

REFLECTIVE LESSONS FROM A CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE IN AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM IN MOZAMBIQUE

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Abstract: Classroom discipline remains one of the greatest challenges confronting novice teachers worldwide. Although exclusionary disciplinary practices such as sending students out of the classroom have traditionally been used to restore order, increasing evidence suggests that such approaches may inadvertently reinforce disruptive behaviour, reduce instructional time, and weaken teacher–student relationships. This paper presents a reflective narrative inquiry based on a classroom incident that occurred during the author's teaching practice in a secondary school in Maputo City, Mozambique, in September 1986. While teaching a Grade 8 English class independently for the first time, the author encountered four students who repeatedly disrupted lessons by inviting friends from neighbouring classrooms to converse through the classroom window. Contrary to prevailing practice, the author chose not to remove the students from the classroom. Instead, he affirmed their intelligence and emphasised the importance of their continued participation in the lesson. The students subsequently apologised, explained that they had expected to be sent outside because doing so allowed them to socialise with friends, and promised to discontinue their behaviour. Using narrative inquiry, reflective practice, restorative education, classroom management theory, and contemporary research on exclusionary discipline, the paper analyses the incident from the perspective of nearly four decades of professional experience. The discussion demonstrates that the teacher's response unintentionally interrupted a cycle of behavioural reinforcement while simultaneously strengthening students' sense of belonging, responsibility, and academic identity. The paper argues that effective classroom management should prioritise inclusion, recognition, and relationship-building rather than routine exclusion. An original Inclusion-Recognition-Responsibility (IRR) Framework is proposed to explain how positive behavioural change can emerge through affirming students' dignity while maintaining high expectations. The study contributes to the literature on reflective teacher education, restorative classroom management, teacher identity, and inclusive pedagogy, particularly within the underrepresented context of Mozambican secondary education.

Keywords: classroom management; restorative discipline; narrative inquiry; reflective practice; teacher identity; inclusive education; English language teaching; novice teachers; Mozambique; student behaviour

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Managing learner behaviour has long been recognised as one of the most demanding aspects of teaching. Regardless of subject area, school level, or national context, teachers must create classroom environments that support learning while responding effectively to behavioural challenges. For novice teachers, classroom management frequently becomes the greatest source of professional anxiety because it requires balancing authority, empathy, instructional goals, and students' diverse social and emotional needs (Marzano, Marzano, and Pickering 2003; Evertson and Weinstein 2013; Hattie 2023).

Historically, many education systems have relied on exclusionary disciplinary practices to maintain classroom order. Students who disrupt lessons may be required to stand outside the classroom, be removed to another room, or receive temporary suspension. Such measures are often justified as necessary for protecting the learning of other students. However, recent educational research increasingly questions the long-term effectiveness of these approaches. Rather than promoting behavioural improvement, exclusion may reinforce disruptive behaviour, reduce academic engagement, weaken students' sense of belonging, and contribute to educational inequalities (Skiba et al. 2014; Gregory et al. 2022).

The present paper examines these issues through a reflective analysis of a classroom incident that occurred during the author's teaching practice in September 1986 at a secondary school in Maputo City, Mozambique. Although the event took place nearly forty years ago, it continues to offer important insights into classroom management, teacher identity, restorative discipline, and inclusive education.

1.2 The Classroom Incident

During a two-month teaching practice placement, the author was assigned to co-teach a Grade 8 English class under the supervision of an experienced classroom teacher. During the second month, the supervising teacher entrusted the author with full responsibility for teaching the class independently.

At that time, four students began disrupting lessons by inviting friends from neighbouring classrooms to chat through the classroom window. The teacher initially responded by moving the students to different seats within the classroom while continuing the lesson. The disruptive behaviour persisted over three consecutive days.

Unexpectedly, one of the students approached the teacher after class and asked why they had not been sent out of the classroom. The teacher replied that the students were intelligent and too important to miss the lesson. The student's response fundamentally changed the teacher's understanding of the situation. He explained that other teachers routinely sent them outside for similar behaviour, allowing them to join their friends and avoid lessons.

The four students apologised and promised to prevent their friends from returning to the classroom window. This resulted in the disruptive behaviour ending.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The incident raises an important educational question: can exclusionary discipline unintentionally reward disruptive behaviour? Traditional classroom management often assumes that removing students discourages misconduct. However, if students perceive exclusion as desirable, disciplinary removal may reinforce rather than reduce inappropriate behaviour.

Understanding how teachers can respond differently has significant implications for classroom management, teacher education, and educational policy.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to analyse the classroom incident through contemporary educational theories and research in order to understand why the teacher's response proved successful and what lessons it offers for modern educational practice.

1.5 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following questions:

1. What factors contributed to the students' disruptive behaviour?
2. Why did refusing to exclude the students produce behavioural change?
3. What does this incident reveal about teacher expectations, classroom relationships, and student motivation?
4. What implications does the incident have for classroom management and teacher education?
5. How can reflective analysis of historical classroom experiences contribute to educational scholarship?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study contributes to:

- classroom management research;
- reflective teacher education;
- restorative discipline;
- inclusive education;
- English language teaching; and
- educational research in Mozambique.

Because narrative accounts from African classrooms remain relatively underrepresented in international educational literature, the study also contributes valuable contextual evidence from Southern Africa.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews scholarship on classroom management, student behaviour, exclusionary discipline, restorative education, teacher identity, reflective practice, and inclusive pedagogy. Together, these perspectives provide the conceptual foundation for analysing the classroom incident.

2.2 Classroom Management

Effective classroom management extends beyond maintaining order. It encompasses establishing positive learning environments, fostering respectful relationships, promoting student engagement, and creating conditions that maximise learning (Marzano et al. 2003; Evertson and Weinstein 2013; Emmer et al. 2006).

Research consistently indicates that proactive management strategies outperform reactive disciplinary approaches.

