

# Education Methods

A Case Study Approach to Professional Development



*Edited by Helen Langford & Jennifer Barnett*



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# Introduction

The idea for this text arose from many conversations with faculty colleagues, principals, teaching professionals, and students about the need for a resource that would satisfy the demand for new materials that accommodate the changing nature of teaching in today's classroom. Administrators in schools, as well as course instructors in faculties of education, are faced with the challenging but rewarding task of assisting current teachers and pre-service teachers in effectively transitioning to a professional setting. The goal of this text is to facilitate student and professional development by highlighting key strategies and approaches that are needed in today's educational settings.

## ***Text Organization***

Each chapter focuses on a different topical subject and plays out many of the dynamic range of related issues that teachers are faced with in schools. Each chapter begins with an overview to introduce the subject matter and is followed by a series of case studies. The aim of these case studies is to stimulate critical thinking, as well as to help stimulate conversations about, and reflections upon one's own practices in, the classroom, the school, and the community at large. A summary concludes each chapter, followed by a series of questions intended to encourage readers to critically assess the subject matter they have read.

## ***Case Study Approach***

Drawing upon Dufour's concept (2004) of professional learning communities, the case study approach in this text is used as a move toward professional development and the sharing of ideas. The approach is designed to stimulate idea sharing about teaching and learning as well as encourage a culture of collaboration among colleagues and peers in an educational setting. The aim is to promote



a team approach where everyone is committed to one another's success. The following case studies provide the reader with a medium for this professional collaboration and sharing. The text addresses many of the key elements of teaching and suggests that readers consult with others in their particular setting so that they can engage in discussions that will bring about meaningful and relevant change. In that way, each reader is involved in making decisions about how a particular situation should be handled, and how the support of colleagues could help.

This text is unique in that it offers the reader the opportunity to share in issues experienced in the school setting. Each case study provides real-life situations that allow the reader to reflect upon the practices detailed in the cases and upon his or her own experiences. The case study approach is appropriate for any pre-service or in-service course where reflective practice and professional development is encouraged.

## ***Summary***

The reflective nature of this text is designed to help each reader develop the skills and tools needed to analyze his or her own practices. Readers are encouraged to explore and investigate the rationale for the ideas and strategies they propose in response to the issues in each case study. In addition, readers are invited to focus on the impact of these ideas and strategies on students' learning. In this way, each reader has the potential of doing his or her part in contributing to and becoming a participant in an effective professional learning community in the educational setting in which he or she is situated.

Dufour, R. What is a "Professional Learning Community?" *Educational Leadership*, Volume 61 #8. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (May, 2004).

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*North Bay, November 2005*



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# CHAPTER 1

## **Classroom Management**

### **“Who’s in Charge?”**

*Jennifer Barnett*



## **INTRODUCTION**

All teachers know that student misbehaviour can negatively influence the learning environment. Even new teachers with limited experience are concerned with managing these behaviours. In fact, Charles (2002) notes that teachers experience many incidents of misbehaviour during their careers and, for new teachers, misbehaviour is often the prime obstacle to their success, leaving an unpleasant mark on their careers.

The most thoroughly prepared and well-designed lesson has no chance of success if the instructor is not able to effectively manage the classroom and her students’ behaviour. (Levin, Nolan, Kerr & Elliott, 2005, pp. 1–2)

With the escalation of student misbehaviour, teachers begin to feel a loss of control over their own classrooms. This can eventually lead to depression and fatigue (Wolfgang, 2001, p. iii). Misbehaviour can even cause some teachers to leave the profession within their first three years of teaching. As Lee Manning and Bucher (2003) explain:

They did not realize that just as time and effort must be spent on organizing and implementing



instruction, time and effort must be spent on managing behaviour. (p. 5)

Regardless of how much effort a teacher spends in creating interesting lessons, effort must also be put into management. A successful teacher, regardless of experience, begins thinking about potential difficulties even before they appear. If the teacher does not invest some time on this, a lot of time and emotional energy could be wasted later (Kauffman, Mostert, Trent, & Hallahan, 2002, p.3). When what is actually occurring in the classroom is misdiagnosed, misbehaviour will continue to increase. Appropriate thinking on this issue first requires stepping back from the situation, objectively reviewing the information available, and then figuring out possible causes and solutions.

