Teachers also control the arrangement of desks in the classroom. Most regular classrooms at Grandin are traditionally organized. The students sit in individual desks arranged in rows. In special subject classrooms, seating arrangements are more varied. A few teachers allow students to choose their own seats, but most make regular assignments. Students are usually allowed some freedom of movement from seat to seat as long as they do not become involved in disruptive activities, at which point the teacher may demand that someone retake his or her regular seat. Teachers also regulate students' access to areas outside the classroom such as restrooms. They regulate when students may leave to go to PE, lunch, and other classrooms. All teachers have passes which students are supposed to carry when they are in the halls during class time. Most teachers keep fairly close track of who has the hall pass and how many people are out of the room at once, preferring that only a few go at a time.

This control that teachers exercise over the utilization of space in the school allows them to create an atmosphere which they consider appropriate for school activities. Messages about this context can be graphically displayed on bulletin boards or physically displayed in the freedom of movement granted to students. Through the messages conveyed and the limitations imposed, students are reminded that adults are officially in charge of organizing activities at school.

The Use of Time

Besides having more control over the decoration of the environment, the arrangement of the furniture, and student movement in the building,

DCCUMENT RESUME

ED 154 098 UD 018 240

AUTHOR Eisenhart, Margaret
TITLE Maintaining Ccntrcl: Teacher Ccmpetence in the Classroom.
PUB DATE 2 Dec 77
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Asscciatien (76th, Houston, Texas, December 2, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Class Management; Class Organizatien; *Classrocm Environment; Classrccm Techniques; *Discipline; *Effective Teaching; Elementary Educatien; Rewards; *School Environment; Schccl Schedules; Student Behavior; *Teacher Behavicr; Teacher Characteristics

ABSTRACT

To be a competent teacher, the school environment must be organized to preserve a system of student behavior and group functioning which allows the teacher to select the activities in which the group will engage. This is often called "maintaining control" by teachers. Means of organizing the school context to affect student behavior are examined in this study. These means include: (1) the arrangement of the physical environment and the people in it; (2) the use of time; and (3) the system of rewards and recognition. The ways in which teachers utilize these means are discussed in terms of their differential success in maintaining control. (Author/MC)

MAINTAINING CONTROL: TEACHER COMPETENCE IN THE CLASSROOM

Margaret Eisenhart

Department of Anthropology
University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Paper Presented at the 76th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Houston, Texas; December 2, 1977

This paper concerns teacher competence as it is manifest in the success of teachers at one elementary school to convince students to participate in teacher-directed activities; that is, in their ability to control the behavior of students at school. I first discuss the general means these teachers have of organizing the school context to encourage the activities they consider appropriate. Secondly, teacher success at getting students to comply with these activities is examined in light of organizational strategies. As we shall see, some teachers are more successful at achieving control than others.

To the casual visitor to Grandin School, the school would appear to be quite an ordinary one. (Grandin is a pseudonym for a desegregated, elementary school in a Southern city. This school was the site of a two-year ethnographic study of black and white fifth and sixth graders.[1] At the time of the study, approximately 65% of the students were black; 50% of the teachers were black.) Aside from the design of the building itself, there are various cues attesting to the fact that school is being conducted. Such cues include children seated at desks, usually arranged in rows, facing an adult who might be in the process of describing how to do a math problem, telling a child to get down to his or her work, directing children to line up to go to another room and so forth. In short, a visitor would notice that things are proceeding in a way generally considered appropriate for school.

Careful observation of the school reveals that such a situation does not come about easily. To be a competent student, for example, one must possess and correctly organize a great deal of information about what is expected at school. Mehan describes the competent student

as follows,

> "To be competent members of the classroom community, students must be able to interpret implicit classroom rules and provide the proper action on the right occasion. They must know which classroom rule is in effect at a given time, and know which behavior is demanded by each role". (1976:8)

As Mehan has further pointed out, however, "teachers and students mutually influence one another, and thereby jointly contribute to the social organization of the (school and) classroom" (1976:9) (see also McDermott and Hall 1977).

To be a competent teacher, one must organize the school environment to preserve a system of student behavior and group functioning which allows the teacher to select the activities in which the group will engage. Teachers call this practice, "maintaining control", and they consider it central to their duties as teachers.[2] One Grandin teacher, when asked by one of the researchers to define what "control" meant to her, responded, "It is what you do during the day instead of teaching." This teacher clearly expressed a belief which is probably generally shared by teachers at the school that their formal duty to educate students presupposes control of the children who come to the school.

