



# Making connections

Continuing our series on behaviour management, **Sue Cowley** looks at ways of engaging your students to encourage good behaviour.

If you think back to when you were at school, certain teachers will loom large in your memory. Some for positive reasons: 'she believed in me', 'he gave me a love for that subject'. Others for negative reasons: 'her lessons were so dull', 'he said I was useless'. Where you and your class felt engaged with the teacher, it's likely that you behaved well for him or her. And if you felt disconnected, for whatever reason, it's equally likely that you messed around.

To be successful at managing behaviour, you've got to engage with your students. This does not mean you have to pander to them, or even that they have to like you. But it does mean capturing their interest, getting them excited about learning, having a two-way ethos of respect. You can utilise the whole range of your teaching skills to do this, from the way you use your voice, to the kind of things you do in your lessons, to the interest you show in their wider lives. Connect with your students, and they will return the favour by behaving better for you.

## Using your voice

Effective voice usage helps you engage with a class, and also with an individual. You'll often hear good advice about not shouting, but there is far more to voice usage than this. Give a good tonal quality to your voice – sound curious, excited, interested, disappointed, surprised, sad, happy. This is particularly useful for students who have English as an additional language – they will pick out far more from how you sound than from what you say. Use your voice to give a feeling of pace as well. When interest flags, speak with a sense of urgency; if the class is wild, calm the students down with a hypnotic speed and tone.

## Using your face

Eye contact is fundamental to feeling connected, but use it sensitively. For some, prolonged one-to-one eye contact can feel rather threatening. When you're whole-class teaching, keep your eyes moving round the room, making contact with as many children as you can. Use your whole face, smiling to show pleasure, frowning to show curiosity.

## Using your body

The way you stand and move around your room will have a significant impact on your connection with your students. Maintain a confident, open, relaxed posture. This is especially important with your most difficult classes, where your instinct will be to tense up and become defensive. Keep walking around the room, so that you literally connect by moving alongside each individual. Watch for right or left hand dominance – most teachers instinctively focus more towards one side of

the room. If you're right-handed, make a deliberate attempt to connect with those children on your left side, and vice versa.

## Using your lessons

Not every lesson you teach will be an all-singing, all-dancing, multi-media extravaganza. But your students will know if you're putting in the effort, and equally if you're not. Take some risks, try out some creative approaches, appeal to all your students' senses. Sometimes it will work, sometimes it won't. But give it a go and show your students that you want them to love your lessons, and the subject you're teaching them.

## Building trust

There's one element to this connection that you can't magic up overnight, and that's the long, slow process of building a relationship with your students. This is why teachers with great classroom management skills and years of experience can still struggle when they move to a new school. The children must get to know you, and you must get to know them, so that an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect can prevail. Take an interest in what your students do outside of school, participate in some extra curricular activities, aim to incorporate their interests into some of your lessons. Keep chipping away and don't give up, even if it feels like they're constantly trying to push you away.

As EM Forster said in *Howard's End*: "Only connect... live in fragments no longer." When you and your class make that connection, magic truly can happen.

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Peter Arkell

Keep moving around the room, so that you literally connect with the children.