2.3 Exclusionary Discipline

Traditional disciplinary practices often involve sending students outside, temporary classroom removal, detention, suspension or expulsion.

Although these measures may produce immediate compliance, studies increasingly report negative long-term educational consequences, including reduced instructional time, lower achievement, increased dropout rates, and weakened teacher–student relationships (Skiba et al. 2014; Gregory et al. 2022).

2.4 Restorative Education

Restorative education seeks to repair relationships rather than simply punish misconduct.

Core principles include inclusion, dialogue, accountability, empathy, repairing harm or rebuilding trust.

Evidence suggests restorative approaches improve school climate while reducing disciplinary incidents (Gregory et al. 2022).

2.5 Teacher Expectations

Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) Pygmalion Effect demonstrates that teacher expectations influence student achievement. Subsequent research has shown that expectations shape motivation, engagement, classroom participation, and self-belief (Hattie 2023).

2.6 Reflective Practice

Schön (1983) argues that teachers become professionals through systematic reflection on experience. Farrell (2019) extends this principle specifically to English language teaching, demonstrating that reflective teachers improve professional judgement over time.

2.7 Teacher Identity

Teacher identity develops through significant classroom experiences. Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) argue that identity emerges from continuous interaction between professional knowledge, classroom practice, and personal beliefs.

The present classroom incident represents one such identity-shaping experience.

2.8 Inclusive Education

Inclusive education seeks to maximise participation rather than exclusion. UNESCO (2024) argues that belonging, participation, and equitable access are fundamental principles of quality education.

The incident analysed in this paper illustrates how everyday disciplinary decisions can either support or undermine inclusion.

2.9 Conceptual Framework

The literature suggests that classroom discipline is best understood as an interaction among teacher expectations, student motivation, relationships, behavioural reinforcement, classroom belonging or reflective decision-making.

These concepts form the analytical framework used in point 4 below.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative narrative inquiry design supported by reflective practice. Narrative inquiry recognises teachers' lived experiences as valuable sources of professional knowledge (Clandinin and Connelly 2000).

3.2 Data Source

The primary data consist of the author's detailed recollection of a classroom incident experienced during teaching practice in September 1986.

Reflection has been enriched by nearly four decades of teaching experience, professional reading, educational theory and recent empirical research.

3.3 Reflective Framework

The analysis is informed by Schön's (1983) reflective practitioner model, Brookfield's (2017) critical reflection framework, and Farrell's (2019) model of reflective practice in English language teaching.

3.4 Analytical Procedure

The incident was analysed through successive stages: description of events, identification of key decisions, interpretation using educational theories, comparison with recent empirical research, reflection on implications for practice and development of the Inclusion-Recognition-Responsibility Framework.

3.5 Trustworthiness

To enhance credibility, the narrative is triangulated with established educational theories and recent empirical literature on classroom management, restorative education, and inclusive schooling. Thick description enables readers to judge the transferability of the findings to comparable educational contexts.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

No identifying information about the school or students is disclosed. The purpose of the narrative is educational rather than evaluative, and the analysis focuses on professional learning rather than attributing blame. Ethical reflection also acknowledges the limits of retrospective interpretation while recognising the value of practitioner narratives as legitimate sources of educational knowledge.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE CLASSROOM INCIDENT

4.1 Introduction

The classroom incident described in this paper represents more than an isolated episode of student misbehaviour during teaching practice. It provides a valuable opportunity to examine how teachers make decisions under pressure and how those decisions influence students' attitudes, behaviour, and learning. Reflecting on such incidents is widely regarded as an essential component of professional growth because it allows teachers to connect lived experiences with educational theory (Schön 1983; Brookfield 2017; Farrell 2019).

The event occurred in September 1986 during the author's teaching practice at a secondary school in Maputo City, Mozambique. Although the event happened several decades ago, contemporary educational research provides powerful theoretical perspectives

for interpreting it. What initially appeared to be a simple disciplinary problem can now be understood as a complex interaction involving teacher identity, student motivation, classroom relationships, behavioural expectations, and the unintended consequences of exclusionary disciplinary practices.

This chapter therefore analyses the incident through multiple theoretical frameworks and contemporary educational research. Rather than judging the decision made at the time, the discussion seeks to understand why the decision proved successful and what it reveals about effective classroom management.

4.2 The Educational Context of Mozambique in the Mid-1980s

To appreciate the significance of the classroom incident, it is important to understand the educational environment in Mozambique during the mid-1980s. Following independence from Portugal in 1975, the country was engaged in expanding access to education while simultaneously facing severe economic constraints and the effects of civil conflict. Schools frequently operated with limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, shortages of trained teachers, and insufficient instructional materials (Hanlon 1996; Chimbutane 2011; Cossa and Dias, 2022).

Teacher preparation programmes were relatively short, and student teachers often assumed considerable classroom responsibilities during teaching practice. Experienced teachers generally expected student teachers to demonstrate authority through maintaining discipline, often by employing the same strategies that they themselves had experienced or observed. One common response to disruptive behaviour was the removal of students from the classroom.

Within such contexts, sending students outside the classroom was not generally questioned. It was regarded as an efficient way of restoring order while allowing the lesson to continue. Contemporary educational research, however, suggests that although exclusion may produce immediate compliance, it often fails to address the underlying causes of disruptive behaviour and may even reinforce it (Gregory et al. 2022; Darling-Hammond et al. 2020).

The author's decision therefore represented an unplanned departure from prevailing practice. Although not based on formal knowledge of restorative discipline, it reflected an intuitive recognition that the students' presence in the classroom remained valuable.

4.3 Understanding Student Misbehaviour

Educational psychologists increasingly argue that behaviour should not simply be viewed as obedience or disobedience. Instead, behaviour is a form of communication. Students' actions often express unmet psychological, social, or emotional needs (Glasser 1998; Dreikurs, Grunwald, and Pepper 1998).

