they can to cope. For example, they might want to reciprocate with

punishment, they might externalise it by blaming others and denying their own responsibilities, or they might want to give up. Unless teachers are confident in their own ability to manage with and without support, the relationship between themselves and their students who challenge suffers. The cost is shared by the student, his or her family, the community and by the teachers themselves. It takes a lot of courage to teach well, but even more to teach poorly. No teacher wants to make it harder for themselves; however, it is relatively easy to become sucked into a vortex of replicating unhelpful practices.

If we see students in the classroom as, say, “coerced consumers”, then the teacher is marketing a product that these consumers do not necessarily want to buy. Few people outside the profession truly understand the difficulty of this work as it is expressed through classroom interactions, experienced in the dynamic nature of teacher-student relationships and measured through the quality of the students’ engagement with learning. In situations when teachers, (for whatever reason, and it is usually a confluence of reasons) find that particular students are particularly difficult to engage they either seek specialist support or are compelled to do so by others.

When a student is referred for specialist support, you can be inadvertently thrust into a politically sensitive situation when the teachers involved are themselves coerced and believe that their own behaviour that is under critical scrutiny. In many ways, it can be as challenging to work with these colleagues as it is the students themselves.

You are all intimately aware of collaborative consultation processes and use these to ameliorate the stigma associated with being seen to be an expert who has the answer, the cure, or the fix. However, there are predictable patterns within the professional interactions between teachers and specialists that have the potential to hijack the agenda of working together successfully, no matter how skilled your communication processes are. In a supportive role, one continues to learn new ways to address each issue as it almost inevitably arises. It is not your job to solve the problem that teachers face in classrooms but it is your job to support, prompt, guide, teach and listen to these teachers as they experiment with ideas and strategies that might be novel to them.

From the outset, I know that the vast majority of teachers and school leaders who work in classrooms and in specialist positions are ethically motivated, thoroughly skilled and resilient adults undertaking valuable work day after day. However, as mentioned earlier, situations involving students who are difficult to engage can trigger counterproductive decision-making in the most robust professionals. When this occurs, it is difficult to know what to do and it is easy to become stuck in despondency and despair. The usual routines and climates of entire classrooms, indeed schools, can implode when a problem either erupts suddenly or grows incrementally over time. People find themselves in deeply vulnerable situations. It impacts so personally that even the most resilient, as Dr John Langley put it in his keynote at your recent Behaviour Management Summit, “can be inspired to take a long hard look at the drinks cabinet after work”.

While you cannot remove, cure or fix the problems inherent in a referred case, you can and do use particular types of conversations to prompt your colleagues to take the next informed step in their work with their students. When you are successful in case work, the teachers involved emerge from the process stronger, better informed and more able to engage all students in learning.

Professionals can feel intimidated by the idea that their performance is scrutinised. Ironically, when you reach out to work with a colleague who is having management concerns, the act of support inadvertently advertises that teacher's current difficulties. Successfully addressing this conundrum lies at the heart of learning how to "do" behaviour management effectively from your specialist perspective. Knowing when and how to challenge a belief, contribute suggestions that will refine a plan, and demonstrate a strategy without inadvertently eroding a colleague's self-efficacy is delicate work. The (modestly named) Richmond Framework maps this work and provides another structural tool for you to consider adding to your existing repertoire.

The framework, illustrated in Figure 1, maps the territory of behaviour management from a leadership perspective (which is where you are working). It provides a visual model for tracking the "doing" mentioned above. The framework contains nine discrete sites of work that you engage in with your teachers, typically via professional conversations.