In the section that follows, means of organizing the school context to affect student behavior are examined. These means include three general areas which orient students toward school as it is envisioned by teachers: 1) the arrangement of the physical environment and the people in it; 2) the use of time or, in other words, the scheduling of activities; and 3) the system of rewards and recognition.

MEANS OF ORGANIZING THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

The Arrangement of the Physical Environment

Teachers suggest by the decorations they put on bulletin boards, by the way they arrange the furniture and the people in it, and by the areas of the building to which they deny students access, their ideas about what constitutes appropriate behavior for children at school. Probably the most obvious decorations are the profusion of messages placed on the walls of both the halls and classrooms. In large measure, these bulletin boards carry admonitions concerning appropriate behavior for school, for home, or for the season of the year.

In almost every room there is a chart or some other display to represent a student's behavior relative to other members of the class. A common practice is for a classroom teacher to devote one bulletin board to a display which represents the children in the class. For example, in the fall, the bulletin board may depict a tree with many different colored leaves. Each leaf carries the name of a student in the class. If the student behaves inappropriately, his or her leaf may be moved so that it appears to be lying on the ground. A caption such as "Keep your leaf from falling" accompanies the picture. In other rooms students receive gold stars beside their names for good behavior and high quality work. While criteria for determining whether a student's leaf falls or whether he or she receives a gold star vary somewhat from room to room, the point is that these representations serve as public reminders of how teachers view students' behavior.

Teachers also control the arrangement of desks in the classroom. Most regular classrooms at Grandin are traditionally organized. The students sit in individual desks arranged in rows. In special subject classrooms, seating arrangements are more varied. A few teachers allow students to choose their own seats, but most make regular assignments. Students are usually allowed some freedom of movement from seat to seat as long as they do not become involved in disruptive activities, at which point the teacher may demand that someone retake his or her regular seat. Teachers also regulate students' access to areas outside the classroom such as restrooms. They regulate when students may leave to go to PE, lunch, and other classrooms. All teachers have passes which students are supposed to carry when they are in the halls during class time. Most teachers keep fairly close track of who has the hall pass and how many people are out of the room at once, preferring that only a few go at a time.

This control that teachers exercise over the utilization of space in the school allows them to create an atmosphere which they consider appropriate for school activities. Messages about this context can be graphically displayed on bulletin boards or physically displayed in the freedom of movement granted to students. Through the messages conveyed and the limitations imposed, students are reminded that adults are officially in charge of organizing activities at school.

The Use of Time

Besides having more control over the decoration of the environment, the arrangement of the furniture, and student movement in the building,

teachers also have a great deal of control over the type of activities that occur during the day. They organize most of the events that go on in the classroom and they intervene in what children are doing.

By tightly scheduling when various events will occur and by closely monitoring what students are doing in order to limit or correct inappropriate behavior, teachers emphasize the importance of properly conducting these events. Teachers mark different events by phrases such as "clear your desks" and "take out your books". These markers signal the end of one event and the beginning of another. At the same time, teachers make it clear that they place a high value on the successful execution of these events. Students who behave in such a way as to allow teacher-organized activities to go smoothly are praised; those who disrupt these events are punished. When students stay within the limits of what teachers consider to be appropriate behavior during these activities, student-organized activities may also go on simultaneously; when students exceed these limits, teachers intervene in student proceedings. In this way teachers create a rhythm of events to which students become accustomed and the execution of this rhythm becomes an important goal for the students as well as the teacher.

The Reward and Recognition System

While the means of organizing social contexts mentioned above are important, they are not compelling enough to induce students to consistently participate in teacher-organized activities. Thus, teachers offer various rewards and forms of recognition to students in exchange for student participation.

The teacher-organized reward system includes but also goes beyond those rewards such as grades which teachers are officially designated to administer. Although grades formally reward student behavior as well as academic success, student interest in the teacher-controlled "good student" identity is often overshadowed by concern with student-controlled identities such as "good friend". Thus, the usefulness of grades per se as rewards is limited. Nonetheless, teachers at one time or another capitalize on their power to dispense grades by threatening students with them in an attempt to influence student behavior in teacher-desired activities.

More important means for influencing day-to-day student behavior are products of the reward system generated by Grandin teachers themselves. Here, activities which teachers know students enjoy can be arranged, denied, or manipulated in promises, warnings, or threats.