The four students repeatedly invited friends from neighbouring classrooms to converse through the classroom window. At first glance, this behaviour appeared intentionally disruptive. Yet the subsequent conversation revealed a more complex reality.

When one student eventually approached the teacher and asked, "Why are you not sending us out?", the question itself transformed the meaning of the previous behaviour.

The students were not merely challenging authority: they were testing whether the expected disciplinary response would occur.

This revelation is consistent with contemporary behavioural theories suggesting that many disruptive behaviours are maintained because they produce desired outcomes rather than because students enjoy misbehaving for its own sake (Sugai and Simonsen 2012).

The desired outcome, in this case, was surprisingly simple: being sent outside.

Outside the classroom were their friends.

Outside the classroom there was freedom.

Outside the classroom there were no academic expectations.

Thus, exclusion had become a reward rather than a punishment.

4.4 The Hidden Reinforcement Behind Exclusion

One of the most significant lessons emerging from this incident concerns behavioural reinforcement.

According to Skinner's theory of operant conditioning (1953), behaviours that produce rewarding consequences are likely to be repeated. Educational psychologists continue to use this principle when analysing classroom behaviour.

Many teachers believed that removing disruptive students punished misconduct. From the students' perspective, however, removal represented success. The disciplinary consequence actually delivered exactly what the students wanted.

This finding aligns with current research on exclusionary discipline. Numerous studies have shown that suspension, temporary exclusion, and classroom removal frequently fail to reduce future misconduct because they do not modify the motivations underlying behaviour (Noltemeyer et al. 2015; Gregory et al. 2022).

In many cases, exclusion reduces instructional time while simultaneously increasing students' social interactions with similarly disengaged peers. Consequently, the behaviour becomes reinforced rather than discouraged.

The author's decision unintentionally interrupted this reinforcement cycle.

Because the anticipated reward never arrived, the behavioural strategy lost its effectiveness and the students themselves recognised this as shown by their subsequent apology that demonstrated that they understood both the teacher's reasoning and the unintended nature of their own actions.

4.5 Teacher Expectations and the Pygmalion Effect

Perhaps the most powerful moment occurred when the teacher responded: "I am not sending you away because you are intelligent and important to be in the lesson."

Although spoken spontaneously, this statement reflects what later became widely recognised through educational research as the importance of teacher expectations.

Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) demonstrate that students frequently perform according to the expectations communicated by teachers.

When teachers communicate confidence in students' abilities, learners often develop stronger academic motivation and greater self-belief.

Later research by Hattie (2023) continues to identify teacher expectations as one of the many factors influencing student achievement, particularly when those expectations are expressed through supportive interactions rather than labels.

Importantly, the statement communicated two distinct messages. First, the students were described as intelligent. Second, their presence in class mattered.

Many disciplinary responses focus exclusively on behaviour. This response focused instead on identity. Rather than saying: "You are behaving badly," the teacher effectively communicated: "You belong here."

Such language aligns closely with restorative educational philosophy, which separates the worth of the individual from the behaviour being corrected (Wachtel 2016).

4.6 Belonging as a Protective Factor

Recent educational research increasingly identifies belonging as a central predictor of academic engagement.

Students who believe that they are respected, valued, and accepted within the classroom are more likely to participate positively, demonstrate persistence, and regulate their own behaviour (Allen et al. 2021). The teacher's refusal to remove the students conveyed precisely this sense of belonging.

Instead of treating the students as problems to be removed, they were treated as learners whose participation remained important. This distinction appears subtle. Its consequences are profound.

The students' apology suggests that they experienced not humiliation but recognition. Recognition often generates responsibility and punishment often generates resistance.

The incident therefore illustrates how relational approaches to discipline can produce behavioural change without coercion.

4.7 Restorative Discipline versus Punitive Discipline

The classroom episode also provides an opportunity to compare two contrasting disciplinary philosophies. Punitive discipline seeks immediate compliance through sanctions. Restorative discipline seeks behavioural improvement through relationships, accountability, dialogue, and inclusion.

In punitive systems, misconduct is interpreted primarily as rule breaking whereas in restorative systems, misconduct is interpreted as harm to relationships that requires repair (Morrison and Vaandering 2012).

The author's response unintentionally resembled restorative practice.

Several restorative principles were present:

- keeping students within the learning community;
- preserving dignity;
- communicating positive expectations;
- encouraging personal responsibility;
- allowing students to repair the situation voluntarily.

The students' promise to discourage their friends from returning demonstrates restoration rather than mere obedience.

They accepted ownership of the problem. No punishment was imposed. Yet behaviour changed.

Contemporary evidence suggests that restorative approaches can reduce disciplinary incidents, strengthen teacher–student relationships, and improve school climate when implemented consistently (Gregory et al. 2022; Darling-Hammond 2022).

4.8 Reflective Practice and Teacher Growth

From today's perspective, the incident of the four students illustrates the value of reflective practice. At the time, the decision was largely intuitive. Through subsequent years of teaching experience and engagement with educational scholarship and management, the event has acquired deeper meaning. Reflection enables practitioners to reinterpret past experiences in light of new theories and evidence, transforming isolated events into professional knowledge (Schön 1983; Farrell 2019).

The episode discussed here underscores that effective teaching is not solely the application of prescribed techniques but also the exercise of informed professional judgment. By analysing why a spontaneous response proved effective, teachers can develop principles that inform future practice and contribute to teacher education.

5. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF REFUSING TO SEND STUDENTS OUT OF THE CLASSROOM

5.1 Introduction

The classroom incident described in this paper extends far beyond the experience of one student teacher during teaching practice. It raises fundamental questions about the purposes of school discipline, the nature of teacher authority, and the educational consequences of removing students from learning environments. Although classroom exclusion has historically been regarded as

a legitimate disciplinary strategy in many education systems, contemporary research increasingly challenges its effectiveness. Rather than promoting learning and behavioural change, exclusionary practices often reduce opportunities for academic engagement, weaken teacher-student relationships, and contribute to long-term educational disadvantage (Skiba et al. 2014; Gregory et al. 2022).