By reading the following case studies and answering the applicable questions, you will obtain some practice in thoughtful reflection. The cases “The Bane of Jane” and “In the Name of Friendship” deal with elementary situations, and “Mr. Cal’s Dilemma” and “Riches Found in the Mind or Mine?” are situated in the secondary panel. The student level for “A State of Readiness to Teach” is unspecified.





CASE STUDIES

- 1 – The Bane of Jane
- 2 – Mr. Cal’s Dilemma
- 3 – Riches Found in the Mind or Mine?
- 4 – In the Name of Friendship
- 5 – A State of Readiness to Teach

Case Study #1 – The Bane of Jane

*Ms. Lee, a first-year teacher, teaches at a well-established neighbourhood school. She finds the school’s climate warm and inviting. Most of the parents of her students are quite willing to work with their children at home, though some require guidance in helping their children with school-related tasks. The children in this school come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. Ms. Lee has a Grade 3 class of 30 students with no Educational Assistant.*

Early in the school year, the negative behaviour of one student caused Ms. Lee to stop and consider what she was actually doing to manage her class. Jane, an academically capable student, liked to continuously talk back during teacher-directed lessons. She had begun to refuse to participate in classroom activities. Furthermore, the students around her were beginning to copy her behaviour. In response to Jane’s inappropriate outbursts, Ms. Lee continued to use nonverbal methods in an attempt to promote appropriate behaviour.

Ms. Lee was aware that Jane lived with her mother and saw her father once every two weeks. Her mother was willing to meet with Ms. Lee, having acknowledged that Jane’s current attitude was not only affecting her own progress but also potentially the ability of those around her to learn. However, Jane’s mother felt at a loss as to how she could help as she was experiencing these same problems with Jane at home as well.



On one particular day, Jane's disruptive behaviour was at a peak. The whole class was seated on the floor. Ms. Lee was reading a story and discussing the development of the main character. Ms. Lee had to repeatedly ask Jane not to interrupt when she was reading aloud to the class. Jane became increasingly vocal and disruptive. Though it was difficult, Ms. Lee attempted to ignore Jane and continue with the lesson. After about 20 minutes of these continuous disruptions, Jane stood up and left the room. Ms. Lee informed the office immediately. The principal saw Jane trying to leave the school and brought her to the office. Jane spent the remainder of the day at the office. The principal informed Ms. Lee that she had spoken with Jane's mother and that Jane would return to class the following day.

Through discussions, the principal had identified that Ms. Lee needed to reconsider her way of dealing with the problems that Jane was creating. He acknowledged that being a first-year teacher meant that Ms. Lee may have a limited repertoire of management strategies to draw upon when encountering such behavioural problems. The principal asked Ms. Lee to draw up an action plan (behaviour management plan) for Jane that would be immediately implemented as well as establish some method to change such behaviours in students as may be required in the future. The principal offered to provide theoretical support and resources to help Ms. Lee achieve these objectives.





## QUESTIONS

1. Jane's outburst occurred on Monday. Which five immediate proactive and behavioural strategies could Ms. Lee plan to use on Tuesday to keep the student on task for the period?
2. Ms. Lee has devised some management strategies for Tuesday, but she knows that she will need additional resources and management techniques in the future.
  - a) Describe a plan that includes management strategies for ensuring the appropriate behaviour of:
    - Jane for the remainder of the school year
    - the whole class for the remainder of the school year
  - b) Which background information, documentation, and resources could aid Ms. Lee with the development of this plan?



## Case Study #2 – Mr. Cal’s Dilemma

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*Mr. Cal is a Science teacher with 22 years of experience and has taught in several departments at the same secondary school. He spoke of enjoying lower-level (e.g., workplace and college-bound) classes more than the advanced-level (university-bound) students. “I like teaching lower-level kids better than advanced-level kids. It's a little more work, but you get more satisfaction from it. Not everyone thinks the way I do.”*

Mr. Cal was shortly to meet a challenge that would cause him to reconsider his optimistic approach to teaching. Kumar, a student who had recently been released from a closed custody youth detention centre, was consistently creating disruptions in his Grade 10 science class. These incidents challenged Mr. Cal’s role as a teacher but, to date, did not deflate his optimism about changing Kumar’s negative attitude and behaviour. Mr. Cal found that “winning over” Kumar was a difficult task; however, he was still hopeful and up to the challenge. It was his willingness to tackle what some staff viewed as “lost causes” that earned him the respect of both students and teachers.

Mr. Cal’s outlook on education was well-seasoned with diverse experiences from working with students like Kumar. In his experience, problem students eventually complied with his expectations of appropriate classroom behaviour.

