

DEALING WITH DISCIPLINE 2



For Luke Prodrromou and Lindsay Clandfield **RAP is much more than merely music.**

We began this series of three articles asking the question 'Do you have a discipline problem?'. We proposed a hierarchy of 'teacher needs' to deal with discipline problems. These included rules and regulations, responses to misbehaviour, classroom management, discipline-friendly techniques and motivation.

Our third and final article (the second dedicated to dealing with discipline) elaborates on the antidote to demotivation and the subsequent misbehaviour of students, young and old. We have summed up the last three parts of our approach in the acronym RAP, which stands for Rapport, Attitude and Presence. The long-term, and probably most lasting, solution to problems of discipline lies in our ability to do three things.

Firstly, we need to build good *rapport* between ourselves and our learners and between one learner and another.

Secondly, we need to adopt strategies and techniques that inspire positive *attitudes* in our learners; this is often as simple as having positive attitudes ourselves. A teacher's enthusiasm is by nature infectious, a fact confirmed by research and common sense.

Finally, our most powerful weapon in dealing with discipline problems is our own *presence* or *personality*. Though an elusive quality, it is often cited in training courses and handbooks for teachers as a mark of good teaching. It includes our enthusiasm but it is much more and it is worth trying to break it down into its constituent parts and then building it up again into a synthesis which should become habitual in our classroom practice.

'Remember the best attention-getter is the sheer force of your personality, your presence.' Dörnyei

How to start, then, to build RAP as a remedy to discipline problems? Let's begin from the beginning: our first moments with a new class are particularly important. Here are some tips for making the most of our presence in these moments:

RAP: Rapport

In the early stages of a course, try the following to build immediate rapport:

- 1 Get to class first, introduce yourself and familiarise yourself with who's sitting where. Make a rough class plan with students' names and where they are sitting if that helps.
- 2 Explain the objectives of the course and how you will conduct the classes.

Use *we* as well as *you* in statements when talking about the class.

Discover and use names. Use techniques for helping yourself remember names and helping students remember each other's names.

Technique 1

Name discussion and name test

Write the following on the board and ask students to copy it down. They should then put a tick next to the words that describe their first name or their last name.

Put students into groups. In groups, they exchange information about their names. Do some group feedback and collect in this information.

For a future class, prepare a *Name test* based on this information. Give the students advance warning of this. See below for an example:

NAME TEST

Complete with the names of people in your class.

- 1 _____ and _____ have common names in their country.
- 2 _____ has an easy name to pronounce.
- 3 I am sitting next to _____.
- 4 _____ has an unusual name.
- 5 I am sitting behind _____.
- 6 The teacher's last name is _____.

Technique 2

Find someone who ... variation

Find someone who ... questionnaires are very common at the beginning of a course. You can often find something like the one below in coursebooks or resource material.

Questionnaire 1

Find someone who ... Name

- 1 has green eyes.
- 2 is wearing a ring.
- 3 lives in the country.
- 4 has been abroad.
- 5 will be going to a bar tonight.

However, we can give students the opportunity to construct their own questionnaires, reflecting their own interests and not just those of the textbook or the teacher. Notice the difference in rapport potential of the 'classic' version above and the *Find someone who ...* questionnaire below.

Questionnaire 2

In this class, I'd like to Name find someone who ...

- 1 has ...
- 2 is ...
- 3 lives ...
- 4 has been ...

In techniques such as this second version, the target language is still guided but the content is the students' own. It also sends out a useful message to reluctant learners: your opinions and interests count and can form part of the language learning process. For the teacher who is committed to building RAP, these simple techniques bring the teacher's knowledge and the students' knowledge into closer alignment. Shared background knowledge is a key factor in building a sense of community in the classroom. When we ask questions or engage in elicitation, we can draw on particular details which help build a sense of identification between the learners themselves and between the learners and the teacher.

RAP: Attitude

As teachers, we can help motivation by encouraging positive attitudes towards the language and the classroom. The good teacher does this by treating students with the respect they deserve. This builds their confidence and self-esteem, and it makes it much easier to make the language and the cultural content attractive to learners.

Content

In terms of content, positive attitudes may be encouraged by linking the classroom world with the world outside. This may mean adapting textbook material to make it more relevant to learners' needs or using material provided by the learners themselves (magazine articles, newspaper articles, extracts from books they like, songs – even recycled versions of their own compositions).

Error correction

Making sure errors are a positive experience and not a humiliating one (error need not be 'terror') is a crucial opportunity to build positive attitudes. Try giving students questionnaires at the beginning of the course which allow them to tell you how they like to be corrected.

Technique 3

Attitudes towards error

Give a questionnaire similar to the following to your students at the beginning of the year.

CORRECTION PREFERENCES

Tick the statements you agree with.