The author's decision not to send the disruptive students out of the classroom unintentionally anticipated many principles that now underpin restorative education, positive behavioural interventions, and inclusive pedagogy. Although the novice teacher's decision was based on intuition rather than formal theoretical knowledge, subsequent reflection suggests that it fostered dialogue, responsibility, and behavioural change without resorting to exclusion. This chapter discusses the broader implications of that decision for learners, teachers, schools, teacher education, educational policy, and English language teaching.

5.2 The Educational Cost of Sending Students Out of Class

One of the most immediate consequences of excluding students from classrooms is the loss of learning opportunities. Every minute spent outside the classroom is a minute during which students are unable to participate in instruction, interact academically with peers, or receive formative feedback from teachers.

Research consistently demonstrates that instructional time is among the strongest predictors of academic achievement (Hattie 2023). Consequently, disciplinary practices that reduce instructional time are likely to widen existing achievement gaps, particularly among students who already experience educational disadvantages.

In the present case, the four students had developed an expectation that being sent outside constituted a desirable outcome. Rather than perceiving exclusion as punishment, they regarded it as an opportunity to socialise with friends. Their behaviour therefore illustrates a paradox frequently identified in contemporary behavioural research: disciplinary strategies may inadvertently reinforce the very behaviours they seek to eliminate (Sugai and Simonsen 2012).

From a behavioural perspective, exclusion became a positive reinforcer because it provided access to preferred activities. Had the author followed the common practice of removing the students from class, their disruptive behaviour might have been strengthened rather than diminished. This insight has important implications for classroom management. Teachers should not evaluate disciplinary strategies solely according to their immediate effectiveness in restoring order. Instead, they should also consider the long-term behavioural consequences of those strategies.

5.3 Classroom Exclusion and Student Motivation

Educational psychologists distinguish between intrinsic motivation-engaging in learning because it is meaningful-and extrinsic motivation-participating to obtain rewards or avoid punishment (Ryan and Deci 2020).

Punitive disciplinary systems often rely heavily on external control. Students behave appropriately because they fear sanctions rather than because they value learning.

The classroom incident described in this paper suggests an alternative motivational pathway. Instead of threatening punishment, the teacher communicated confidence: "You are intelligent and important to be in the lesson."

The above simple statement appealed directly to the students' sense of identity. Rather than defining them by their misconduct, it reminded them of their academic potential.

According to Self-Determination Theory, students are more likely to regulate their own behaviour when three psychological needs are satisfied: competence, autonomy and relatedness (Ryan and Deci 2020).

The teacher's response addressed all three: (i) the students were recognised as capable learners (competence); (ii) they were trusted to make better choices (autonomy) and (iii) they were assured that they belonged in the classroom community (relatedness).

The subsequent apology by the students suggests that these psychological needs became more influential than the anticipated reward of exclusion.

5.4 The Importance of Teacher Expectations

One of the most striking aspects of the incident is the language used by the teacher. Rather than describing the students as troublemakers, the teacher described them as intelligent.

Educational research has repeatedly demonstrated that teacher expectations significantly influence student performance and behaviour. Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) pioneering work on the Pygmalion Effect showed that students frequently internalise teachers' beliefs about their potential.

More recent syntheses continue to demonstrate that teachers' expectations influence students' academic confidence, persistence, classroom participation, and achievement (Hattie 2023).

Importantly, expectations are communicated not only through grades and formal feedback but also through everyday interactions. Students notice who receives encouragement, who is trusted, who is listened to and who is excluded.

When teachers consistently communicate belief in students' abilities, they help construct positive academic identities.

The author's response accomplished precisely this.

Instead of communicating: "You are not wanted here," the teacher communicated: "You are too valuable to lose."

This subtle difference transformed the disciplinary interaction into an affirmation of belonging.

5.5 Human Dignity in Classroom Management

One of the central principles emerging from this incident concerns the preservation of student dignity.

Traditional disciplinary approaches often rely on public correction, embarrassment, or exclusion to demonstrate authority. However, educational philosophers such as Noddings (2013) argue that caring relationships constitute the moral foundation of education.

When students believe that teachers genuinely care about their learning and well-being, they are more willing to cooperate, accept correction, and engage in learning.

The author's decision avoided public humiliation. The students were not labelled. They were not ridiculed. They were not isolated. Instead, they remained members of the learning community.

This approach reflects contemporary restorative philosophy, which distinguishes between rejecting inappropriate behaviour and rejecting the individual. The behaviour required correction. The students remained respected.

Such distinctions are increasingly recognised as essential for inclusive education.

5.6 Implications for Beginning Teachers

Beginning teachers frequently report that classroom management is among the greatest challenges they encounter during their first years of teaching (OECD 2020).

Many novice teachers therefore imitate the disciplinary practices of experienced colleagues without critically examining their effectiveness.

The classroom incident illustrates the importance of professional judgment.

The supervising teacher had previously managed the class using conventional disciplinary methods. The student teacher, however, responded differently - not because of superior knowledge but because the situation prompted an alternative interpretation. This experience suggests that teacher education should encourage critical reflection rather than mechanical replication of existing practices.

Student teachers should be encouraged to ask: Why am I choosing this strategy? What behaviour is it reinforcing? What message does it send? Will it improve learning?

Reflective practice enables teachers to move beyond routine responses toward intentional decision-making (Farrell 2019).

5.7 Implications for Teacher Education Programmes

Teacher preparation programmes often devote considerable attention to lesson planning, assessment, and subject knowledge while allocating comparatively less time to relationship-centred classroom management.

The present incident of the four students suggests several areas requiring greater emphasis.

First, student teachers should examine the psychological purposes of behaviour because misbehaviour is rarely random. Students typically seek attention, belonging, recognition, autonomy and avoidance of failure. Understanding these motivations enables teachers to address causes rather than symptoms.