Events such as PE, break, and special recreation periods which students especially like are often set up as rewards for the successful completion of schoolwork and/or for satisfactory school behavior. Teachers may withhold these events, including PE which is officially scheduled on a daily basis, if students do not behave appropriately. With the exception of one person, teachers threaten to abolish PE or break time much more frequently than they really do. Interestingly, the one teacher who frequently made good on her threat to take away the PE period seemed to have progressively more trouble controlling her class.

Most teachers also establish a number of classroom roles with specified duties. These roles are individually assigned to students in the class. Being singled out do do these jobs allocated by the teacher

puts students in a position of upholding the teacher-organized system. For example, several teachers designate students to take charge of the class while they are out of the room. In these cases, students are made responsible for maintaining control in the image of the teacher. For them to be successful at their jobs, they must convince their fellow students to cooperate with the teacher's goals for the class. Other jobs such as film projectionist or errand runner also place students in the role of teacher assistant.

Allowing or disallowing students access to favorite events is one way of setting up rewards which affect behavior. Another is to individually recognize students for the behaviors they exhibit in school. Teachers recognize students by publicly praising their work and behavior. For example, one day a teacher was chastizing a student for not doing his work. The teacher said, referring to another student, "Look at Jake -- he knows how to do his work. I wish some of the rest of you could be more like Jake."

While teachers control public praise for desired behaviors, they also may publicly criticize students. A few teachers regularly make spectacles of individual students who fail to conform to teacher expectations. Students especially dislike this form of attention because it makes them look ridiculous in front of their classmates.

DIFFERENTIAL TEACHER SUCCESS

While the various methods of organizing the school context described above are available to all Grandin teachers, teachers do not all utilize these means in the same fashion. While physical environments are

arranged in very similar ways, the organization of activities and rewards differs across teachers. In the following, it is suggested that these differences are related to teacher success in maintaining control of students.

Koogler (1977) describes an event called "passing the Easter egg" which was conducted in approximately the same manner but with very different outcomes in two kindergarten classrooms. In both classes, the children were told to position themselves in a circle. One person was given an egg and told to walk around the inside of the circle and pass the egg to someone in the circle. The one who received the egg was then given the opportunity to pass it on to someone else.[3] In one class, the students conducted the event in accordance with teacher expectations. In this case, the event proceeded smoothly, everyone got a chance to pass the egg and the children even reinforced the teacher's directions, cues and signals about how to conduct the game by exerting pressure on their peers to conform. In the unsuccessful case, the event did not turn out as the teacher had hoped and student efforts were directed more at sabotaging the teacher's plans than reinforcing them. Here the execution of the event was interrupted by frequent misbehaviors and disagreements about how to proceed.

Koogler suggests that the differing success of the two events is attributable to different strategies for regulating classroom activities. She argues that the first teacher is more successful because she regulates the event by altering conditions pertaining to the group rather than to individuals. For example, when the noise level rose, this teacher lowered the volume of the record which was playing during

the course of the event. With this change, the children immediately lowered their voices. When it appeared that some children might not get the egg, she simply asked the group to pass it to others who had not had a turn. The unsuccessful teacher, on the other hand, attempted to regulate the game by singling out individuals who misbehaved, in some cases removing them from the game. She further imposed certain conditions which operated to effectively prevent some students who remained in the game from receiving the egg, thus frustrating them in their efforts to play by the rules.

In a very similar vein, McDermott and Hall (1977) have described teacher success at getting students to do what teachers want in a recent article about two teachers' ability to handle a fifth grade "debate club." The authors suggest that the success of the debate is related to one teacher's tendency to provide cues which keep student attention focused on correctly executing the group activity. The regular teacher moderator for the club was quite adept at cueing students in this way. For example, when student comments veered from the topic at hand, this moderator reminded the group that all comments should be directed to the subject of debate. If the students did not appear interested in one topic another was selected. Periodically this moderator also reinforced the group structure by asking students to reposition themselves so that they faced each other in the debate circle. McDermott and Hall note that, with this moderator, the children generally followed the rules of the debate and that they helped each other to do so. The substitute moderator, who did not use such group-organizing cues, was not successful at leading the debate. In fact, the students shortly reorganized themselves in such a way that they appeared to be acting directly counter to the goals of a debate.

While all Grandin teachers focus to some extent on both individuals and groups in their attempts to organize, and thereby control, students, the teachers differ in the emphasis they place on regulation through individual versus group behaviors. The following is an excerpt from a class where the teacher attempted to regulate behavior by focusing attention on individual misdeeds.

