

TLN Keynote CRT Conference 2 July 2014

“This is not how our teacher does it!”

Abstract

Too often students treat CRTs as fair game in class, turning what should be a day of joy into a nightmare. Yet as a CRT it's difficult to find the time to develop the kind relationship that could be your saviour when it comes to classroom management issues. If only the time spent dealing with misbehaviour could be used more positively.

There is a way! In this keynote Jo will explore the possibilities and strategies to help rapidly build successful relationships that can be used the very next time that phone rings.

Keynote

Being a CRT is a little like being a grandparent, you have the kids for a day or two and then you give them back! The difference is that sometimes you may never see these kids again while the grandparent has the privilege of getting to know the child over time and forming what is essentially a beautiful relationship that lasts a lifetime.

As a CRT, it's really difficult walking into a different classroom with a different set of students 4, 5, 6 or even 7 times a day. For primary school CRTs it means spending the most part of the day with the same students, and then perhaps taking a specialist class or working with another class while yours goes off to art, language or HPE class. As a casual relief teacher you become fair game in every one of these classes. You just don't have enough time to develop any form of relationship with these students and you know that this essentially would be your saviour when it comes to classroom management.

Having a CRT in class seems to be a tradition or right for students to misbehave. The lesson, research tells us, is seen as a waste of time because students are unlikely to learn anything and the usual teacher will need to re-teach it anyway, so invariably the CRT becomes the baby-sitter. Keep them quiet and keep them out of trouble. Don't vary the lesson plan, regardless of what they say to you and do not think that giving them some of your emergency activities from your bag of tricks is always going to work.

Student misbehavior, when they discover their usual teacher is absent includes:

- Avoiding work
- Testing boundaries
- Refusing to cooperate
- Intimidation
- Challenging authority
- Vandalising school property
- Using inappropriate language
- Socializing during class time
- Taking liberties
- Ignoring instructions

There are probably many more misbehaviours they could employ but the only thing a CRT won't be able to do is follow it up with threats of keeping them in at break time – when you most probably have yard duty commitments – and of course you most probably won't be around the next day and don't our students know it! They don't even seem to fear the fact that you can easily communicate their misbehaviour to their usual teacher, who is easily in the position to follow it up if they so desire. And there it is – will they? Do they? Why not? Well, it's probably simply because if you had such misbehavior, worthy of reporting, chances are that the work set did not get done and so they, the usual teacher, has to now waste more valuable time getting it done and secondly, it's not going to change things because well, who cares? CRT's aren't real teachers anyhow; otherwise they'd have a real job in a real school. Right?

Nothing could be further from the truth.

First of all, you certainly are a real teacher with VIT registration; otherwise you wouldn't be there to start. Incidentally, you wouldn't be sitting here listening to this, regardless of the reasons you are attending today. Next, you willingly choose to answer the phone on any given morning. You could easily say no or make up some excuse for not being able to do CRT work, third, well many of you choose to be CRTs as really there are pros in doing this work. Fourth, quite frankly, without you - there would be no way a school; any school could keep functioning every time one of their own goes off on PD, is sick, out on excursion, at an appointment etc. You are the catch at the

end of the lifeline that the school launches almost everyday. Your heads could be much bigger than they are at present. In fact, did you know that every child will be taught by a CRT for almost 2 years of their 13 years spent in primary and secondary education?

CRTs are a rare breed of teachers who know what they are in for, or learn pretty quickly after their first go! Picture this; you arrive at the school as early as is humanly possible after the desperate phone call, make small talk with office staff, see the daily organiser who hands you a box, stack of papers, a folder or whatever it is they keep extras in and you have very little time to go through the package before you are expected to attend morning briefing, find the coffee, the classroom, the staffroom and the bathroom, pretty much in that order. After all you won't have time to have a proper lunch break due to yard duty - and the bathroom, well, let's just say that your bladder had better be in good nick.

Bell rings and it's off to the first class of the day, assuming you haven't already had to attend a roll call class. You arrive to a class of unfamiliar students in an unfamiliar classroom setting and guess what? You're about to teach a subject that is not on your list of can do! AND the lesson plan is ... well actually, where is the lesson plan? Year 7 History ... *"the students know what they need to do."* OMG!!!

Where do you start? Firstly we are well aware that as educators we were born to make a difference. So let's start with that.

The student brain

Over the last 20 years we have made great leaps in understanding the way the brain works and are able to study it in both still and moving picture formats. We are aware that the teen brain develops from back to front, that is, the back of the brain referred to as the amygdala, where the fight or flight sensations develop to the frontal lobes, funnily enough, found at the very front of the brain and incidentally, the largest in humans. The frontal lobe is where we possess the ability to reason, to interpret and to show empathy. Are you getting the picture? So when we ask, "What were they thinking?" as we tend to do, when they do stupid things, the correct response is "well, they weren't!" Literally!