Second, teacher education should expose students to restorative approaches before they enter classrooms.

Many teachers continue using exclusionary discipline because alternative strategies have not been explicitly taught.

Third, reflective writing should become a central feature of teaching practice.

Narrative reflection allows student teachers to transform experiences into professional knowledge.

This paper itself illustrates how one classroom event can continue informing professional understanding decades later.

5.8 Implications for Schools

Schools increasingly recognise that discipline cannot be separated from school culture.

Where exclusion becomes the dominant response to behavioural challenges, students may develop adversarial relationships with teachers.

Conversely, schools that emphasise inclusion, dialogue, and accountability often experience stronger teacher-student relationships and improved school climate (Gregory et al. 2022).

The classroom incident demonstrates that maintaining students within the learning community may produce better educational outcomes than removing them. This does not, however, imply that exclusion should never occur. Serious threats to safety, violence, or persistent disruption may require temporary removal.

It should be understood that exclusion may represent a carefully considered last resort rather than an automatic response. Schools therefore benefit from establishing graduated systems of behavioural support that prioritise prevention, dialogue, restorative conversations, and collaborative problem-solving before resorting to exclusion.

5.9 Implications for English Language Teaching

The incident occurred during an English lesson, making it particularly relevant to language education.

Language learning depends heavily upon interaction. Students acquire communicative competence through listening, speaking, reading, writing, questioning, and negotiating meaning with teachers and peers (Richards 2022).

Removing learners from language classrooms therefore has particularly serious consequences as every missed lesson reduces opportunities for exposure to authentic language.

In multilingual contexts such as Mozambique, where English is learned as a foreign language, classroom interaction often constitutes students' primary opportunity to practise English. Consequently, exclusion not only interrupts behavioural development but also slows language acquisition.

Keeping students engaged within communicative learning environments therefore supports both behavioural and linguistic development.

5.10 Policy Implications for Mozambique

Mozambique has made significant progress toward inclusive education and improving access to quality schooling. Nevertheless, schools continue to face challenges related to overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, and varying levels of teacher preparation (UNESCO 2024).

The classroom incident offers several policy lessons relevant to these contexts.

Teacher education curricula should include evidence-based approaches to classroom management that emphasise prevention, inclusion, and relationship-building. Professional development programmes should also support practising teachers in moving beyond exclusionary discipline toward restorative and positive behavioural approaches.

At the school level, policies should encourage the systematic collection and review of disciplinary data. Understanding why students are removed from classrooms, how often this occurs, and with what outcomes can help schools evaluate whether exclusion is serving its intended educational purpose.

Finally, educational policies should recognise that maintaining students' engagement in learning is both an academic and a social justice issue. Every effort to reduce unnecessary exclusion contributes to greater educational equity.

5.11 Concluding Remarks

The decision not to send four disruptive students out of the classroom initially appeared to be a simple instinctive response by a novice teacher. Four decades later, it can be understood as an example of relationship-centred classroom management that anticipated many principles now supported by educational research. By refusing to remove the students, the teacher interrupted a cycle in which exclusion had become rewarding, affirmed the students' value as learners, and created the conditions for voluntary behavioural change.

The implications extend beyond one classroom. They challenge educators to reconsider assumptions about discipline, authority, and learning. Rather than asking how quickly disruptive students can be removed, teachers and schools might ask how they can keep students engaged, accountable, and connected to the learning community. This shift from exclusion to inclusion has the potential to improve not only behaviour but also academic achievement, teacher–student relationships, and long-term educational outcomes.

6. LESSONS LEARNED: A REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS FORTY YEARS LATER

6.1 Introduction

Educational experiences often acquire deeper meaning with time. What appears to be an ordinary classroom event during the early years of teaching may later emerge as a defining moment in a teacher's professional identity. The classroom incident described in this paper occurred in September 1986, when the author was a student teacher undertaking teaching practice in a secondary school in Maputo City, Mozambique. At the time, the decision not to send four disruptive students out of the classroom was largely intuitive. Nearly four decades later, however, the incident can be interpreted through contemporary educational theories and research, revealing important lessons about classroom management, teacher identity, ethical leadership, and inclusive education.

Reflective practice involves revisiting professional experiences to understand not only what happened but also why it happened and what can be learned from it (Schön 1983; Farrell 2019). The passage of time enables teachers to interpret earlier decisions in the light of accumulated experience and evolving scholarship. This chapter therefore examines the enduring lessons that emerge from the incident and considers how they have shaped the author's understanding of effective teaching.

6.2 Lesson One: Every Behaviour Has a Purpose

One of the most significant lessons arising from the incident is that disruptive behaviour rarely occurs without purpose. At the time, the students' actions appeared to be deliberate attempts to interrupt the lesson. They repeatedly invited friends from neighbouring classrooms to chat through the classroom window while instruction was taking place. Initially, the behaviour seemed to be a straightforward challenge to the authority of a novice teacher.

The subsequent conversation transformed this interpretation. One of the students approached the teacher and asked: "Why are you not sending us out?"

The question revealed that the students' behaviour had been motivated not simply by a desire to disrupt but by an expectation of a particular response. Their objective was to be removed from the classroom so that they could join their friends outside. The disciplinary consequence itself had become the reward.

Contemporary behavioural theories support this interpretation. Functional Behaviour Assessment (FBA) emphasises that teachers should identify the purpose served by behaviour before selecting an intervention (Sugai and Simonsen 2012). Behaviour may be maintained because it provides attention, access to preferred activities, escape from difficult tasks, or social recognition. In this case, exclusion from the classroom offered social interaction and freedom from academic demands. By declining to remove the four students, the teacher unintentionally disrupted the reinforcement cycle that sustained the behaviour.

This lesson continues to have profound implications for educators. Before responding to misconduct, teachers should ask not only *What happened?* but also *Why might this behaviour be occurring?* Understanding the function of behaviour allows interventions to address underlying causes rather than merely suppressing visible symptoms.