> The teacher to Tricia: "That paper's messy and nasty... You can do better than that; we've got nice paper and pencils." The teacher tells Tricia that she is very neat: her clothes, hair, body, and so forth, so why did she turn in such a nasty paper and on the wrong day? Tricia says she couldn't help it being nasty. Teacher: "Tricia, are you a nasty person?" Tricia: "No." Then the teacher tells her again that she is very neat otherwise and so there is no need for a nasty paper.

Teachers such as the one described above also have a tendency to emphasize rewards such as class monitor, class president, or errand runner. Such rewards single out individual students as special.

At Grandin, as in the cases described by Koogler and McDermott and Hall, teachers who attempt to regulate student behavior by drawing attention to individuals who misbehave are likely to have difficulty maintaining control of the whole class. The most extreme example of a class out-of-control occurred with one particular substitute who spent an extended period of time with a class. The following is an excerpt from one twenty-minute segment of this class.

> Tricia and Mandy are singing. The teacher says, "Tricia!" Paul says to Tricia, "She ((the teacher)) compliments you on your singing." They keep singing. The teacher calls out, "Tricia, you have music on Mondays and Wednesdays." Tricia says, "Mondays and Wednesdays? Oh, ok." The teacher goes over to Joanne's desk to tell her something then temporarily leaves the room for a minute. While she is gone the students begin bickering

> with each other. When she returns she asks, "What's going on?" Paul starts to tell the story. The teacher says, "I asked Robbie, not you, Paul." Robbie says Tricia slapped him. Tricia starts her side of the story. Robbie breaks in. Tricia says, "She asked me, she didn't ask you." The teacher tells them to calm down, saying, "Tricia has not shut her mouth since 8:30 this morning." A few seconds later Tricia goes back up to the teacher and asks to go to the bathroom. The teacher says yes and on her way out Tricia kicks the door and then slams it. The teacher starts talking to Paul about being sick...Then the teacher asks Mandy to put the spelling words on the board. Tricia says, "Mandy doesn't even know what to do!" Robbie is trying to retrieve his spelling book from Maurice. Maurice won't let him have it. Tricia, who is looking for her book, now comes over to Maurice and says, "Let me see." Tricia turns back to Mandy: "Mandy, that's not the way to erase the board." Paul says, "Mrs. ((teacher's name)), Martha's copying Kelly." Martha says, "Mind you own business." Bill tells the teacher that someone has put glue on his seat. Paul asks if he can clean it up. The teacher says, "No, I don't want you over there." Martha suggests "Why don't we clean up our room?" Shortly thereafter, Tricia begins singing again.

This teacher was clearly at the mercy of the student system in the classroom. The students exerted their control by continually asking her questions which she answered individually. Whenever she tried to make a statement which referred to the whole class, students asked her question after question about the statement's impact on each of them, effectively reducing any impact it might have had on the group. In this instance, activities such as singing, fighting, and talking out which were not planned nor desired by the teacher went on in spite of her.

While this case represents the extreme at Grandin, other regular teachers who use the practice of making spectacles of students who misbehave often had difficulties with their students. One of these teachers would ring a bell and begin a song whenever things got

unbearable. The class would invariably join in, thus temporarily reordering the group. It appears likely that without this device or something comparable, this teacher would not have been able to control her students.

In contrast to this strategy, other teachers rely more heavily on cues about misbehavior aimed at the group. In other words, the class as a whole was reminded of appropriate activities for the classroom. This situation was achieved by signals such as turning off the lights when voices got too loud, temporarily halting student free-time activities in the classroom, organizing students into groups to work on certain projects and making everyone stay in for PE if anyone in the class got in trouble. One teacher allowed student involvement in handling the inappropriate behaviors of others in the classroom. The teacher periodically held "class discussions" or rap sessions where the group as a whole discussed problems that one or another student might be having in getting along in the class. The same teacher organized a number of group rewards such as a Friday afternoon recreation period at which time students could dance or could play organized sports with the teacher acting as referee.

CONCLUSION

In this discussion of teacher strategies for achieving control, the teachers who attempt to organize students' behaviors around the requirements of group execution of activities appear to be more successful at achieving control than those who attempt to modify behavior

through individual encounters (for further information on the analytical distinction between events and encounters, see Clement 1977). In other words, where emphasis and value are placed on learning the sequence of behaviors considered appropriate for an event to be conducted properly, teachers seem to have more success. Thus they appear more competent at controlling their students.

The organization of behaviors into events requires students to relate as a group and makes the group responsible for the successful completion of the event. When attempts to maintain control are expressed as aspects of relationships, difficulties can arise for the teacher because the group may dissolve into an aggregate of individuals vying for the teacher's attention. If the teacher has no way of drawing students together for activities, the group may organize itself according to goals conflicting with those of the teacher.

