

Chapter 4

Peace and Progress I: Building Productive Classrooms

The bell rang outside of Julia Cavalho's tenth-grade English class. The sound was still echoing in the hall when Ms. Cavalho started her lesson.

"Today," she began, "you will become thieves. Worse than thieves. Thieves steal only your money or your property. You—" (she looked around the class and paused for emphasis) "— will steal something far more valuable. You will steal an author's style. An author builds his or her style, word by word, sentence by sentence, over many years. Stealing an author's style is like stealing a work of art that someone took years to create. It's despicable, but you're going to do it."

During her speech the students sat in rapt attention. Two students, Mark and Gloria, slunk in late. Mark made a funny "Oops, I'm late" face and did an exaggerated tiptoe to his desk. Ms. Cavalho ignored both of them, as did the class. She continued her lesson.

"To whom are you going to do this dirty deed? Papa Hemingway, of course. Hemingway of the short, punchy sentence. Hemingway of the almost excessive attention to physical detail. You've read *The Old Man and the Sea*. You've read parts of *The Sun Also Rises* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*."

While Ms. Cavalho talked, Mark made an exaggerated show of getting out his books. He whispered to a neighboring student. Without stopping her lesson, Ms. Cavalho moved near Mark. He stopped whispering and paid attention.

"Today you will become Hemingway. You will steal his words, his pace, his meter, his similes, his metaphors, and put them to work in your own stories."

Ms. Cavalho had students review elements of Hemingway's style, which the class had studied before.

"Everyone think for a moment. How would Hemingway describe an old woman going up the stairs at the end of a long day's work? Mai, what do you think?"

Mai gave her short description of the old woman.

"Sounds great to me. I like your use of very short sentences and physical description.

Any other ideas? Kevin?"

Ms. Cavalho let several students give Hemingway-style descriptions, using them as opportunities to reinforce her main points.

"In a moment," she said, "you're going to get your chance to become Ernest Hemingway.

As usual, you'll be working in your writing response groups. Before we start, however, let's go over our rules about effective group work. Who can tell me what they are?"

The students volunteered several rules: Respect others, explain your ideas, be sure everyone participates, stand up for your opinion, keep voices low.

"All right," said Ms. Cavalho. "When I say begin, I'd like you to move your desks together and start planning your compositions. Ready? Begin."

The students moved their desks together smoothly and quickly and got right to work.

During the transition, Ms. Cavalho called Mark and Gloria to her desk to discuss their lateness.

Gloria had a good excuse, but Mark was developing a pattern of lateness and disruptiveness.

"Mark," said Ms. Cavalho, "I'm concerned about your lateness and your behavior in class. I've spoken to some of your other teachers, and they say you're behaving even worse in their classes than you do in mine. Please come here after school, and we'll see if we can come up with a solution to this problem."

Mark returned to his group and got to work. Ms. Cavalho circulated among the groups, giving encouragement to students who were working well. When she saw two girls who were goofing off, she moved close to them and put her hand on one girl's shoulder while looking at the plan for her composition.

"Good start," she said. "Let's see how far you can get with this by the end of the period."

The students worked in a controlled but excited way through the end of the period, thoroughly enjoying "stealing" from Hemingway. The classroom sounded like a beehive with busy, involved students sharing ideas, reading drafts to each other, and editing each other's compositions. At the end of the day, Mark returned to Ms. Cavalho's classroom.

"Mark," she said, "we need to do something about your lateness and your clowning in class. How would you suggest that we solve this problem?"

“Gloria was late, too,” Mark protested.

“We’re not talking about Gloria. We’re talking about you. You are responsible for your own behavior.”

“OK, OK, I promise I’ll be on time.”

“That’s not good enough. We’ve had this conversation before. We need a different plan this time. I know you can succeed in this class, but you’re making it hard on yourself as well as disrupting your classmates.

“Let’s try an experiment,” Ms. Cavalho went on. “Each day, I’d like you to rate your own behavior. I’ll do the same. If we both agree at the end of each week that you’ve been on time and appropriately, behaved, fine. If not, I’ll need to call your parents and see whether we can make a plan with them. Are you willing to give it a try?”

“OK, I guess so.”

“Great. I’m expecting to see a new Mark starting tomorrow. I know you won’t let me down!”

Creating an Effective Learning Environment

Providing an effective learning environment includes strategies that teachers use to create a positive, productive classroom experience. Often called **classroom management**, strategies for providing effective learning environments include not only preventing and responding to misbehavior but also, more importantly, using class time well, creating an atmosphere that is conducive to interest and inquiry, and permitting activities that engage students’ minds and imaginations. A class with no behavior problems can by no means be assumed to be a well-managed class.

The most effective approach to classroom management is effective instruction. Students who are participating in well-structured activities that engage their interests, who are highly motivated to learn, and who are working on tasks that are challenging yet within their capabilities rarely pose any serious management problems. The vignette involving Ms. Cavalho illustrates this. She has a well-managed class not because she behaves like a drill sergeant, but because she teaches interesting lessons, engages students’ imaginations and energies, makes efficient use of time, and communicates a sense of purpose, high expectations, and contagious enthusiasm. However, even a well-managed class is sure to contain individual students who will misbehave. While Ms. Cavalho’s focus is on preventing behavior problems, she is also ready to intervene when necessary to see that students’ behaviors are within acceptable limits. For some students a glance, physical proximity, or a hand on the shoulder is enough. For others, consequences might be necessary. Even in these cases, Ms. Cavalho does not let behavior issues disrupt her lesson or her students’ learning activities.

This chapter focuses on the creation of effective learning environments, classroom management, and discipline. Creating an effective learning environment involves organizing classroom activities, instruction, and the physical classroom to provide for effective use of time, to create a happy, productive classroom, and to minimize disruptions. **Discipline** refers to methods used to prevent behavior problems or to respond to existing behavior problems so as to reduce their occurrence in the future.

There is no magic or charisma that makes a teacher an effective classroom manager.

Setting up an effective learning environment is a matter of knowing a set of techniques that any teacher can learn and apply. This chapter takes an approach to classroom management and discipline that emphasizes prevention of misbehavior. Still, every teacher, no matter how effective, will encounter discipline problems sometimes, and this chapter also presents means of handling these problems when they arise.

Effective Use of Time

Time is a limited resource in schools. A typical U.S. school is in session about 6 hours a day for 180 days each year. Out of these 6 hours (or so) must come time for teaching a variety of subjects plus time for lunch, recess, transitions between classes, announcements, and so on.

A term for available instructional time is **allocated time**: the time during which students have an opportunity to learn. When the teacher is lecturing, students can learn by paying attention. When students have written assignments or other tasks, they can learn by doing them.

In a 40- to 60-minute period in a particular subject, many quite different factors reduce the time available for instruction.

A discussion follows of some common ways in which allocated time can be maximized.

Preventing Lost Time. One way in which much instructional time disappears is through losses of entire days or periods. Many of these losses are inevitable because of such things as standardized testing days and snow days, and you certainly would not want to abolish important field trips or school assemblies simply to get in a few more periods of instruction. However, frequent losses of instructional periods interrupt the flow of instruction and can ultimately deprive students of sufficient time to master the curriculum.