6.3 Lesson Two: Punishment May Reinforce Misconduct

Perhaps the most striking insight from the incident is that disciplinary measures do not always function as intended. Many teachers assume that sending a disruptive student out of the classroom is punitive. Yet punishment is defined not by the teacher's intention but by its effect on future behaviour (Skinner 1953). If a consequence increases the likelihood of the behaviour recurring, it is functioning as reinforcement rather than punishment.

The students themselves explained that they expected to be sent out because other teachers routinely did so. Once outside, they were free to play with friends. Thus, the consequence that teachers believed would discourage disruption actually encouraged it.

This finding aligns with a substantial body of research questioning the effectiveness of exclusionary discipline. Skiba et al. (2014) argue that removing students from classrooms frequently fails to improve behaviour while simultaneously reducing academic engagement. Gregory et al. (2022) likewise report that restorative alternatives are associated with lower rates of disciplinary incidents and stronger school climates when implemented consistently.

The author's decision illustrates that effective classroom management requires careful consideration of behavioural consequences. Teachers should evaluate not only whether a strategy restores immediate order but also whether it contributes to long-term behavioural improvement. In many situations, maintaining students within the learning environment while addressing the causes of misconduct may prove more effective than exclusion.

6.4 Lesson Three: Language Shapes Identity

One of the defining moments of the incident was the teacher's response: "I am not sending you away because you are very intelligent and important to be in the lesson."

Although spoken spontaneously, these words carried considerable educational significance. Rather than defining the students by their inappropriate behaviour, the teacher affirmed their academic ability and their place within the classroom community.

Research on teacher expectations suggests that students frequently internalise the messages teachers communicate about their abilities (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968). Positive expectations can enhance motivation, persistence, and achievement, while negative expectations may contribute to disengagement and low self-esteem.

The language used in disciplinary encounters is therefore not merely corrective; it is formative. It shapes how students understand themselves. Being described as intelligent and important encouraged the students to see themselves not as troublemakers but as valued members of the learning community. Their subsequent apology indicates that this positive identity appealed to their sense of responsibility.

For contemporary educators, this lesson underscores the importance of choosing language that separates behaviour from identity. Teachers can reject misconduct while affirming students' worth. Such an approach supports both behavioural change and healthy identity development.

6.5 Lesson Four: Respect Generates Responsibility

The students' apology was neither demanded nor coerced. It emerged voluntarily after the teacher expressed confidence in their value as learners. This suggests that respectful treatment may foster a greater sense of personal responsibility than punitive responses.

Humanistic educational theories emphasise that respect, empathy, and unconditional positive regard create conditions in which learners are more willing to engage constructively (Rogers 1969). Similarly, Noddings (2013) argues that caring relationships form the ethical foundation of effective education. Students are more likely to accept guidance from teachers whom they perceive as genuinely concerned about their learning and well-being.

In the present case, respect did not weaken teacher authority. On the contrary, it strengthened it. The students recognised that the teacher's decision was motivated not by fear or indecision but by a commitment to their education. This recognition transformed the relationship from one characterised by confrontation to one based on mutual respect.

The lesson is particularly relevant in contexts where teachers may believe that maintaining authority requires harsh discipline. Respectful relationships and high expectations are not incompatible with effective classroom management; indeed, they often reinforce one another.

6.6 Lesson Five: Reflective Practice Transforms Experience into Professional Knowledge

At the time of the incident, the author lacked the theoretical vocabulary to explain why the decision proved successful. It was only through years of teaching, professional development, and engagement with educational scholarship that the deeper significance of the event became apparent.

Schön (1983) distinguishes between reflection-in-action-thinking while acting-and reflection-on-action-analysing events after they have occurred. The classroom incident involved both forms of reflection. The immediate decision represented reflection-in-action, while the subsequent decades of analysis constitute reflection-on-action.

This process demonstrates that professional expertise develops not only through experience but through systematic reflection on experience. Teachers who critically examine their decisions are better able to identify underlying principles that can guide future practice.

The present paper itself exemplifies this process. A single classroom episode has become a source of enduring professional insight because it has been interpreted through multiple theoretical perspectives, connected with contemporary research, and considered within broader educational contexts.

6.7 Lesson Six: Inclusive Discipline Supports Educational Equity

The incident also highlights the relationship between discipline and educational equity. Exclusionary practices disproportionately affect students who are already vulnerable because of socioeconomic disadvantage, linguistic diversity, disability, or other factors. Removing students from classrooms often compounds educational inequalities by reducing access to instruction and increasing disengagement.

Although the four students in this case were described as highly intelligent, they nonetheless risked losing valuable learning opportunities had they been excluded. The teacher's decision ensured that they remained participants in the educational process. Inclusive education seeks to maximise participation rather than exclusion. It assumes that all learners have the right to engage meaningfully in classroom life, even when behavioural challenges arise. The incident therefore illustrates how everyday disciplinary decisions contribute to broader goals of educational justice and inclusion.

6.8 Lesson Seven: The Experience Shaped My Professional Identity

Looking back after nearly forty years, it is evident that this classroom experience influenced the author's understanding of what it means to be a teacher. Effective teaching is not merely the transmission of knowledge or the enforcement of rules. It involves recognising the humanity, dignity, and potential of every learner.

The incident reinforced the belief that discipline should ultimately serve learning rather than simply maintaining order. Authority is most effective when it is exercised with fairness, empathy, and respect. Students respond not only to what teachers know but also to how teachers treat them.

This perspective has informed the author's subsequent teaching philosophy. It has encouraged a commitment to inclusive classroom practices, reflective professional development, and relationship-centred pedagogy. What began as an uncertain decision by a novice teacher became a foundational lesson in educational leadership.

