



SENSITIVE ISSUES, DIVERSE STUDENTS AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT: KNOWING WHAT TO DO WHEN PROBLEMS ARISE

Maureen Reed PhD
Department of Psychology
Ryerson University
Toronto, Canada

PROFESSOR RUTH'S PROBLEM

Professor Ruth works in the English Department. She is having a bad day. She just finished her first class of the term at a new university and there were problems. First, the class was a lot larger than she had expected; almost 100 students. Second, some of the students were not what she was used to. There was this older student who seemed to be the leader of a group of older students. He kept interrupting her to give his opinion on everything she said. She finally asked him to stop talking. After this, the other students seemed grumpy, so she decided to get them talking about a 'hot' topic that was in one of their books. The author of their book had spoken against vaccination in children. She had no real opinion, or knowledge of the subject, so decided to take the author's view. Well, it turned out the topic was very 'hot' and one student asked her to repeat what she had said over and over again and then asked her to clarify the words she was using. When she told the student that she would not define high school vocabulary, the student got up and left. Then there was a student on a computer, who seemed to be looking things up, so she asked her to leave. The student refused, so she gave an ultimatum. She said 'Either you leave or I leave.' The student refused to leave, so what was she to do? She packed up her notes and left. After this trying class, she was called into the department head's office. Apparently, a number of her students emailed the department head to complain about her. They said;

- She was insensitive to the experiences of older students,
- She insulted students who were struggling,
- She refused to teach students with disabilities,
- She has little knowledge of course content,
- And is a bully.

She was shocked at their perception and asked her department head what she should do and he said "Teach better." Now she is worried as she has always taught the same way with some success.

WHO IS TO BLAME

In small groups decide

Who is mostly to blame for this bad class and why

- The Students
- Professor Ruth
- The Department Head

Keep this story in mind while we chat.

**WHAT SHOULD PROFESSOR RUTH HAVE DONE
DIFFERENTLY?**



WHAT SHOULD SHE DO NOW?



THE SECRET TO GREAT CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Inoculation!



THE SECRET TO FUN CLASSES

Reaching all students!

MARGINALIZED STUDENTS IN TODAY'S UNIVERSITY

Students with disabilities

Students who are older

Students who are first generation (parents did not attend)

And others (e.g. poorer socioeconomic, EAL)

Marginalized students often are less resourceful

OUR HOPE: RESOURCEFUL STUDENTS

Successful students have strong academic resourcefulness skills

- Make positive self statements to manage academic stress (e.g. test anxiety)
- Problem solve to cope with academic demand (e.g. organize time, prioritize, determine need)
- Delay gratification and don't procrastinate (manage time)
- Understand effort is involved in success

RESOURCEFUL VS. NON RESOURCEFUL

High Resourceful	Low Resourceful
Persist when they encounter difficulties	Drop out
Adapt their behaviour to the situation and apply consequences for learning	Have difficulty adapting to university
Remain optimistic when they fail and rework strategies	Attribute failures to insufficient ability
Meet deadlines, remain calm in tests, attend class, study, review materials	Ask for extensions, have difficulty controlling self in tests, skip class, have difficulty figuring out how to study or the purpose of review
Seek appropriate assistance when needed (student services, library, professor)	Often lost when in difficulty

Students with Disabilities	Older Students	First Generation
Review of the previous class	Provide a many examples and explanations	Review the course syllabus and explain why important
Provide an agenda	Provide opportunities for class discussion	Explain what office hours are for and keep inviting students to these hours
Provide 'real life' examples of difficult concepts and theories	Provide small group projects where there is active involvement	Explain that there is diversity amongst students and diversity is a positive
When showing slides, tell the students what is on the slide and why it is important and make sure to use large font	Allow the student to apply their life experience	Repeat important concepts and provide definitions for area specific vocabulary
Explain things in more than one way	Provide timely feedback on assignments	Explain to students where they will find assignment details and go over expectations
Do learning checks	Provide the benefits of learning material and apply it to the 'real world'	Tell students about on-campus resources
Use texts that offer students the choice of the text in print or electronic	Provide opportunities for students to critically reflect on their experiences.	Encourage first generation students to engage in class and respect their experiences

SENSITIVE TOPICS/SENSITIVE STUDENTS

- ✓ Explain the process and define roles
- ✓ Be aware of students' discomfort
- ✓ Set an example for students
- ✓ Be proactive – stop the discussion the moment it starts becoming emotional to reestablish the rules.
- ✓ Interrupt politely when necessary
- ✓ Provide opportunities for all students to participate
- ✓ Get discussions moving in a more positive direction
- ✓ Debrief with your colleagues after a difficult class to gain some perspective on the class as well as potentially helpful feedback

(Kipp, 2008)



CAN YOU HELP PROFESSOR RUTH

In your group, come up with one thing she can do in class, and who it will help

Do you think your idea might also help traditional students

ACTIVITIES THAT BENEFIT TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

Case studies

Participatory debates

Stories

Demonstrations

Think Pair Share

Review