Making good use of all classroom time is less a matter of squeezing out a few more minutes or hours of instruction each year than of communicating to students that learning is an important business that is worth their time and effort. If a teacher finds excuses not to teach, students might learn that learning is not a serious enterprise. In studying an outstandingly effective inner-city Baltimore elementary school, a journalist described a third-grade teacher who took her class to the school library, which she found locked. She sent a student for the key, and while the class waited, the teacher whispered to her students, "Let's work on our doubles. Nine plus nine? Six plus six?" The class whispered the answers back in unison. Did a couple of minutes working on addition facts increase the students' achievement? Of course not. But it probably did help to develop a perception that school is for learning, not for marking time.

Preventing Late Starts and Early Finishes. A surprising amount of allocated instructional time is lost because the teacher does not start teaching at the beginning of the period. A crisp, on-time start to a lesson is important for setting a purposive tone to instruction. If students know that a teacher does not start on time, they might be lackadaisical about getting to class on time; this attitude makes future on-time starts increasingly difficult. In Ms. Cavalho's class, students know that if they are late, they will miss something interesting, fun, and important. As a result, almost all of them are in class and ready to learn when the bell rings.

Teachers can also shortchange students if they stop teaching before the end of the period.

This can be avoided by planning more instruction than you think you'll need, in case you finish the lesson early.

Preventing Interruptions. One important cause of lost allocated time for instruction is interruptions. Interruptions may be externally imposed, such as announcements or the need to sign forms sent from the principal's office; or they may be caused by teachers or students themselves. Interruptions not only directly cut into the time for instruction but also break the momentum of the lesson, which reduces students' attention to the task at hand.

Avoiding interruptions takes planning. For example, some teachers put a "Do not disturb—learning in progress!" sign on the door to inform would-be interrupters to come back later. One teacher wore a special hat during small-group lessons to remind her other second-graders not to interrupt her during that time. Rather than signing forms or dealing with other "administrivia" at once, some teachers keep a box where students and others can put any forms and then deal with them while students are doing independent or group work or after the lesson is over.

Anything you can postpone doing until after a lesson should be postponed. For example, if you have started a lesson and a student walks in late, go on with the lesson and deal with the tardiness issue later.

Handling Routine Procedures. Some teachers spend too much time on simple classroom routines. For example, some elementary teachers spend many minutes getting students ready for lunch or dismissal because they call students by name, one at a time. This is unnecessary. Early in the school year, many teachers establish a routine that only when the entire table (or row) is quiet and ready to go are students called to line up. Lining up for lunch then takes seconds, not minutes.

Other procedures should also become routine for students. They must know, for example, when they may go to the washroom or sharpen a pencil and not ask to do these things at other times. You might collect papers by having students pass them to the front or to the left or by having table monitors collect the table's papers. Distribution of materials must also be planned for. Exactly how these tasks are done is less important than that students know clearly what they are to do. Many teachers assign regular classroom helpers to take care of distribution and collection of papers, taking messages to the office, erasing the blackboard, and other routine tasks that are annoying interruptions for teachers but that students love to do. You should use student power as much as possible.

Getting Students' Attention. Teachers need a method for quickly getting students' attention. Many use a "zero noise signal" in which you raise your hand, and teach students to raise their own hands, stop talking, and listen. You'd then praise groups that comply first. Other teachers use a bell or a tambourine for the same purpose.

Maintaining a Rapid Pace of Instruction. Teachers who cover a lot of content in each lesson have students who learn more. A rapid pace also contributes to students' interest and time on task.

Minimizing Time Spent on Discipline. Whenever possible—which is almost always—disciplinary statements or actions should not interrupt the flow of the lesson. A sharp glance, silently moving close to an offending student, or a hand signal, such as putting finger to lips to remind a student to be silent, is usually effective for the kind of minor behavior problems that teachers must constantly deal with, and they allow the lesson to proceed without interruption. For example, Ms. Cavalho could have interrupted her lesson to scold Mark and Gloria, but that would have wasted time and disrupted the concentration and focus of the whole class. If students need talking to about discipline problems, the time to do it is after the lesson or after school, not in the middle of a lesson. If Diana and Martin are talking during a quiet reading time instead of working, it would be better to say, "Diana and Martin, see me at three o'clock," than to launch into an on-the-spot speech about the importance of being on-task during seatwork times.

Using Engaged Time Effectively

Engaged time (or time on-task) is the time individual students actually spend doing assigned work.

Allocated time and engaged time differ in that allocated time refers to the opportunity for the entire class to engage in learning activities, whereas engaged time may be different for each student, depending on a student's attentiveness and willingness to work.

Strategies for maximizing student time on-task are discussed in the following sections.

Teaching Engaging Lessons. The best way to increase students' time on-task is to teach lessons that are so interesting, engaging, and relevant to students' interests that students will pay attention and eagerly do what is asked of them. Part of this strategy calls for the teacher to emphasize active, rapidly paced instruction with varied modes of presentation and frequent opportunities for student participation and to deemphasize independent seatwork, especially unsupervised seatwork (as in follow-up time in elementary reading classes). Student engagement is much higher when the teacher is teaching than during individual seatwork. Giving students many opportunities to participate actively in lessons also increases learning, and engaged time is much higher in well-structured cooperative learning programs than in independent seatwork.

Maintaining Momentum. Maintaining momentum during a lesson is a key to keeping task engagement high. *Momentum* refers to the avoidance of interruptions or slowdowns. In a class that maintains good momentum, students always have something to do and, once started working, are not interrupted. Anyone who has tried to write a term paper only to be interrupted by telephone calls, knocks on the door, and other disturbances knows that these interruptions cause much more damage to concentration and progress than the amount of time they take.

Back in 1970, Jacob Kounin gave the following example of teacher-caused slowdowns and interruptions:

The teacher is just starting a reading group at the reading circle while the rest of the children are engaged in seatwork with workbooks. She sat in front of the reading group and asked, "All right, who can tell me the name of our next chapter?" Before a child was called on to answer, she looked toward the children at seatwork, saying: "Let's wait until the people in Group Two are settled and working." (Actually most were writing in their workbooks.) She then looked at John, who was in the seatwork group, naggingly asking,

"Did you find your pencil?" John answered something which was inaudible. The teacher got up from her seat, saying, "I'd like to know what you did with it." Pause for about two seconds. "Did you eat it?" Another pause. "What happened to it? What color was it? You can't do your work without it." The teacher then went to her desk to get a pencil to give to John, saying, "I'll get you a pencil. Make sure the pencil is here tomorrow morning.

And don't tell me you lost that one too. And make it a new one, and see that it's sharpened." (p. 104)

This teacher destroyed the momentum of a reading lesson by spending more than a minute dealing with a behavior that could easily have been ignored. Of course, during this interchange, the entire class—both the reading group and the seatwork group—were off-task; but what is worse, they required much more time to get resettled and back to work after the incident.

Maintaining Smoothness of Instruction. *Smoothness* is another term Kounin used to refer to continued focus on a meaningful sequence of instruction. Smooth instruction avoids jumping without transitions from topic to topic or from the lesson to other activities. For example, The teacher was conducting a recitation with a subgroup. She was walking toward a child who was reciting when she passed by the fish bowl. She suddenly stopped walking toward the boy, and stopped at the fish bowl, saying: "Oh my, I forgot to feed the fish!" She then got some fish food from a nearby shelf and started to feed the fish, saying: "My, see how hungry it is." She then turned to a girl, saying:

"See, Margaret, you forgot to feed the fish. You can see how hungry it is. See how quickly it comes up to eat." (Kounin, 1970, pp. 98–99)

This example illustrates how smoothness and momentum are related. The teacher jumped from her lesson to housekeeping to (unnecessary) disciplining, interrupting one student's recitation and making it impossible for the other students to focus on the lesson.