So let's go back to the fight and flight part of the brain. When cornered, the teen, has very little else to do but come out fighting in order to escape, so they *will* answer back, they *will* shout and they *will* argue, simply because they have no other more acceptable response forthcoming. So what do we as adults prove by arguing with them?

There are a number of neuro-myths that we grapple with. Up until recently we believed that the brain was static and could not be changed but the latest research suggests otherwise. There is talk of left brained and right brain dominance but ultimately while this is quite fun to explain to students, we do think and learn with our whole brain. But I still like to show them and teach them about how it might work for them. Let's have a look.

Step 1: Building Relationships

As a CRT you have very little time to build any relationship with the unknown species in the class. Or is there...?

There are a few things I would recommend:

Role modeling - do as I do.

Your attitude sets the scene – they are always watching and learning from us.

One thing you must remember is that classroom management starts outside the classroom. Arriving to class grumpy, tired, or unmotivated is only going to set the scene for a very unpleasant experience. Instead, why not arrive with a smile and a good morning! You could set the classroom culture by handing them something from your bag of tricks. It could just be a little introductory question such as *"name one thing you love to do in your spare time"* and every student could have different ones. It only takes 5 minutes to go around and ask for the responses, or, if you think you'd like to get right down to doing the work you could just ask for 3 responses and use them as a break in the classroom during the session. I don't see it as an interruption but I look at it as a positive reinforcement of relationship and it also helps them stay on track – you could use it to break up the learning. *"We'll go again in 15 minutes."* Did you know

that a child's attention span is their age in minutes? This could be a great way to give them a break.

Empathising with the students – walking in their shoes

We really don't need to enter the learning space with our own problems. As the adult we need to set our problems aside because there is going to be a full set of problems arriving with each individual student who joins the class today. Instead of being overly occupied with our own burdens, I'd like to suggest that we take a minute and walk in their shoes, perhaps ask ourselves the following real life questions (I personally can think of a child in each of the following situations):

What happened to them before they arrived to your particular class?

- Did they have a fight with their parent?
- Was there anything to eat for breakfast?
- Was it their responsibility to get siblings off to school, since the parent was off at work early?
- Were they up half the night perfecting their research project, on social media, watching TV or playing video games?
- Have they travelled a long way to school, been up since dawn getting here?
- Did they just get negative feedback?
- Did they fail a test that they thought they had fully prepared for?
- Were they bullied?
- Did they break up with their girlfriend/boyfriend?
- Did a teacher call them stupid?
- Did they fail to make the team?
- Have they just come from an appointment with the psychologist or social worker?
- Have they enjoyed this class in the past?

What did happen before they walked into your class?

So before you pounce, and I advise against going for the throat first, THINK. In fact just listen, look and learn. It is amazing how much you can gage just doing these three little things, listen, look and learn. Listen, look and learn. In fact, I've never had to ask what footy team they follow – just listen on a Monday morning and you'll soon know. I

never watch footy either, except the last quarter of any final – never been to the footy, but watching the sports segment on the news every Sunday night is enough for me to get by in my classes!

Be flexible – it's not the end of the world.

Just because the teacher says, doesn't mean it has to be done that way. There are many different ways one can get the work done other than how the absent teacher has directed. I'd firstly ask myself what I want the students to achieve. I'd have clear goals and begin to develop some sort of relationship. Don't forget that for them you are probably a stranger, even if they have had you before. Tell them something about yourself, say hi, smile, and tell them how you feel privileged to be teaching them today. Vary the lesson, sometimes fast, sometimes slow, talk, think, write, play, move, ask, answer, and reflect. Vary your voice. Julian Treasure (Sound consultant) talks about HAIL, H-A-I-L –to greet or acclaim enthusiastically - whenever you are speaking to an audience, one should think about HAIL. It is an acronym H- honesty, A -authenticity, I –integrity, L –love. You are there to make a difference to the students' learning. Know when to ignore secondary behaviours. You don't have to be the 'tough' guy all the time. Know the rules and apply them fairly and consistently. If you anticipate that they will behave then they will. Anticipate disaster and it will happen. Be optimistic. If your day doesn't start off great take a minute...to laugh.

Hooking them in

There are a few things I do to hook them into learning. There's nothing better than hearing them say at the end of a session, "*Miss that was so much fun! We didn't do any work!*" See I don't look at this statement negatively. Have you ever wondered what it really means? To me it's saying that for kids in order for them to think they are 'learning' they have to have done a lot of busy work. They don't necessarily associate play with learning. Actually, many adults think that playing is not learning but there's plenty of research to suggest otherwise. That's one of the reasons I always explain to students the purpose of what we are doing, or in many cases as a reflection after the fact and it's great to see their faces. Their eyes kind of wander to search inside their head, their mouths open slightly to *ohhhh*, as recognition happens and they realise they did actually do learning, even though they did no 'work'.