One day, when the students were working on an experiment, Mr. Cal noticed that Kumar was not using the Bunsen burner properly. He approached Kumar and advised him about how he should be handling the burner. Kumar became verbally abusive, calling Mr. Cal an “asshole.” The class was quite noisy, as the students were busy completing their own experiments. So, Mr. Cal turned and walked away hoping this incident would go unnoticed—perhaps Kumar was just having a bad day. At the end of the class, he asked the students to complete their lab reports as homework and bring them to the next class.



The next day at class, Mr. Cal moved from student to student checking their completed reports. When he came up to Kumar, he asked him about his failure to complete the lab report. Kumar exploded, pushed Mr. Cal aside, and stormed out of the classroom. This time, the whole class noticed Kumar's inappropriate behaviour. Their eyes were upon Mr. Cal, and every face wore a puzzled expression. What was Mr. Cal to do? Was this a teachable moment?



## QUESTIONS

1. What errors, if any, has Mr. Cal made?
2. Detail what Mr. Cal should do immediately to address this situation with the class.
3. What should Mr. Cal do before meeting with Kumar?



### **Case Study #3 – Riches Found in the Mind or Mine?**

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*Mr. Yurri, a sixth-year teacher, teaches at a rural secondary school. Most of the parents are well-off and always willing to contribute financially to the school. Because of their shift-work schedules in the area mine, they are often prevented from other forms of school involvement. In fact, many of the children go home to an empty house. Most of Mr. Yurri's Grade 9 students are responsible for taking care of their other siblings and even getting the evening meal prepared.*

One of Mr. Yurri's top students, Bill, frequently engaged in disruptive behaviour in the classroom. Further, though he was consistently successful academically, he usually came to school with his homework incomplete. The parent-teacher conference following first semester reports did not result in a plan of action to deal with this problem. Bill's parents indicated that they were not often home in the evening to monitor his homework completion and that Bill had to take care of their other children. Further, as Bill was 14 and responsible for his own actions, his parents considered it Bill's responsibility to complete his homework. The discussion about his homework concluded with Bill's parents commenting that his lack of attention to homework was obviously not an issue, since Mr. Yurri himself considered Bill's comprehension in class and his grades to be good. Bill's parents also pointed out that managing classroom behaviour was Mr. Yurri's responsibility as a professional teacher.

Mr. Yurri had to acknowledge that if he was to distract Bill from engaging in inappropriate behaviour in class, he would have to come up with a plan. He spent some time reflecting on what may be the cause of Bill's outbursts. It occurred to him that Bill might be simply seeking attention. Bill frequently made funny comments to create laughter in the classroom and engaged in verbal confrontations with his teacher. He had recently begun to refuse to participate in large and small group activities in class as well. Mr. Yurri realized that his use of nonverbal and verbal interventions and consistent consequences have had little effect in deterring Bill's problem behaviour. He felt that Bill was beginning to take control of the



classroom as it seemed more and more difficult to redirect the class back on task after one of his outbursts.

In an attempt to better understand Bill's state of mind, Mr. Yurri asked Bill to talk to him about his future. Mr. Yurri said in a kind voice that he knew Bill was bright and could easily be successful in secondary school and college. He expressed his concern that Bill's disruptive behaviour in class and his failure to complete his homework might jeopardize his opportunities in the future. Surprisingly, Bill said to Mr. Yurri that as there were always employment opportunities at the mine, it was his intention to quit school at the end of Grade 10 and go to work at the mine, since it was unionized and offered great benefits and exceptional pay. Bill's dad and mom worked at the mine. They were doing fine, and so high school graduation was not really needed, he said.

Mr. Yurri decided to ask his principal and the school resource teacher to give him some ideas to deal with Bill. His concern was not only about managing Bill's in-class behaviour, but he also wanted to encourage him to continue and complete his education. The principal suggested that Mr. Yurri primarily needed to examine his current way of handling the problems that Bill created and that he should think about how to support the other students in the classroom in this situation. The resource teacher pointed out that Mr. Yurri's primary concern should be to make Bill realize how far he could go in the future with his own abilities combined with a good education. Mr. Yurri agreed with both their suggestions; however, neither the principal nor the resource teacher had come up with any concrete suggestions to deal with the immediate problems. He was still at a loss as to what he should actually do.



## QUESTIONS

1. Brainstorm ways to deal with Bill in the classroom. Based on these ideas, create a behaviour management contract that