Managing Transitions. Transitions are changes from one activity to another; for example, from lecture to seatwork, from subject to subject, or from lesson to lunch. Elementary school classes have been found to have an average of 31 major transitions a day, occupying 15 percent of class time. Transitions are the seams of class management at which classroom order is most likely to come apart.

Following are three rules for the management of transitions:

1. When making a transition, give a clear signal to which the students have been taught to respond. For example, in the elementary grades, some teachers use a bell or a hand signal to indicate to students that they should immediately be quiet and listen to instructions.
2. Before the transition is made, students must be certain about what they are to do when the signal is given. For example, you might say, "When I say 'Go,' I want you all to put your books away and get out the compositions you started yesterday. Is everyone ready? All right, go!" When giving instructions to students to begin independent seatwork, you can help them get started with the activity before letting them work independently, as in the following example:

Teacher: Today we are going to find guide words for different pages in the dictionary. Everyone should have an assignment sheet with the words on it and a dictionary. Class, hold up your assignment sheet. [They do.] Now hold up your dictionary. [They do.] Good. Now turn to page eighty-two. [The teacher walks around to see that everyone does so.] Look at the top of the page, and put your finger on the first guide word. [The teacher walks around to check on this.] Class, what is the first guide word?

Class: Carrot!

Teacher: Good. The first guide word is carrot. Now look to the right on the same page. Class, what word do you see there?

Class: Carve!

Teacher: Right. The guide words are carrot and carve. Now turn to page five hundred fifty-five and find the guide words. [Students do this.] Class, what is the first guide word on page five hundred fifty-five?

Class: Scheme!

Teacher: Class, what is the second guide word?

Class: Scissors!

Teacher: Great! Now do the first problem on your assignment sheet by yourselves, and then check with a partner to see if you agree. The teacher then checks whether all or almost all students have the first item correct before telling them to complete the worksheet. The idea, of course, is to make sure that students know exactly what they are to do before they start doing it.

3. Make transitions all at once. Students should be trained to make transitions as a group, rather than one student at a time. The teacher should usually give directions to the class as a whole or to well-defined groups: "Class, I want you all to put away your laboratory materials and prepare for dismissal as quickly and quietly as you can. . . . I see that Table Three is quiet and ready. Table Three, please line up quietly. Table Six, line up. Table One . . . Table Four. Everyone else may line up quietly. Let's go!"

Maintaining Group Focus during Lessons. Maintaining group focus means using classroom organization strategies and questioning techniques that ensure that all students in the class stay involved in the lesson, even when only one student is called on by the teacher. Two principal components of Kounin's concept of maintaining group focus are accountability and group alerting.

Kounin used the term **accountability** to mean "the degree to which the teacher holds the children accountable and responsible for their task performances during recitation sessions" (p.

119). Examples of tactics for increasing accountability are using choral responses, having all students hold up their work so the teacher can see it, circulating among the students to see what they are doing, and drawing other children into the performance of one child (e.g., "I want you all to watch what Suzanne is doing so you can tell me whether you agree or disagree with her answer"). Ms. Cavalho increased involvement and accountability by having all students prepare a Hemingway-like description and only then asking for a few of them to be read.

The idea behind these tactics is to maintain the involvement of all students in all parts of the lesson. A study of third- and fourth-graders found that students raised their hands an average of once every 6 minutes and gave an answer only once every 15 minutes, with some students hardly ever participating. This is not enough participation to ensure student attention. Teachers should be concerned not only about drawing all students into class activities but also about avoiding activities that relegate most students to the role of spectator for long periods. For example, a very common teaching error is to have one or two students work out a lengthy problem on the whiteboard or read an extended passage while the rest of the class has nothing to do. Such methods waste the time of much of the class, break the momentum of the lesson, and leave the door open for misbehavior.

Group alerting refers to questioning strategies that are designed to keep all students on their toes during a lecture or discussion. One example of group alerting is creating suspense before calling on a student by saying, "Given triangle ABC, if we know the measures of sides A and B and of angle AB, what else can we find out about the triangle? . . . [Pause] . . . Maria?" Note that this keeps the whole class thinking until Maria's name is called. The opposite effect would have been created by saying, "Maria, given triangle ABC . . . ," because only Maria would have been alerted. Calling on students in a random order is another example of group alerting, as is letting students know that they may be asked questions about the preceding reciter's answers. For example, the teacher might follow up Maria's answer with "What is the name of the postulate that Maria used? . . . Ralph?"

Maintaining Group Focus during Seatwork. During times when students are doing seatwork and the teacher is available to work with them, it is important to monitor the seatwork activities and to informally check individual students' work. That is, you should circulate among the students' desks to see how they are doing. This allows you to identify any problems students are having before they waste seatwork time

practicing errors or giving up in frustration. If students are engaged in cooperative groupwork, they can check each other's work, but you still need to check frequently with each group to see that the students are on the right track.

Seatwork times provide excellent opportunities for providing individual help to students who are struggling to keep up with the class, but you should resist the temptation to work too long with an individual student. Interactions with students during seatwork should be as brief as possible because if the teacher gets tied down with any one student, the rest of the class may drift off-task or run into problems of their own.

Withitness. **Withitness** is another term coined by Kounin (1970). It describes teachers' actions that indicate awareness of students' behavior at all times. Kounin called this awareness "having eyes in the back of one's head." Teachers who are with-it can respond immediately to student misbehavior and know who started what. Teachers who lack withitness can make the error of scolding the wrong student, as in the following instance:

Lucy and John, who were sitting at the same table as Jane, started to whisper.

Robert watched this, and he too got into the act. Then Jane giggled and said something to John. Then Mary leaned over and whispered to Jane. At this point, the teacher said, "Mary and Jane, stop that!" (adapted from Kounin, 1970, p. 80)

By responding only to Mary and Jane, who were the last to get involved in the whispering and giggling incident, the teacher indicated that she did not know what was going on.

A single incident of this kind might make little difference, but after many such incidents, students recognize the teacher's tendency to respond inappropriately to their behavior.

Another example of a lack of withitness is responding too late to a sequence of misbehavior. Lucy and John's whispering could have been easily nipped in the bud, perhaps with simply a glance or a finger to the lips. By the time the whispering had escalated to giggling and spread to several students, a full stop in the lesson was needed to rectify the situation.

A major component of withitness is scanning the class frequently and establishing eye contact with individual students. More effective classroom managers frequently scan the classroom visually, to monitor the pace of activity as well as individual students' behaviors.

Effective classroom managers have the ability to interpret and act on the mood of the class as a whole. They notice when students are beginning to fidget or are otherwise showing signs of flagging attention, and they act on this information to change activities to recapture student engagement.

Overlapping. **Overlapping** refers to the teacher's ability to attend to interruptions or behavior problems while continuing a lesson or other instructional activity. For example, one teacher was teaching a lesson on reading comprehension when he saw a student looking at a book that was unrelated to the lesson. Without interrupting his lesson, the teacher walked over to the student, took her book, closed it, and put it on her desk, all while continuing to speak to the class. This took care of the student's misbehavior without slowing the momentum of the lesson; the rest of the class hardly noticed that the event occurred. Similarly, Ms. Cavalho squelched a whispering incident just by moving closer to the whispering students while continuing her lesson.

