

Hour 3 – Design Control: Teaching Choices and Behaviour

Hour 4 – Response: Managing Behaviour When Things Go Wrong

By Katherine Reilly, ELT Author & Teacher Trainer

 May 3rd, 2026 |  ENBI Online Workshop

Part 1: Theoretical Foundations

1. Behaviour Management as Professional Decision-Making

Classroom behaviour management is not primarily about control or punishment. It is about *professional decision-making under pressure*. Effective teachers continuously interpret situations, weigh risks, and choose responses that protect learning, safety, and dignity.

When behaviour is framed as a student problem (e.g. “difficult”, “disrespectful”, “lazy”), teachers are left with limited options: punish, remove, or confront. This framing often leads to emotional, public, or delayed reactions.

A situational framing asks a different question:

What in this moment is producing this behaviour?

This shift does not excuse behaviour. Instead, it gives teachers leverage by focusing on what can be changed immediately: language, timing, structure, audience, and task design.

2. Why Behaviour Escalates

Escalation rarely begins with a major incident. It develops through predictable stages:

- Micro-signals: whispers, avoidance, movement, disengagement
- Low-level disruption: comments, jokes, refusal to participate
- Disruptive incident: emotional or confrontational behaviour
- Public confrontation: loss of focus, audience involvement
- Teacher error: intervention that is emotional, public, or late

Escalation often occurs because teachers intervene too late: only once behaviour has become public.

3. Prevention as a Professional Responsibility

Prevention is not optional; it is part of lesson planning.

High-risk moments include:

- Transitions without clear structure
- Long instructions
- Unclear task expectations
- Low teacher proximity
- High peer visibility

Preventive moves include:

- Strategic teacher positioning
 - Pausing instead of repeating instructions
 - Managing transitions tightly
 - Standing near, not speaking over students
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4. Using Proxemics as a Behavioural Tool

Proxemics—the use of physical space—plays a significant role in classroom management.

Four key spatial zones:

- **Intimate Zone** (0–45 cm)
- **Personal Zone** (45 cm–1.2 m)
- **Social Zone** (1.2–3.7 m)
- **Public Zone** (beyond 3.7 m)

In classroom practice, teachers primarily operate between the **social** and **personal zones**.

A key technique is **proximity interference**:

- The teacher moves into a student's personal zone
- This creates a non-verbal signal of monitoring and authority
- The behaviour often stops without verbal interruption

Advantages:

- Avoids public confrontation
- Allows the student to save face
- Maintains lesson flow

Limit:

The **intimate zone should be avoided**, as it may be perceived as intrusive or threatening and can escalate behaviour.

5. Responding to Escalating Students

When a student is already escalating, strategies must shift from prevention to de-escalation.

Effective techniques include:

- **Increasing physical distance**
(avoiding feelings of being cornered; approx. 1.5–2 meters)
- **Using “low and slow” communication**
(quiet, steady, controlled tone)
- **Maintaining non-confrontational body language**
(open posture, no pointing, no looming over the student)
- **Offering limited choices**
(e.g. “You can continue here or move to another seat”)
- **Providing take-up time**
(giving instructions, then stepping away)

A critical boundary:

Physical contact must always be avoided, as it can be misinterpreted and lead to further escalation.

6. Teacher Language and Escalation

Certain phrases escalate situations because they challenge identity, invite power struggles, or create an audience.

Escalating language includes:

- “How many times do I have to tell you?”
- “You’re being rude/disrespectful.”
- “If you don’t stop, you’ll...”

Professional alternatives:

- “We’ll deal with this after the activity.”
- “Right now, the task is...”
- “You can choose exercise A or B.”

Professional language maintains authority, buys time, and protects lesson flow.

7. Rage-Baiting and Emotional Control

Rage-baiting is deliberate behaviour designed to provoke an emotional reaction from the teacher. It feeds on audience attention and teacher emotion.

Key principle:

Rage-baiting ends the moment the teacher stops feeding it.

How do we respond?

Professional responses involve neutrality, brevity, removal of audience, and delayed follow-up.

8. Teacher Self-Regulation

Calm is not passive—it is strategic.

- Emotion is contagious
- Authority does not require winning
- Professionalism requires consistency, not dominance

Professional mantra:

Stay calm. Stay private. Stay consistent.

Part 2: Case Studies and Professional Approaches

Case Study 1: Persistent Low-Level Disruption

Element	Description
Context	Teen EFL class (ages 14–16). One student repeatedly makes humorous side comments in Greek during low-structure moments.
Teacher notices	Peer-checking before speaking, laughter reinforcing behaviour.
Risk	Disruption normalised; authority slowly erodes.
Common response	Public reprimand, sarcasm.
Professional response	Silent proximity, brief task redirection, no public naming.
Reflective question	At what moment could the teacher have intervened earlier to prevent this becoming public?
Possible professional answers	Intervene during micro-signals; remove audience early; prioritise lesson flow over correction.

Case Study 2: Refusal to Participate

Element	Description
Context	Secondary class (ages 15–17). Student keeps books closed, avoids eye contact, remains silent.
Teacher notices	Passive resistance begins after public instructions.
Risk	Public power struggle; disengagement becomes identity-based.
Common response	Public demand for compliance.
Professional response	Quiet, private choice-based instruction.
Reflective question	How does public instruction change the meaning of compliance for this student?
Possible professional answers	Public demands threaten dignity; private choices allow compliance without loss of face.

Case Study 3: Emotional Reaction

Element	Description
Context	Mixed-ability class. Teacher corrects a student publicly; student reacts emotionally.
Teacher notices	Sudden emotional shift; class attention locks onto exchange.
Risk	Emotional contagion; confrontation.
Common response	Insisting on public correction or ignoring entirely.
Professional response	Lower voice, minimal language, delayed conversation.
Reflective question	Is my priority to correct behaviour immediately or prevent escalation?
Possible professional answers	Prevent escalation when emotions rise; delay correction; base decisions on observable cues.

Case Study 4: Perceived Unfairness After Reprimand

Element	Description
Context	Upper secondary class (ages 16–17). Student claims they are always reprimanded.
Teacher notices	Generalising language; peer attention shifts.
Risk	Public debate about fairness; authority reframed as bias.
Common response	Defending oneself publicly; comparisons.
Professional response	Acknowledge feelings; postpone discussion.
Reflective question	How can feelings be acknowledged without turning this into a public trial?
Possible professional answers	Validate emotion without agreeing; restate expectations; move discussion to private space.

Case Study 5: Passive Defiance and Phone Usage

Element	Description
Context	Upper secondary EFL class. Three students disengage; one uses phone discreetly.
Teacher notices	Withdrawal, whispering, avoidance.
Risk	Silent spread of disengagement.
Common response	Public reprimand; sarcasm.
Professional response	Non-verbal proximity; private choices; expectation reset.
Reflective question	Is this behaviour seeking power, attention, or escape?
Possible professional answers	Identify function; remove reward; re-engage without confrontation.

Case Study 6: Bullying in the Classroom

Element	Description
Context	One student verbally intimidates another during a lesson.
Teacher notices	Distress, silence, power imbalance.
Risk	Normalisation of harm; loss of safety.
Immediate priority	Stop behaviour; protect dignity; restore safety.
Reflective question	What action must I take immediately, even if it disrupts the lesson?
Possible professional answers	Stop behaviour publicly; separate students; document and follow protocol.

Final Note

Behaviour management is not about having the perfect response. It is about making professional decisions that prevent escalation, protect learners, and preserve learning.

9. Resources for Classroom Management

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