This model, however, does not entirely account for differential teacher success at control at Grandin. One teacher who did attempt to influence behavior through individual encounters was more effective at getting students to conform than her colleagues mentioned above. This outcome obtained at least partially because the students feared her. This teacher readily made spectacles of individual students who misbehaved by boxing their ears, yanking them out of their seats or vividly chastizing them in front of their classmates.

> Teacher: "Robbie, you're just now getting your work out? You don't have a pencil or paper. How did you find time to put your clothes on ... why didn't you just come to school naked?"

This teacher was also quick to paddle students or call parents for what she considered serious violations. Her aggressive style combined with extremely close monitoring of student activities -- in comparison to many other teachers, she rarely let any significant student-centered activities take place during formal class lessons -- apparently contributed to her feared reputation. Here, in spite of frequent attempts to control through personal attacks on students, this teacher was successful at maintaining classroom control.

A number of other teachers did establish close personal relationships with students. These teachers were concerned that students relate to them as friends, or in some cases, as a kind of mother or father. They were more likely than other teachers to visit students' homes, work with students to solve individual problems, and try to provide students with special resources when needed. These teachers counted on the friendship relationship as a basis for student compliance with teacher requirements for orderly school behavior. Thus, where teacher-student encounters are of a positive nature, it appears that control may be established in this fashion.

It is also significant, in light of findings reported elsewhere (see Lacey 1970; McDermott 1974; and McDermott and Hall 1977 on situations where students organize themselves in opposition to the aims of the teacher) that in only two of the fourteen classrooms observed during the study of Grandin did students appear to be engaging in their own activities without regard for the teacher. In the case of two other teachers, however, the teachers appeared to make little effort to organize or direct the behavior of their students. In such classes,

students would conspicuously get up and leave the room, blatantly talk or move their desks close to those of their friends, and often did very little schoolwork. In spite of this freedom, a semblance of order did exist in these rooms. This order seemed to be maintained primarily by the students. For example, students would announce that it was time to clean up to go to library or that today was the day for the art teacher to come. They also would attempt to modify the behavior of their peers when behaviors such as teasing individual students got out of hand. Thus, while students activities flourished, students at the same time seemed to know and care that certain things happen in a classroom and would carry them out even in the absence of explicit teacher directions.

Thus at one level, it appears that organizational strategies in which teachers attempt to regulate student behavior by focusing attention on the group rather than the individual do facilitate control. However, attempts to control through personal encounters may also be successful at least as a partial result of the affective bond established between teacher and student. Finally, questions are raised as to why students at Grandin make efforts to uphold the teacher-directed system even when teachers do not, and why, in some other cases, teachers do "lose" control. Apparently a complex set of factors contributes to teacher competence, making continued work in the area necessary.

NOTES

1. The study was conducted under contract (No. 400-76-0008) from the National Institute of Education. Grandin as well as all the names of individuals are pseudonyms.

2. Part of this paper is adapted from Clement et al. 1977, Chapter 8.

3. I have significantly abbreviated the description of the game provided by Koogler. See her paper for a full account of the game and how it was carried out in the two classrooms.

REFERENCES

Clement, Dorothy C.
1977 Social Competence in a Desegregated School: Implications for a Cultural Theory of Competence. Paper presented at the 76th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Houston, Texas.

Clement, Dorothy C., Eisenhart, Margaret and Joe Harding
1977 The Emerging Order: An Ethnography of a Southern Desegregated School. Final Report, "Field Study of an Urban Desegregated School". Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education.

Koogler, Carol C.
1977 The Ordering of Behavior among Kindergarteners. Paper presented at the Southern Anthropological Association Meetings, Miami, Florida.

Lacey, Colin
1970 Hightown Grammar: The School as a Social System. Manchester, England: The University Press.

McDermott, R.P.
1974 Achieving School Failure: An Anthropological Approach to Illiteracy and Social Stratification. In Education and Cultural Process: Toward an Anthropology of Education. G.A. Spindler, ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, pp. 82-118.

McDermott, R.P. and William S. Hall
1977 The Social Organization of a Successful and an Unsuccessful School Performance. The Quarterly Newsletter of the Institute for Comparative Human Development 1(3)10:11.

Mehan, Hugh
1976 Students' Interactional Competence in the Classroom. The Quarterly Newsletter of the Institute for Comparative Human Development 1(1):7-10.