Another example of a teacher doing a good job of overlapping is as follows:

The teacher is at the reading circle and Lucy is reading aloud while standing.

Johnny, who was doing seatwork at his desk, walks up toward the teacher, holding his workbook. The teacher glances at Johnny, then looks back at Lucy, nodding at Lucy, as Lucy continues to read aloud. The teacher remains seated and takes Johnny's workbook. She turns to Lucy, saying, "That was a hard word, Lucy, and you pronounced it right." She checks about three more answers to Johnny's book saying, "That's fine, you can go ahead and do the next page now," and resumes looking at the reading book as Lucy continues reading. (Kounin, 1970, p. 84)

Johnny's interruption of the reading group might have been avoided altogether by a good classroom manager, who would have assigned enough work to keep all students productively busy during reading

circle time and given clear instructions on what they were to do when they finished their seatwork. For example, Johnny's work could have been checked by a partner or teammate. However, interruptions are sometimes unavoidable, and the ability to keep the main activity going while handling them has a strong effect on classroom order.

Starting Out the Year Right

The first days of school are critical in establishing classroom order. A list of six characteristics of effective classroom managers follows:

1. Effective managers have a clear, specific plan for introducing students to classroom rules and procedures and spend as many days as necessary carrying out their plan until students knew how to line up, ask for help, and so on.
2. Effective managers work with the whole class initially (even if they plan to group students later). They are involved with the whole class at all times, rarely leaving any students without something to do or without supervision. For example, effective managers seldom work with an individual student unless the rest of the class is productively occupied.
3. Effective managers spend extra time during the first days of school introducing procedures and discussing class rules (often encouraging students to suggest rules themselves). They remind students of class rules every day for at least the first week of school.
4. Effective managers teach students specific procedures. For example, some have students practice lining up quickly and quietly; others teach students to respond to a signal, such as a raised hand, a bell, a flick of the light switch, or a call for attention.
5. Effective managers use simple, enjoyable tasks as first activities. Materials for the first lessons are well prepared, clearly presented, and varied. The teachers ask students to get right to work on the first day of school and then gave them instructions on procedures gradually, to avoid overloading them with too much information at a time.
6. Effective managers respond immediately to stop any misbehavior.

Setting Class Rules

One of the first management-related tasks at the start of the year is setting class rules.

Three principles govern this process. First, class rules should be few in number. Second, they should make sense and be seen as fair by students. Third, they should be clearly explained and deliberately taught to students. A major purpose of clearly explaining general class rules is to give authority for specific procedures. For example, all students will understand and support a rule such as "Respect others' property." This simple rule can be invoked to cover such obvious misbehaviors as stealing or destroying materials but also gives a reason for putting materials away, cleaning up litter, and refraining from marking up textbooks. Students may be asked to help set the rules, or they may be given a set of rules and asked to give examples of these rules.

Class discussions give students a feeling of participation in setting rational rules that everyone can live by. When the class as a whole has agreed on a set of rules, offenders know that they are transgressing community norms, not the teacher's arbitrary regulations. One all-purpose set of class rules follows:

1. ***Be courteous to others.*** This rule forbids interrupting others or speaking out of turn, teasing or laughing at others, bullying, fighting, and so on.
2. ***Respect others' property.***
3. ***Be on-task.*** This includes listening when the teacher or other students are talking, working on seatwork, continuing to work during any interruptions, staying in one's seat, being at one's seat and ready to work when the bell rings, and following directions.
4. ***Raise hands to be recognized.*** This is a rule against calling out or getting out of one's seat for assistance without permission.

Chapter 5

Peace and Progress II: Preventing Behavior Problems

The preceding chapter discussed means of organizing classroom activities to maximize time for instruction and minimize time for such minor disturbances as students talking out of turn, getting out of their seats without permission, and not paying attention. Provision of interesting lessons, efficient use of class time, and careful structuring of instructional activities will prevent most such minor behavior problems—and many more serious ones as well. Time off-task can lead to more serious problems, and many behavior problems arise because students are frustrated or bored in school. Instructional programs that actively involve students and provide all of them with opportunities for success might prevent such problems.

However, effective lessons and good use of class time are not the only means of preventing or dealing with inappropriate behavior. Besides structuring classes to reduce the frequency of behavior problems, teachers must have strategies for preventing more serious problems and dealing with behavior problems when they do occur.

The great majority of behavior problems are relatively minor disruptions, such as failing to follow class rules or procedures, nothing really serious, but behaviors that must be minimized for learning to occur. Before considering disciplinary strategies, it is important to reflect on their purpose. Students should learn much more in school than the “Three Rs.” They should learn that they are competent learners and that learning is enjoyable and satisfying. A classroom environment that is warm, supportive, and accepting fosters these attitudes. Furthermore, there is a strong link between attentive, non-disruptive behavior and student achievement.

A healthy classroom environment cannot be created if students do not respect teachers or teachers do not respect students. Though teachers should involve students in setting class rules and take student needs or input into account in organizing the classroom, teachers are ultimately the leaders who establish and enforce rules by which students must live. These class rules and procedures should become second nature to students. Teachers who have not established their authority in the classroom are likely to spend too much time dealing with behavior problems or yelling at students to be instructionally effective. Furthermore, the clearer the structure and routine procedures in the classroom, the more freedom the teacher can allow students. The following sections discuss strategies for dealing with typical discipline problems.

The Principle of Least Intervention

In dealing with routine classroom behavior problems, the most important principle is that a teacher should correct misbehaviors by using the simplest intervention that will work. Many studies have found that the amount of time spent disciplining students is negatively related to student achievement. The teacher’s main goal in dealing with routine misbehavior is to do so in a way that is both effective and avoids unnecessarily disrupting the lesson. If at all possible, the lesson must go on while any behavior problems are dealt with.

Prevention

The easiest behavior problems to deal with are those that never occur in the first place.

Teachers can prevent behavior problems by presenting interesting and lively lessons, making class rules and procedures clear, keeping students busy on meaningful tasks, and using other effective techniques of basic classroom management. Ms. Cavalho’s class is an excellent example of this. Her students rarely misbehave because they are interested and engaged.

Varying the content of lessons, using a variety of materials and approaches, displaying humor and enthusiasm, and using cooperative learning or project-based learning can all reduce boredom-caused behavior problems. A teacher can avert frustration caused by material that is too difficult or assignments that are unrealistically long by breaking assignments into smaller steps and doing a better job of preparing students to work on their own. Fatigue can be reduced if short breaks are allowed, activities are varied, and difficult subjects are scheduled in the morning, when students are fresh.

Nonverbal Cues

Teachers can eliminate much routine classroom misbehavior without breaking the momentum of the lesson by the use of simple **nonverbal cues**. Making eye contact with a misbehaving student might be enough to stop misbehavior. For example, if two students are whispering, you might simply catch the eye of one or both of them. Moving close to a student who is misbehaving also usually alerts the student to shape up. If these techniques fail, a light hand on the student's shoulder is likely to be effective (although touch should be used cautiously with adolescents, who may be sensitive about being touched). These nonverbal strategies all clearly convey the same message: "I see what you are doing and don't like it. Please get back to work." The advantage of communicating this message nonverbally is that the lesson need not be interrupted. In contrast, verbal reprimands can cause a ripple effect; many students stop working while one is being reprimanded. Instead of interrupting the flow of concentration for many to deal with the behavior of one, nonverbal cues usually have an effect only on the student who is misbehaving.