6.9 Concluding Reflections

The classroom incident described in this paper demonstrates that meaningful professional learning often arises from unexpected experiences. By refusing to send disruptive students out of the classroom, the teacher disrupted a cycle of reinforcement, affirmed students' value, and fostered voluntary behavioural change. The event illustrates that discipline grounded in respect, inclusion, and positive expectations can be both educationally effective and ethically sound.

Four decades later, the experience continues to offer valuable insights for teachers, teacher educators, and policymakers. It reminds us that every disciplinary decision communicates beliefs about students, learning, and the purpose of education. Choosing inclusion over exclusion may not only improve behaviour but also strengthen relationships, support academic engagement, and contribute to more equitable educational outcomes.

7. CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND THE INCLUSION-RECOGNITION-RESPONSIBILITY FRAMEWORK

7.1 Introduction

This paper began with a seemingly ordinary classroom incident that occurred during the author's teaching practice in a secondary school in Maputo City, Mozambique, in September 1986. As a novice teacher entrusted with teaching independently for the first time, the author encountered four students who repeatedly disrupted an English lesson by inviting friends from neighbouring classrooms to converse through the classroom window.

Contrary to the disciplinary practice commonly employed at the time, the author chose not to remove the students from the classroom. Instead, he informed them that they were intelligent and too important to miss the lesson. The students later apologised, explained that they had expected to be sent outside so they could join their friends, and promised that the disruptive behaviour would not recur.

Viewed retrospectively through contemporary educational theories, this episode reveals much more than successful classroom management. It demonstrates how teachers' disciplinary decisions communicate beliefs about learners, influence motivation, shape relationships, and contribute to either educational inclusion or exclusion. The experience also illustrates the value of reflective practice, whereby ordinary professional experiences become sources of enduring educational knowledge.

This concluding chapter synthesises the major findings of the study, proposes an original conceptual framework derived from the incident, discusses the contribution of the paper to educational scholarship, acknowledges limitations, and offers recommendations for teachers, teacher educators, school leaders, policymakers, and future researchers.

7.2 Summary of Major Findings

The analysis undertaken in this paper has generated several important findings.

First, student behaviour should be understood within its social and psychological context rather than interpreted solely as disobedience. The disruptive behaviour observed during the lesson was purposeful. The students anticipated that they would be removed from the classroom, thereby gaining access to preferred social activities outside. This finding supports behavioural theories that emphasise the importance of identifying the function of behaviour before selecting disciplinary responses (Sugai and Simonsen 2012).

Second, exclusionary discipline may unintentionally reinforce disruptive behaviour. Although classroom removal is frequently intended as punishment, its effectiveness depends upon how students perceive the consequence. In this case, exclusion

represented a reward rather than a sanction. Consequently, routine disciplinary practices may sometimes strengthen rather than reduce undesirable behaviour.

Third, teacher expectations significantly influence student behaviour and self-perception. By describing the students as intelligent and important, the teacher communicated confidence in their academic potential. This positive affirmation encouraged the students to reconsider their behaviour and assume responsibility for improving it. The incident therefore illustrates principles associated with the Pygmalion Effect, self-determination theory, and humanistic education.

Fourth, respectful relationships can strengthen rather than weaken classroom authority. Contrary to assumptions that effective discipline requires coercion, the teacher's response fostered cooperation, accountability, and voluntary behavioural change without resorting to punishment.

Finally, reflective practice transforms experience into professional knowledge. Although the decision was intuitive in September 1986, subsequent reflection has enabled the author to interpret the event within broader theoretical and policy contexts. The incident therefore contributes not only to personal professional development but also to wider discussions concerning classroom management, teacher education, and inclusive schooling.

7.3 The Inclusion-Recognition-Responsibility Framework

One of the principal contributions of this paper is the development of an interpretive framework that emerged directly from the classroom experience. The Inclusion-Recognition-Responsibility (IRR) Framework **proposes** that positive behavioural change often occurs through three interconnected processes rather than through exclusionary punishment.

Stage One: Inclusion

The teacher deliberately chose to keep the students within the learning environment. This decision communicated that participation in learning remained important despite inappropriate behaviour.

Instead of separating students from the educational community, the teacher preserved their membership within it. Inclusion therefore becomes the foundation for subsequent behavioural change.

Stage Two: Recognition

The teacher recognised the students' potential by stating that they were intelligent and important members of the class.

Recognition differs fundamentally from praise. Praise evaluates performance while recognition affirms identity.

By recognising students as capable learners rather than defining them by misconduct, the teacher strengthened their academic self-concept.

Stage Three: Responsibility

Recognition encouraged students to assume responsibility for their own actions.

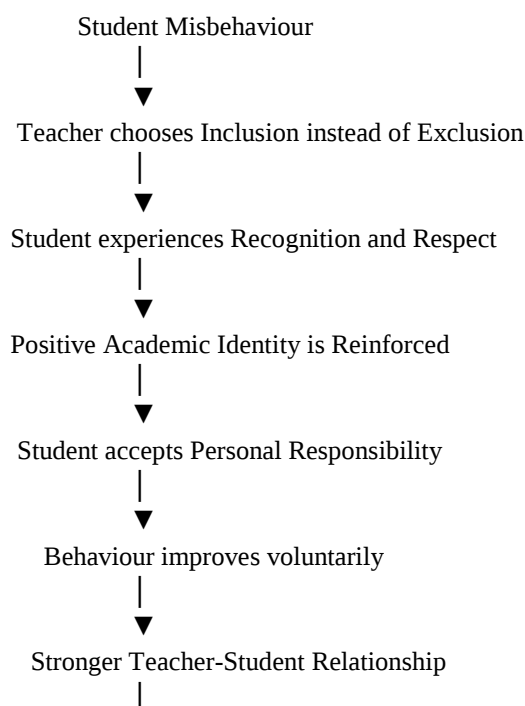
The students apologised voluntarily. In addition, they explained their behaviour and they accepted accountability.

Most importantly, they proposed their own solution by promising to discourage their friends from returning.