In spoken work, I like the teacher to:

- 1 write my errors on the board.
- 2 use translation to correct me.
- 3 tell me 'no that's wrong'.
- 4 echo what I say correctly.
- 5 finish what I want to say when I can't remember.
- 6 use gestures to show me the correct answer.
- 7 correct me immediately.
- 8 wait till I've finished speaking before correcting me.
- 9 correct me later, when the activity is over.
- 10 ignore unimportant errors.
- 11 whisper the correct answer.

Add one suggestion for the teacher:

12 _____

Collect the questionnaires and look through them for any commonalities. In the next class, outline a strategy for error correction based on what the students asked for. Later on in the course, come back to the error correction strategy and discuss it with the class. Is it still working? Would they like to be corrected more? Less?

The following acronym sums up the things we can do to instil positive attitudes in our learners:

A = 'active' involvement in what happens in the classroom – you learn best when you participate

T = 'task' and the importance of using the language to express yourself and to get things done in the real world

T = 'test', the importance of regular revision, recycling and evaluation of progress

I = 'interaction' with other learners

T = 'training' yourself to learn more efficiently

U = 'you' the learner as the centre of the learning process

D= 'developing' your skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing

E = 'English' as an international language of communication, between you and the rest of the world

It might be helpful to give this acronym to the class as a handout or make a classroom poster of it; this could take the form of a competition in which students produce their own posters based on the attitude acronym. You may ask them to change the meaning of each letter if they wish; so 'a' could stand for 'assistance' (= the teacher helps and we help each other).

RAP: Presence

'P = Presence' is perhaps the most elusive and powerful of the qualities that make up RAP. It is a quality that appears on observation checklists of good teaching but has never been very well defined.

Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that outstanding teachers have a strong presence in class. What is it, however, that so many people involved in teaching agree on exactly? It may mean that teachers who can control a class and have few discipline problems

- have confidence;
- show professionalism;
- have experience;
- are cheerful;
- are at ease with themselves.

Enthusiasm is the key to success and the 'presence' of the teacher can inspire enthusiasm in the learners. Our attitudes as 'mediators' of the language are infectious.

It is always possible to work on your presence – here are some tips:

1 Be conscious of your body language. The first step is awareness.

2 Make inclusive, direct eye contact with your students.

3 Use your voice, project clearly but also try to experiment with different tones.

4 Wait for silence. Try some of these ways of getting silence: *'I'd like you all to look this way and listen carefully.'* Pause. *'I'm going to wait for complete silence before I continue.'* Pause. *'I want silence in five-four-three-twoone.'* Pause.

5 When in 'teaching mode', use pauses – scan the class to get attention in mid-sentence, stop, wait, look steadily, then continue. Good public speakers are often very effective at doing this.

6 Give the lesson a clear form – make targets clear and achievable. Your preparation, including your timing, should be apparent.

Technique 4

The board plan

Before class

- Write the main points of your lesson on the board (see the example in the box).
- Put the plan in the top left-hand corner of the board. Research shows that this is where the eye is drawn to (think of where icons and menus tend to be on computer screens). Put the plan in the same place every day.

In class

- At the beginning of class, show the class the points you have listed on the board. Briefly explain each one.
- As the lesson progresses, cross out, erase or tick each point as you move on to the next one.

Going through the plan like this ahead of time can be immensely satisfying for students. Many times, having planned the whole lesson yourself, *you* can see the learning outcomes and achievement of aims. But from the students' point of view these may not be so clear. They may be asking themselves why they were actually doing an activity. Going through the main points of the class, and crossing them out as you go, gives a sense of progress. It also gives the lesson, and you by extension, a life and presence of its own.

Finally, it is important not only to establish RAP but to *maintain* it as the class or the course evolves. Here are some closing tips which should help do this and pre-empt discipline problems:

1 Engage students' attention with a fresh and vigorous approach. While you may have taught the same coursebook lesson x times, remember it may be the first and only time for them.

2 Show how content is related to students' interests, existing knowledge, future concerns.

3 Vary activities and learning styles, keep up the momentum, vary the pace.

4 Distribute attention equally, be flexible enough to value unexpected contributions.

5 Keep a roving eye: show that everything is noticed, even if intervention is avoided.

6 Ensure flow from one stage of the lesson to the next and from lesson to lesson. Do not interrupt the flow of a lesson unnecessarily.

7 Periodically get feedback from the students on how they think the classes are going. This could be through informal chat or formalised questionnaires.

8 Make lessons memorable – use movement, music, colour and humour.

'I might have dissected a frog five hundred times, but it's the 501st time I always see something I didn't see before and it's the same thing with teaching students. You always see something new.'

Anne Frye

We have found the following books invaluable in preparing these articles:

Cowley, S *Getting the Buggers to Behave* Continuum 2003 Dörnyei, Z *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom* CUP 2001 McManus, M *Troublesome Behaviour in the Classroom* (2nd ed) Routledge 1995 Murphey, T and Dörnyei, Z *Group Dynamics in the Language Classroom* CUP 2005 Rogers, B *You Know the Fair Rule* Longman 1990 Rogers, B *The Language of Discipline* Northcote House 1994

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