Praising Behavior That Is Incompatible with Misbehavior

Praise can be a powerful motivator for many students. One strategy for reducing misbehavior in class is to make sure to praise students for behaviors that are incompatible with the misbehavior you want to reduce. That is, catch students in the act of doing right. For example, if students often get out of their seats without permission, praise them on the occasions when they do get to work right away.

Praising Other Students

It is often possible to get one student to behave by praising others for behaving. For example, if Polly is goofing off, the teacher might say, "I'm glad to see so many students working so well—Jake is doing a good job, Carol is doing well, José and Michelle are working nicely. . . ." When Polly finally does get to work, the teacher should praise her, too, without dwelling on her past inattention: "I see James and Walter and Polly doing such good work."

Verbal Reminders

If a nonverbal cue is impossible or ineffective, a simple verbal reminder might help to bring a student into line. The reminder should be given immediately after the student misbehaves; delayed reminders are usually ineffective. If possible, the reminder should state what students are supposed to be doing rather than dwelling on what they are doing wrong. For example, it is better to say, "John, please attend to your own work," than, "John, stop copying off of Alfredo's paper." Stating the reminder positively communicates more positive expectations for future behavior than does a negative statement. Also, the reminder should focus on the behavior, not on the student.

Repeated Reminders

Most often a nonverbal cue, reinforcement of other students, or a simple reminder will be enough to end minor misbehavior. However, sometimes students test the teacher's resolve by failing to do what has been asked of them or by arguing or giving excuses. This testing will diminish over time if students learn that teachers mean what they say and will use appropriate measures to enforce an orderly, productive classroom environment.

When a student refuses to comply with a simple reminder, one strategy to attempt first is a repetition of the reminder, ignoring any irrelevant excuse or argument. If a student has a legitimate issue to discuss, the teacher might deal with it, but all too often students' arguments or excuses are nothing more than a means of drawing out an interaction with the teacher to avoid getting down to work. Recall, for example, how Ms. Cavalho refused to be drawn into a discussion of Gloria's lateness when it was Mark's behavior that was at issue.

Applying Consequences

When all previous steps have been ineffective in getting the student to comply with a clearly stated and reasonable request, the final step is to pose a choice to the student: Either comply or suffer the consequences. Examples of consequences are sending the student out of class, making the student miss a few minutes of recess or some other privilege, having the student stay after school, and calling the student's parents. A consequence for not complying with the teacher's request should be mildly unpleasant, short in duration, and applied as soon as possible after the behavior occurs. Certainty is far more important than severity; students must know that consequences follow misbehavior as night follows day. One disadvantage of using severe or long-lasting punishment (e.g., no recess for a week) is that it can create resentment in the student and a defiant attitude. Also, it might be difficult to follow through on severe or longlasting consequences. Mild but certain consequences communicate, "I cannot tolerate that sort of behavior, but I care about you and want you to rejoin the class as soon as you are ready." Before presenting a student with a consequence for noncompliance, teachers must be absolutely certain that they can and will follow through if necessary. When a teacher says, "You may choose to get to work right away, or you may choose to spend 5 minutes of your recess doing your work here," the teacher must be certain that someone will be available to monitor the student in the classroom during recess. Vague or empty threats ("You stop that or I'll make you wish you had!" or "You get to work or I'll have you suspended for a month!") are worse than useless. If teachers are not prepared to follow through with consequences, students will learn to shrug them off.

After a consequence has been applied, the teacher should avoid referring to the incident.

For example, when the student returns from a 10-minute exclusion from class, the teacher should accept her or him back without any sarcasm or recriminations. The student now deserves a fresh start.

Using Applied Behavior Analysis to Manage More Serious Behavior Problems

The previous section discussed how to deal with behaviors that might be appropriate on the playing field but are out of line in the classroom. There are other behaviors that are not appropriate anywhere. These include fighting, stealing, destruction of property, and gross disrespect for teachers or other school staff. These are far less common than routine classroom misbehavior but far more serious. Effective strategies to deal with such behaviors are based on behavioral learning theories, which hold that behaviors that are not reinforced or are punished will diminish in frequency. The following sections present **applied behavior analysis**, an analysis of classroom behavior in terms of behavioral concepts, and give specific strategies for preventing and dealing with misbehavior.

How Student Misbehavior Is Maintained

A basic principle of behavioral learning theories is that if any behavior persists over time, it is being maintained by some reinforcer. To reduce misbehavior in the classroom, we must understand which reinforcers maintain misbehavior in the first place.

The most common reinforcer for classroom misbehavior is attention—from the teacher, the peer group, or both. Students receiving one-to-one tutoring rarely misbehave, both because they already have the undivided attention of an adult and because no classmates are present to attend to any negative behavior. In the typical classroom, however, students have to go out of their way to get the teacher's personal attention, and they have an audience of peers who might encourage or applaud their misdeeds.

Teacher's Attention. Sometimes students misbehave because they want the teacher's attention, even if it is negative. This is a more common reason for misbehavior than many teachers think.

A puzzled teacher might say, "I don't know what is wrong with Nathan. I have to stay with him all day to keep him working! Sometimes I get exasperated and yell at him. My words fall off him like water off a duck's back. He even smiles when I'm scolding him!"

When students appear to misbehave to gain the teacher's attention, the solution is relatively easy: Pay attention to these students when they are doing well, and ignore them (as much as possible) when they misbehave. When ignoring their actions is impossible, imposing time out (e.g., sending these students to a quiet corner or to the principal's office) might be effective.

Peers' Attention. Another very common reason that students misbehave is to get the attention and approval of their peers. The classic instance of this is the class clown, who is obviously performing for the amusement of his or her classmates. However, many other forms of misbehavior are motivated primarily by peer attention and approval—in fact, few students completely disregard the potential impact of their behavior on their classmates. For example, students who refuse to do what the teacher has asked are consciously or unconsciously weighing the effect of their defiance on their standing among their classmates.

Even preschoolers and early elementary school students misbehave to gain peer attention, but beginning around the third grade (and especially during the middle and high school years), it is particularly likely that student misbehavior is linked to peer attention and support. As students enter adolescence, the peer group takes on extreme importance, and peer norms begin to favor independence from authority. When older children and teenagers engage in serious delinquent acts (such as vandalism, theft, and assault), they are usually supported by a delinquent peer group.

Strategies for reducing peer-supported misbehavior are quite different from those for dealing with misbehavior that is meant to capture the teacher's attention. Ignoring misbehavior will be ineffective if the misbehavior is reinforced by peers. For example, if a student is balancing a book on his or her head and the class is laughing, the behavior can hardly be ignored because it will continue as long as the class is interested (and will encourage others to behave likewise). Further, scolding might only attract more attention from classmates or, worse, enhance the student's standing among peers. Similarly, if two students are whispering or talking to each other, they are reinforcing each other for misbehaving, and ignoring their behavior will only encourage more of it.

There are two primary responses to peer-supported misbehavior, if simple reminders (such as moving close to the student) are not working. One is to remove the offender from the classroom to deprive her or him of peer attention. Another is to use **group contingencies**, strategies in which the entire class (or groups of students within the class) is rewarded on the basis of everyone's behavior. Under group contingencies, all students benefit from their classmates' good behavior, so peer support for misbehavior is removed. Group contingencies and other behavior management strategies for peer-supported misbehavior are described in more detail in the following sections.