Responsibility therefore emerged internally rather than being imposed externally.

The framework suggests that sustainable behavioural improvement is most likely when teachers move sequentially through the above three stages.

Figure 7.1. The Inclusion-Recognition-Responsibility Framework



Improved Learning Environment

Although developed from a single reflective case, the framework is consistent with restorative education, positive behavioural interventions, ethics of care, and self-determination theory. It offers a practical lens through which teachers can reconsider disciplinary decision-making.

7.4 Contribution to Educational Scholarship

This paper contributes to educational scholarship in several ways.

A contribution to reflective teacher education

Most studies of classroom management rely on large datasets, surveys, or experimental designs. While such studies provide valuable evidence, they may overlook the complexity of individual teaching experiences. This paper demonstrates the value of narrative inquiry and reflective practice as legitimate sources of professional knowledge.

A contribution to restorative education

The incident illustrates restorative principles before the author had formal knowledge of restorative practices. It therefore provides empirical support for the argument that relationship-centred discipline can emerge intuitively from teachers' ethical commitments to learners.

A contribution to teacher identity research

Teacher identity develops through significant professional experiences rather than through formal coursework alone (Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop 2004). This incident represents a critical moment in the author's identity formation. It influenced subsequent beliefs concerning discipline, authority, and the purposes of education.

A contribution from an African perspective

Much of the literature on classroom management originates from Europe, North America, and Australia. Reflective studies from African classrooms remain comparatively limited. By analysing an experience from Mozambique, this paper contributes contextually grounded evidence to international discussions on inclusive education, classroom management, and teacher development.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Classroom Teachers

Teachers should seek to understand the underlying purposes of student behaviour before selecting disciplinary responses. Classroom removal should not become an automatic reaction to disruption. Instead, teachers should ask whether exclusion is likely to improve behaviour or inadvertently reinforce it.

Teachers should also communicate high expectations consistently. Statements that affirm students' abilities and value can strengthen motivation and encourage responsible behaviour more effectively than punitive language.

Finally, teachers should cultivate reflective habits by documenting significant classroom incidents and analysing them in relation to educational theory. Such practices promote continuous professional learning.

Recommendations for Teacher Education Institutions

Teacher education programmes should strengthen preparation in classroom management by moving beyond behaviour control toward relationship-centred approaches. Student teachers should receive explicit instruction in restorative practices, positive behavioural interventions, conflict resolution, and inclusive pedagogy.

Reflective journals, case-study analysis, peer discussions, and supervised reflection should become integral components of teaching practice. These activities enable future teachers to connect classroom experiences with theoretical perspectives.

Recommendations for School Leaders

School leaders play a critical role in establishing disciplinary cultures. Rather than evaluating teachers solely according to classroom order, leaders should encourage approaches that promote learning, belonging, and student responsibility.

Professional learning communities can provide opportunities for teachers to analyse challenging incidents collaboratively, share successful strategies, and develop consistent restorative practices across schools.

Recommendations for Educational Policymakers

Educational policies should emphasise preventive and restorative approaches alongside appropriate disciplinary procedures. While exclusion may remain necessary in exceptional circumstances involving serious threats to safety, it should not constitute the default response to routine classroom disruption.

Policies should also encourage schools to collect and analyse disciplinary data, enabling evidence-informed evaluation of exclusionary practices and their educational consequences.

Investment in continuing professional development is equally important. Teachers require sustained opportunities to develop expertise in classroom management that reflects current educational research.

Recommendations for Future Research

The present study suggests several directions for future investigation.

Researchers could examine how novice teachers make disciplinary decisions during teaching practice and how these experiences influence professional identity over time. Comparative studies involving different African educational contexts would also enrich understanding of culturally responsive classroom management.

Longitudinal research could explore the long-term effects of restorative disciplinary practices on student engagement, academic achievement, and school climate. In addition, mixed-methods studies comparing exclusionary and restorative approaches in Mozambican schools would provide valuable evidence to inform policy and practice.

7.6 Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the study is based on a single reflective narrative. Consequently, the findings are not statistically generalizable. However, the purpose of narrative inquiry is analytical rather than statistical generalisation. Readers are invited to consider the transferability of the insights to comparable educational contexts.

Second, the incident occurred in September 1986. Educational systems, teacher preparation programmes, and disciplinary policies have evolved considerably since that time. Nevertheless, the reflective analysis demonstrates how historical experiences can continue to inform contemporary educational thinking.

Third, the interpretation inevitably reflects the author's perspective. Although supported by educational theory and empirical research, alternative interpretations remain possible. This limitation is inherent in qualitative reflective research and underscores the importance of transparency in the analytical process.

7.7 Final Reflection

Nearly four decades have passed since the classroom incident that inspired this paper. At the time, it seemed a brief encounter during teaching practice. Yet its significance has endured because it encapsulates a timeless educational principle: students are more likely to change when they feel respected, included, and valued than when they are excluded and rejected.

The author's decision not to send four disruptive students out of the classroom challenged an established disciplinary norm. Rather than weakening authority, the decision strengthened trust. Rather than rewarding disruption, it interrupted the cycle that sustained it. Rather than excluding learners, it reaffirmed their place within the educational community.

The students' apology and commitment to change were not products of fear but of recognition. They responded not to punishment but to the unexpected affirmation that they were intelligent, important, and worthy of remaining in class. This experience continues to remind educators that discipline is fundamentally about teaching rather than controlling, restoring rather than rejecting, and building relationships rather than merely enforcing rules.

In an era when education systems around the world are increasingly committed to inclusion, equity, and student well-being, the lessons drawn from this classroom in Maputo remain highly relevant. They demonstrate that effective classroom management begins not with the question, "How do I remove disruptive students?" but rather with the more fundamental question, "How can I help every student remain engaged in learning while taking responsibility for their behaviour?"

Answering the above question may ultimately determine whether discipline becomes an instrument of exclusion or a pathway to educational transformation.

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