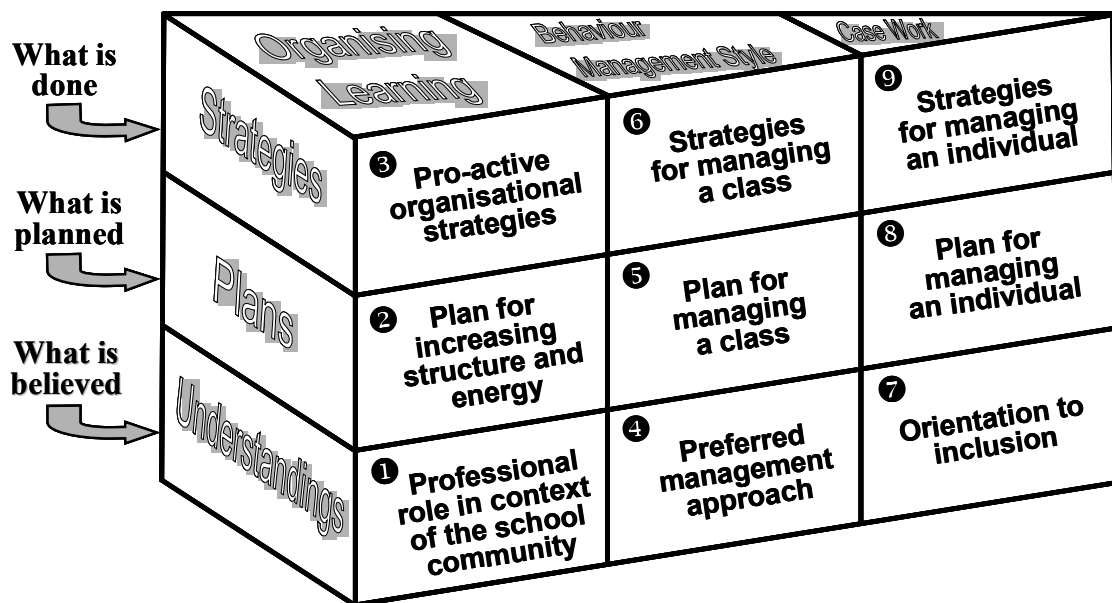


Figure 1: Richmond Framework

The base of the framework concerns how your colleague teachers *understand and commit* to their work as professionals in the idiosyncratic contexts of their schools (more broadly) and communicate with their students (more specifically). Moving upward, the next level on the vertical axis involves how you can support teachers to *plan* for teaching and managing effectively in order to maximise learning time and minimise the amount of time and energy that they spend managing. The top level is comprised of information about how you can help teachers identify the *strategies* that they can use to influence students to engage with learning, to manage adeptly not only whole classes, but also the few particularly challenging individuals who have led to your involvement.

Across the horizontal axis shown at the top of Figure 1, the framework maps three types of behaviour management work in which specialists engage. It begins at the left with how you can help teachers *organise* themselves in order to work effectively. The middle

column on this axis deals with how you can help teachers explore particular *behaviour management styles* in order to identify one or more that best resonates for them with particular classes. It concludes, on the right, with how to support the *casework* undertaken with individual students who present with particular challenges.

It is important that you notice the shape of the framework as it describes management work identified across each level of the horizontal axis. It is a wedge symbolising an important aspect of teachers' work. For example, it is broadest on the left indicating that attention to organisational factors (proactive work) is crucial in helping a teacher set up a predictable learning environment for all students. The narrower set of cells in the centre of the wedge indicates that while the quality of behaviour management itself is important, its efficacy is dependent on factors related to those in the widest section. The wedge finishes in a point on the right, indicating that work with the relatively small number of students who have particularly challenging behaviour should not dominate the time and effort of individual teachers. This work requires the input of your specialist knowledge, through a school-based team approach.

While there are obvious links between sites within the framework, for practical reasons each is explored individually in the keynotes to enhance your knowledge. The order in which these professional conversations appear in the visual model in Figure 1 is not at all indicative of how you might go about your work with colleagues. You might begin supporting an individual teacher (or a group of teachers) at any site identified within the framework and then move to any other as the opportunity arises.

### **Conclusion**

The sequential keynote addresses and subsequent workshop explore a map of nine conversations that specialist teachers have with their classroom based colleagues concerning behaviour management. This approach unromantically cuts through the complexities of the ubiquitous search for fairness, consistency and inclusion to provide a clear pathway for specialist teachers to progress their collaborative work with colleagues in intelligent and practical ways. The work is based on some of the information in Richmond, C. (2009) *Lead More, Manage Less: Five Essential Behaviour Management Insights for School Leaders*. This book is a companion to the text for teachers called, *Teach More, Manage Less: A Minimalist Approach to Behaviour Management*. Both books are published by Scholastic and are available at the Silvereye stand at the conference or from subsequently from the NZ representative of Scholastic. Should you be interested in obtaining copies, it is also possible for you to download order forms from my website ([www.christinerichmond.com.au](http://www.christinerichmond.com.au)) that, after providing relevant details, can be faxed directly to Scholastic.