Release from Unpleasant States or Activities. A third important reinforcer for misbehavior is release from boredom, frustration, fatigue, or unpleasant activities. Escaping from or avoiding an unpleasant stimulus is a reinforcer. Some students see much of what happens in school as unpleasant, boring, frustrating, or tiring. This is particularly true of students who experience repeated failure in school. But even the most able and motivated students feel bored or frustrated at times. Students often misbehave simply to escape from unpleasant activities. This can be clearly seen with students who frequently ask permission to get a drink of water, go to the washroom, or sharpen their pencils. Such students are more likely to make these requests during independent seatwork than during cooperative learning activities or even a lecture because seatwork can be frustrating or anxiety provoking for students who have little confidence in their academic abilities. More serious misbehaviors can also be partially or completely motivated by a desire for release from boredom, frustration, or fatigue. A student might misbehave just to stir things up.

Sometimes students misbehave precisely so that they will be sent out of the classroom.

Obviously, sending such a student to the hall or the principal's office can be counterproductive.

The best solution for misbehaviors arising from boredom, frustration, or fatigue is prevention. Students rarely misbehave during interesting, varied, engaging lessons. Actively involving students in lessons can head off misbehaviors that are the result of boredom or fatigue.

Use of cooperative learning methods or other means of involving students in an active way can be helpful. A teacher can prevent frustration by using materials that ensure a high success rate for all, by making sure that all students are challenged but none is overwhelmed. Changing instruction and assessments to help students succeed can be an effective means of resolving frustration-related behavior problems.

Principles of Applied Behavior Analysis

The behavior management strategies outlined earlier (e.g., nonverbal cues, reminders, mild but certain punishment) might be described as informal applications of behavioral learning theories. These practices, plus the prevention of misbehavior by the use of efficient class management and engaging lessons, will be sufficient to create a good learning environment in most classrooms.

However, more systematic methods are sometimes needed. In classrooms in which most students are well behaved but a few have persistent behavior problems, individual behavior management strategies can be effective. In classrooms in which many students have behavior problems, particularly when there is peer support for misbehavior, whole-class strategies or group contingencies might be needed. Such strategies are most often required when many low achieving or poorly motivated students are put in one class, as often happens in special-education classes and in schools that use tracking or other between-class ability grouping methods.

Setting up and using any applied behavior analysis program requires following a series of steps that proceeds from the observation of the behavior through program implementation to program evaluation. The steps listed here are, to a greater or lesser extent, part of all applied behavior analysis programs:

1. Identify target behavior(s) and reinforcer(s).
2. Establish a baseline for the target behavior.
3. Choose a reinforcer and criteria for reinforcement.
4. If necessary, choose a punisher and criteria for punishment.
5. Observe behavior during program implementation, and compare it to baseline.
6. When the behavior management program is working, reduce the frequency of reinforcement.

Identify Target Behaviors and Reinforcers. The first step in implementing a behavior management program is to observe the misbehaving student to identify one or a small number of behaviors to target first and to see what reinforcers maintain the behavior(s). Another purpose of this observation is to establish a baseline against which to compare improvements. A structured individual behavior management program should aim to change only one behavior or a small set of closely related behaviors. Tackling too many behaviors at a time risks failure with all of them because the student might not clearly see what he or she must do to be reinforced.

The first behavior targeted should be one that is serious; is easy to observe; and, most important, occurs frequently. For example, if a child gets into fights in the playground every few days but gets out of his or her seat without permission several times per hour, you might start with the out-of-seat behavior and deal with the fighting later. Ironically, the more frequent and persistent a behavior, the easier it is to eliminate. This is because positive or negative consequences can be applied frequently, making the connection between behavior and consequence clear to the student.

In observing a student, try to determine what reinforcer(s) are maintaining the target behavior. If a student misbehaves with others (e.g., talks without permission, swears, or teases) or if a student's misbehavior usually attracts the attention of others (e.g., clowning), then you might guess that the behavior is peer supported. If the behavior does not attract much peer attention but always requires teacher attention (e.g., getting out of seat without permission), then you might guess that the behavior is supported by your own attention.

Establish Baseline Behavior. Observe the student to see how often the target behavior occurs.

Before you do this, you will need to clearly define exactly what constitutes the behavior. For example, if the target behavior is "bothering classmates," you will have to decide what specific behaviors constitute "bothering" (perhaps teasing, interrupting, and taking materials).

Select Reinforcers and Criteria for Reinforcement. Typical classroom reinforcers include praise, privileges, and tangible rewards. Praise is especially effective for students who misbehave to get the teacher's attention. It is often a good idea to start a behavior management program by using attention and praise for appropriate behavior to see whether this is sufficient. However, be prepared to use stronger reinforcers if praise is not enough. In addition to praise, many teachers find it useful to give students stars, "smilies," or other small rewards when students behave appropriately. Some teachers use a rubber stamp to mark students' papers with a symbol indicating good work. These small rewards make the teacher's

praise more concrete and visible and let students take their work home and receive praise from their parents

Select Punishers and Criteria for Punishment, If Necessary. Behavioral learning theories strongly favor the use of reinforcers (rewards) for appropriate behavior rather than punishers for inappropriate behavior. The reasons for this are practical as well as ethical. Punishment often creates resentment, so even if it solves one problem, it could create others. Even if punishment would work as well as reinforcement, it should be avoided because it is not conducive to the creation of a happy, healthy classroom environment. Non-physical punishment of one kind or another is necessary in some circumstances, and it should be used without qualms when reinforcement strategies are impossible or ineffective. However, a program of punishment for misbehavior (e.g., depriving a student of privileges, never physical punishment) should always be the last option considered, never the first. A punisher is any unpleasant stimulus that an individual will try to avoid. Common punishers used in schools are reprimands, being sent out of class or to the principal's office, and detention or missed recess. Corporal punishment (e.g., spanking) is illegal in some states and districts and highly restricted in others, but regardless of laws or policies, it should never be used in schools. It is neither a necessary nor an effective response to misbehavior in school. Long ago, O'Leary and O'Leary (1972) listed seven principles for the effective and humane use of punishment:

1. Use punishment sparingly.
2. Make it clear to the child why he or she is being punished.
3. Provide the child with an alternative means of obtaining some positive reinforcement.
4. Reinforce the child for behaviors that are incompatible with those you wish to weaken (e.g., if you punish for being off-task, also reinforce for being ontask).
5. Never use physical punishment.
6. Never punish when you are in a very angry or emotional state.
7. Punish when a behavior starts rather than when it ends.

One effective punisher is called **time out**. The teacher tells a misbehaving student to go to a separate part of the classroom, the hall, the principal's or vice principal's office, or another teacher's class. If possible, the place where the student is sent should be uninteresting and out of view of classmates. One advantage of time-out procedures is that they remove the student from the attention of her or his classmates. Therefore, time out may be especially effective for students whose misbehavior is motivated primarily by peer attention. For example, students who misbehaved in a physical education class were given a sand timer and asked to sit and watch for 3 minutes. This consequence, applied immediately and consistently, soon virtually eliminated misbehavior.

Teachers should assign time outs infrequently. When they do assign them, they should do so calmly and surely. The student is to go straight to the time-out area and stay there until the prescribed time is up. Time-out assignments should be brief, about 5 minutes is usually adequate.