Brainstorms are one of my favourite tools to use when beginning a discussion. Once they have the words these can then be developed further into a mind map where ideas come together, some are abandoned in favour of others and new ideas get posted as they go. It can be done on their own, then in pairs and in groups and even whole classes. With technology it can even be done worldwide or with the class down the hall. With this ammunition then the student can develop sentences, sentences become paragraphs, and paragraphs become essays.

Now I wonder if it occurred to anyone that I used the 'g' word? **Group** work. For some, this is not a pleasant experience, in fact about 2/3 of your class don't like it, but they love collaboration, it's called Facebook, twitter, edmodo, blogs, Google docs etc. You see really there is no difference between group work and collaboration but somehow there are negative vibes when you say the 'g' word, say like cook and chef. What you need to do is get them to group work collaboratively, face to face. I'll extend on this idea in my workshops later.

Story telling is also a great way to get their attention no matter how old they are. Let me tell you a story...

I failed preps. Did you know that? For heaven's sake I failed preps! Between a family trip to Italy and eye surgery on my return I probably missed about 3 months of my first year at school. When I returned, it was to begin again.

In Grade 1, after repeating preps, I was often kept back after school because I didn't know my reader. The teacher would have me sit in a corner and 'read'. She never really assisted me and I never really understood how to go about teaching myself to *read* English – you see I knew how to read simple Italian words but that's phonetic so more easily done than English! That in hindsight, meant I wasn't as dumb as I was made to feel in school.

Every night I would be sent home to 'learn' my English reader. That was of no use really as both my parents were Italian! My mother knew some English at the time but I don't think she understood that she needed to 'teach' me how to read in English.

I have vivid images of one particular reader about a tiger in the jungle and most probably I could have explained the reader orally using the visuals BUT that didn't count. I simply couldn't read English and the teacher had no idea how to engage a student who presented as ESL. I tried.

Are you hooked?

Reciprocal Respect – age doesn't give you the advantage anymore

Gone are the days of respect your elders – get over it and move on 'GOIMO'. The second thing I think we forget is respect for the absent teacher. I heard a principal say once that regular teachers hate leaving work for fill in teachers. As a full time teacher in schools, I can sort of relate to this comment in that you are kind of torn about what work to leave. You really want your students to continue the learning that is already going on even when you are not there but at the same time you want to keep your great ideas for when you are present so invariably the lesson left may not be the greatest of lessons and sometimes they are just down right awful. I still don't see the point of the lesson that goes “*read Chapter 5 and summarise.*” Firstly it's the most boring of tasks ever! And, secondly, kids don't know how to summarise, as they have rarely been taught the skill in my experience. So I suggest that you BYO some ideas of your own or at least be up with the latest stuff on learning. Kids are fascinated by how our brain works and how we learn in different ways. It doesn't have to be complicated information, just interesting. So for example, on the topic of summarizing – a few choice graphic organisers can solve this problem immediately. Or some off the cuff brain theory. Did you know our brain can remember 5 main points written down the page but a myriad of ideas and responses written across the page? Why?

Water off a duck's back – be resilient and teach them to be resilient too!

Don't take it personally remember their brain...

Did you know that 94% of misbehavior can be ignored? That leaves only 6% that needs to be addressed. How should we go about doing this? For a start there is no use in shouting because students, even our own kids don't respond - it's like they are totally deaf to the

whole saga that unfolds out of your mouth. All it achieves is a rise in blood pressure and exhaustion. Why bother? You know the naughty ones always come to school! For them, believe it or not, school is a great place. Here they get attention and they don't care *how* they get it, as long as they do. The aim is to get them the attention they crave your way, not theirs.

And certainly, don't be punishing the whole class for the few who do misbehave. Instead, before pouncing just stop, pause and listen, then take the required action. The school would much rather you solve problems than create them. Remember the regular teacher and her lesson plans? They take a long time to do, as does following up misbehavior, especially if it could have been solved simply by stopping, pausing and then responding instead of reacting immediately without thinking. It's not about you. It's about them. Nothing personal.

Don't just babysit, teach them

The time will go much quicker. The measure of a good CRT is done by how good you are in front of the kids. You must approach with confidence as kids smell fear. You must be prepared and know what is expected by the regular teacher and by the school. Remind the students that you are someone else, somebody different and so you will be doing some things differently from their regular teacher. That's because everyone is different and everyone should be respected and received as they are. Don't be afraid to show them what their regular teacher has laid out for them and explain how you, as a different type of teacher will go about getting that done. Set high expectations, don't bribe but hook them into the learning. It's not work, it's learning you would like to share with them.

You are there to value add to the kids' learning so be authentic, show initiative and above all be loyal. Don't criticise the schools you work at, education is a small world and word will eventually get back to them. Make a difference instead to those kids' learning. Develop a relationship with them and with others at the school. Sit at the big table at lunchtime, let them know about the good things you did with the classes you took, build a loyalty with the whole school. Listen to their story, share their moments, schools do have favourites and you want to be at the top of their list.

Step 2: The rest will fall into place ...