However, timing should begin only after the student settles down; if the student yells or argues, that time should not count. During time out, no one should speak to the student. Teachers should not scold the student during time out. Students should be told why they are being given time out but should not otherwise be lectured. If the principal's office is used, the principal should be asked not to speak to the student.

Reduce the Frequency of Reinforcement. Once a reinforcement program has been in operation for a while and the student's behavior has improved and stabilized at a new level, the frequency of reinforcement can be reduced. Initially, reinforcers might be applied to every instance of appropriate behavior; as time goes on, every other instance, then every several instances might be reinforced. Reducing the frequency of reinforcement helps to maintain the new behaviors over the long run and aids in extending the behaviors to other settings.

Applied Behavior Analysis Programs

Home-based reinforcement strategies and daily report card programs are examples of applied behavioral analysis involving individual students. A group contingency program is an example of an applied behavioral analysis in which the whole class is involved.

Home-Based Reinforcement. Some of the most practical and effective classroom management methods are **home-based reinforcement strategies**. Teachers give students a daily or weekly report card to take home, and parents are asked to provide special privileges or rewards to students on the basis of these teacher reports.

Home-based reinforcement has several advantages over other behavior management strategies. First, parents can give much more potent rewards and privileges than schools can. For example, parents control access to such activities as television, computers, video games, trips to the store, and going out with friends. Parents also know what their own children like and, therefore, can provide more individualized privileges than the school can. Second, home-based reinforcement gives parents frequent good news about their children. Parents of disruptive children usually hear from the school only when their child has done something wrong. This is bad for parent–school relations and can lead to much blame and finger-pointing, not to mention souring parent-child relationships. Third, home-based reinforcement is easy to administer. The teacher can involve any adults who deal with the child (other teachers, bus drivers, playground or lunch monitors) in the program by having the student carry a daily report card all day. Finally, over time, daily report cards can be replaced by weekly report cards and then biweekly report cards without loss in effectiveness, until the school’s usual 6- or 9-week report cards can be used.

Daily Report Cards. Figure 5.2 (*This wasn’t part of the preview materials*) presents a daily report card for Homer Heath, an elementary school student. His teacher, Ms. Casa, rated his behavior and schoolwork at the end of each academic period, and she arranged to have the lunch monitor and the recess monitor rate his behavior when Homer was with them. Homer was responsible for carrying his report card with him at all times and for making sure that it was marked and initialed at the end of each period. Whenever he made at least 30 points, his parents agreed to give him a special privilege: His father agreed to read him an extra story before bedtime and let him stay up 15 minutes longer than usual. Whenever he forgot to bring home his report card, his parents were to assume that he did not meet the criterion. They were asked not to punish him, but just not to provide any special privileges. If Homer had been a middle or high school student or if he had been in a departmentalized elementary school (where he changed classes for each subject), he would have carried his report card to every class, and each teacher would have marked it. Obviously, this approach requires some coordination among teachers, but the effort is certainly worthwhile if the daily report card dramatically reduces a student’s misbehaviors and increases his or her academic output, as it has in dozens of studies evaluating this method. More ideas for using a home-based reinforcement program appear in the following section.

Using a Daily Report Card System

Steps for setting up and implementing a daily report card system are as follows:

1. ***Decide which behaviors to include in the daily report card.*** Choose a behavior or set of behaviors on which the daily report card is to be based. Devise a rating scheme for each behavior, and construct a standard report card form. Your daily report card might be more or less elaborate than the one shown in Figure 5.2. For example, you might break behavior down into more precise categories, such as getting along with others, staying on-task, and following class rules.

=====
FIGURE 5.2 HERE

=====

2. ***Explain the program to parents.*** Home-based reinforcement programs depend on parent participation, so it is critical to inform parents about the program and to obtain their cooperation. Parents should be told what the daily report card means and should be asked to reward their children whenever they bring home a good report card. In presenting the program to parents, teachers should explain what parents might do to reward their children. Communications with parents should be brief, positive, and informal and should generate a feeling that “we’re going to solve this together.” The program should focus on rewarding good behavior rather than punishing bad behavior. Examples of rewards parents might use at home follow:

- Special activities with a parent (e.g., reading, flying a kite, building a model, shopping, playing a game, going to the zoo)

- Special foods
- Baking cookies or cooking
- Operating equipment that is usually reserved for adults (e.g., the dishwasher or vacuum cleaner)
- Access to special games, toys, technology, or equipment
- Small rewards (such as coloring books, paper, comic books, erasers, or stickers)
- Additional play time, television time, video game time, and the like
- Having a friend spend the night
- Later bedtime or curfew

Parents should be encouraged to choose rewards that they can give every day (that is, nothing too expensive or difficult).

The best rewards are ones that build closeness between parent and child, such as doing special activities together. Many children who have behavior problems in school also have them at home and might have less than ideal relationships with their parents. Home-based reinforcement programs provide an opportunity for parents to show their love for their child at a time when the child has something of which to be proud. A special time with Dad can be especially valuable as a reward for good behavior in school and for building the father–son or father–daughter relationship.

3. ***When behavior improves, reduce the frequency of the report.*** When home based reinforcement works, it often works dramatically. Once the student’s behavior has improved and has stabilized, it is time to decrease the frequency of the reports to parents (of course, keep the parents informed about this change). For example, report cards might then be issued only weekly (for larger but less frequent rewards).

Group Contingency Programs. A **group contingency program** is a reinforcement system in which an entire group is rewarded on the basis of the behavior of the group members.

Teachers have always used group contingencies, as in “We’ll go to lunch as soon as all students have put their work away and are quiet.” When the teacher says this, any one student can cause the entire class to be late to lunch. Or the teacher might say, “If the class averages at least ninety on tomorrow’s quiz, then you’ll all be excused from homework for the rest of the week.” This group contingency will depend on the average performance of all group members rather than on any single student’s performance.

One important advantage of group contingencies is that they are relatively easy to administer. Most often, the whole class is either rewarded or not rewarded, so the teacher need not do one thing with some students and something else with others. For example, suppose a teacher says, “If the whole class follows the class rules this morning, we will have five extra minutes of recess.” If the class does earn the extra recess, they all get it together; the teacher does not have to arrange to have some students stay out longer while others are called inside.

The theory behind group contingencies is that when a group is rewarded on the basis of its members’ behavior, the group members will encourage one another to do whatever helps the group gain the reward. Group contingencies can turn the same peer pressure that often supports misbehaviors to pressure opposing misbehavior. When the class can earn extra recess only if all students are well behaved all morning, no one is liable to find it funny when Joan makes silly faces or Quinn speaks disrespectfully to the teacher. The following section provides more detail on how to set up a group contingency program.

Establishing a Group Contingency Program

A group contingency behavior management program can be as simple as the statement “Class, if you are all in your seats, on-task, and quiet this morning, you may have five extra minutes of recess.” However, a little more structure than this can increase the effectiveness of the group contingency.

1. ***Decide which behaviors will be reinforced.*** As in any whole-class behavior modification program, the first step in setting up a group contingency is to establish a set of class rules.

2. ***Set up a developmentally appropriate point system.*** There are essentially three ways to implement a group contingency behavior management program. One is simply to rate class behavior each period or during each activity. That is, an elementary school class might receive 0 to 5 points during each individual instructional period such as reading, language arts, and math. A secondary school class might receive one overall rating each period or separate ratings for behavior and completed assignments. The class would then be rewarded each day or week if they exceeded a pre-established number of points.

Another way to set up a group contingency program is to rate the class at various times during the day. For example, you might set a timer to ring on the average of once every 10 minutes (but varying randomly from 1 to 20 minutes). If the whole class is conforming to class rules when the timer rings, then the class earns a point. The same program can be used without the timer if the teacher gives the class a point every 10 minutes or so if all students are conforming to class rules. Some teachers put a marble into a jar from time to time whenever the class is following rules. Each marble would be worth 10 seconds of extra recess. The sound of marbles going into the jar tells the students they are doing well. In secondary schools, where extra recess is not possible, each marble might represent 10 seconds of break time held at the end of the period on Friday.

3. **Consider deducting points for serious misbehavior.** The group contingency reward system by itself should help to improve student behavior. However, it might still be necessary to react to occasional serious misbehavior. For example, you might deduct 10 points for any instance of fighting or of serious disrespect for the teacher. When points must be deducted, do not negotiate with students about it. Simply deduct them, explaining why they must be deducted and reminding students that they may earn them back if they follow class rules.

4. **When behavior improves, reduce the frequency of the points and reinforcers.** Initially, the group contingency should be applied every day. When the class's behavior improves and stabilizes at a new level for about a week, you may change to giving rewards once a week. Ultimately, the class may graduate from the point-and-reward system entirely, though feedback and praise based on class behavior should continue.

5. **Combine group and individual contingencies if necessary.** The use of group contingencies need not rule out individual contingencies for students who need them. For example, students who continue to have problems in a class using a group contingency might still receive daily or weekly report cards to take home to their parents.

Ethics of Behavioral Methods

The behavior analysis strategies described in this chapter can be powerful. Properly applied, they will usually bring the behavior of even the most disruptive students to manageable levels. However, there is a danger that teachers might use such techniques to over-control students. They could be so concerned about getting students to sit down, stay quiet, and look productive that they lose sight of the fact that school is for learning, not for social control.

Some people object to applied behavior analysis on the basis that it constitutes bribing students to do what they ought to do anyway. However, all classrooms use rewards and punishers (such as grades, praise, scolding, suspension). Applied behavior analysis strategies simply use these rewards in a more systematic way and avoid punishers as much as possible.

Applied behavior analysis methods should be used only when it is clear that preventive or informal methods of improving classroom management are not enough to create a positive environment for learning. It is unethical to over-apply these methods, but it might be equally unethical to fail to apply them when they could avert serious problems. For example, it might be unethical to refer a child to special education or to suspend, expel, or retain a child on the basis of a pattern of behavior problems before using positive behavior management methods long enough to see whether they can resolve the problem without more draconian measures.

Preventing Serious Behavior Problems

Everyone misbehaves. There is hardly a person on earth who has not at some time done something he or she knew to be wrong or even illegal. However, some people's misbehavior is far more frequent and/or serious than others', and students in this category cause their teachers and school administrators (not to mention their parents and themselves) a disproportionate amount of trouble and concern.

The school has an important role to play in preventing or managing serious misbehavior and delinquency, but the student and the school are only one part of the story. Delinquent behavior often involves the police, courts, and social service agencies, as well as students' parents and peers. However, there are some guidelines for prevention of delinquency and serious misbehaviors.

Preventive Programs

The easiest behavior problems to deal with are those that never occur. There are many approaches that have promise for preventing serious behavior problems. One is simply creating safe and prosocial classroom environments and openly discussing risky behaviors and ways to avoid them. Another is giving students opportunities to play prosocial roles as volunteers, tutors, or leaders in activities that benefit their school and community. Creating democratic, participatory classrooms can give students ways of achieving recognition and control in a positive environment, reducing the need to act out. Programs that improve academic achievement also often affect behavior as well. These kinds of strategies embed preventive activities in the day-to-day lives of students, rather than singling them out for special treatment.

Identifying Causes of Misbehavior

Even though some types of students are more prone to misbehavior than others, these characteristics do not cause misbehavior. Some students misbehave because they perceive that the rewards for misbehavior outweigh the rewards for good behavior. For example, students who do not experience success in school might perceive that the potential rewards for hard work and good behavior are small, so they turn to other sources of rewards. Some, particularly those who are failing in many different domains, find their niche in groups that hold norms that devalue achievement and other pro-social behavior. The role of the delinquent peer group in maintaining delinquent behavior cannot be overstated. Delinquent acts among adolescents and preadolescents are usually done in groups and are supported by antisocial peer norms.

Enforcing Rules and Practices

Expectations that students will conform to school rules must be consistently expressed.

For example, graffiti or other vandalism must be repaired at once so that other students do not get the idea that misbehavior is common or accepted. However, rules should be enforced firmly but fairly; rigid applications of “zero tolerance” policies have often been found to be counterproductive.

Enforcing School Attendance

Truancy and delinquency are strongly related; when students are out of school, they are often in the community making trouble. There are many effective means of reducing truancy, as in a successful program that had high school students with serious attendance problems carry cards to be signed by their teachers at the end of each period they attended. Students received a ticket for each period attended, plus bonus tickets for good behavior in class and for going 5 days without missing a class. The tickets were used in a drawing for a variety of prizes. Before the program began, the target students were absent 60 percent of all school days. During the program, absences dropped to 19 percent of school days. Over the same period, truancy among other students with attendance problems who were not in the program increased from 59 percent to 79 percent. Another program markedly increased attendance in an entire elementary school by making full participation in once-a-month parties depend on student attendance. Several activities were provided during the parties, and students could earn access to some or all of them according to the number of days they attended class.

Requesting Family Involvement

Involve the student’s home in any response to serious misbehavior. When misbehavior occurs, parents should be notified. If misbehavior persists, parents should be involved in establishing a program, such as a home-based reinforcement program, to coordinate home and school responses to misbehavior.

Confronting Bullying

A widespread problem in schools at all levels is bullying, where students repeatedly torment weaker peers. Effective approaches to preventing bullying in schools include the following components.

1. Develop and publicize a schoolwide antibullying policy
2. Educate all students about bullying and its negative effects on the whole school
3. Provide training in social skills and recognize students who engage in prosocial activities. Particularly important skills are empathy, impulse control, and anger management.
4. Monitor locations and activities in which bullying occurs.
5. Establish consequences for bullying behavior.

Judiciously Applying Consequences

Avoid the use of suspension (or expulsion) as punishment for all but the most serious misbehavior. Suspension often exacerbates truancy problems, both because it makes students fall behind in their work and because it gives them experience in the use of time out of school. In-school suspension, detention, and other penalties are more effective.

When students misbehave, they should be punished; but when punishment is applied, it should be brief. Being sent to a time-out area or detention room is a common punishment and is effective for most students. Loss of privileges may be used. However, whatever punishment is used should not last too long. It is better to make a misbehaving student miss 2 days of football practice than to throw him off the team, in part because once the student is off the team, the school might have little else of value to offer or withhold. Every child has within himself or herself the capacity for good behavior as well as for misbehavior. The school must be the ally of the good in each child at the same time that it is the enemy of misbehavior. Overly harsh penalties or penalties that do not allow the student to reenter the classroom on an equal footing with others risk pushing students into the antisocial, delinquent subculture. When a student has paid her or his debt by losing privileges, experiencing detention, or whatever the punishment might be, he or she must be fully reaccepted as a member of the class.