

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 304 869

EC 220 541

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TITLE Preventive Discipline through Effective Classroom Management.  
PUB DATE 3 Apr 89  
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Preconvention Training Program "Exploring the Theory/Practice Link in Special Education" at the Annual Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children (67th, San Francisco, CA, April 2-3, 1989).  
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS \*Behavior Problems; Classroom Environment; \*Classroom Techniques; \*Disabilities; \*Discipline; Elementary Secondary Education; \*Prevention; Teacher Role; Teacher Student Relationship; Theory Practice Relationship

## ABSTRACT

Discipline problems in both regular and special education settings can be prevented through the effective use of three key elements: (1) organizational management of classroom elements; (2) anticipation and re-direction of student behavior; and (3) positive, encouraging interactions with students. Organizational management of classroom elements takes into consideration the physical arrangement of the classroom, a consistent schedule of activities, procedures for handling classroom routines, and rules for classroom behavior. Anticipation and re-direction of circumstances that may lead to misbehavior can occur in three ways: through lesson planning and delivery, through the use of specific teacher behaviors, and through knowledge of individual student behavior patterns. Finally, creating a positive, encouraging classroom environment calls for high levels of student success and involvement in classroom activities, the use of encouragement instead of praise, and an attempt to avoid criticizing or demeaning students when they misbehave or make academic errors. (JDD)

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# Preventive Discipline Through Effective Classroom Management

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## CEC Preconvention Training

"Exploring the Theory/Practice  
Link in Special Education"

April 3, 1989

San Francisco, California

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## PREVENTIVE DISCIPLINE THROUGH EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

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The American public and teachers agree that student behavior problems are among the most serious concerns facing our schools, according to the 1984 Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward Public Education. In considering discipline problems, what often come to mind are serious behaviors such as fighting, defiance, or open confrontation with the teacher. Yet, research has indicated that such events happen rarely. The vast majority of student misbehavior-- 90% or more-- consists of inappropriate talking and being out of seat (Jones, 1979). Such "minor" behavior problems take up an inordinate amount of teacher time and may interrupt instructional progress for the entire class.

While some students have serious emotional or behavior problems which require specific, systematic interventions, many of the problems which may plague regular or special education teachers can be prevented through effective classroom management. This paper, produced as part of the Council for Exceptional Children's Preconvention Training, "Exploring the Theory/Practice Link in Special Education," focuses on how to prevent discipline problems in both regular and special education settings through the effective use of three key elements:



- I. Organizational management of classroom elements
- II. Anticipation and re-direction of student behavior
- III. Positive, encouraging interactions with students

### ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT OF CLASSROOM ELEMENTS

Many of the activities that teachers engage in prior to the start of school can contribute to preventing behavior problems. These include the PHYSICAL ARRANGEMENT of the classroom, developing a CONSISTENT SCHEDULE of activities, and devising PROCEDURES to handle classroom routines. Another activity which contributes to a well-ordered classroom is best done soon after the students arrive for the first day of school-- developing RULES FOR CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR. Each of these activities will be discussed below.

#### The Physical Arrangement of the Classroom--

The typical American classroom is a square or rectangular room with hard surfaces, uncomfortable furniture, inadequate ventilation or temperature control, and poor acoustics. Into this room are placed up to 30 students and one or more adults. It is the teacher's job to make this environment comfortable, pleasant, and efficient. Most teachers work



very hard in making their classrooms comfortable and pleasant for the students-- a great deal of time is spent on bulletin boards, reading corners, plant tables and the hamster habitat. Equally important, however, is the job of making the physical environment of the classroom work EFFICIENTLY.

What is likely to happen in the following situations?

- \* Becky has been assigned the first coat hook inside the door. Because of the placement of the bookshelves, no one else can get into the room until she has finished hanging up her coat.
- \* Randy has to ask Jane to scoot in her chair in order for him to go to the pencil sharpener or the drinking fountain.

It is easy to imagine how the arrangements of these classrooms can contribute to behavior problems.

Look at the two classroom diagrams on the next page? Identify at least three potential problems with the arrangements of each of these rooms.

#### SECOND GRADE CLASSROOM

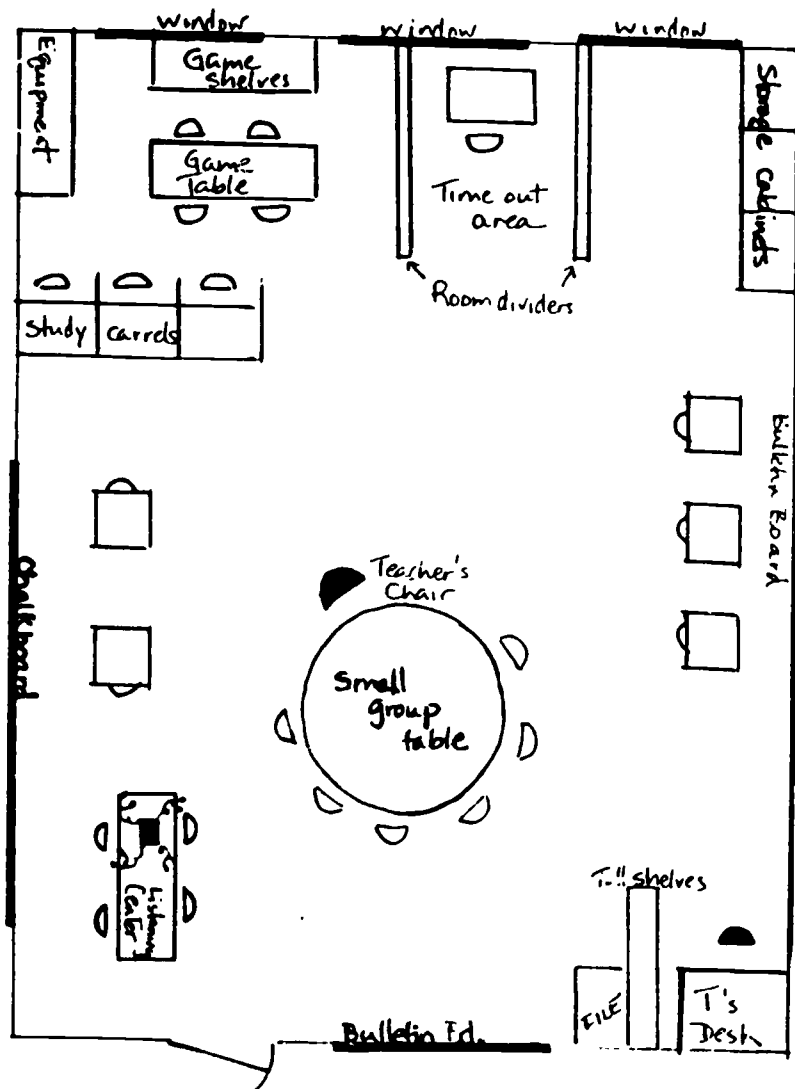
#### RESOURCE ROOM

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

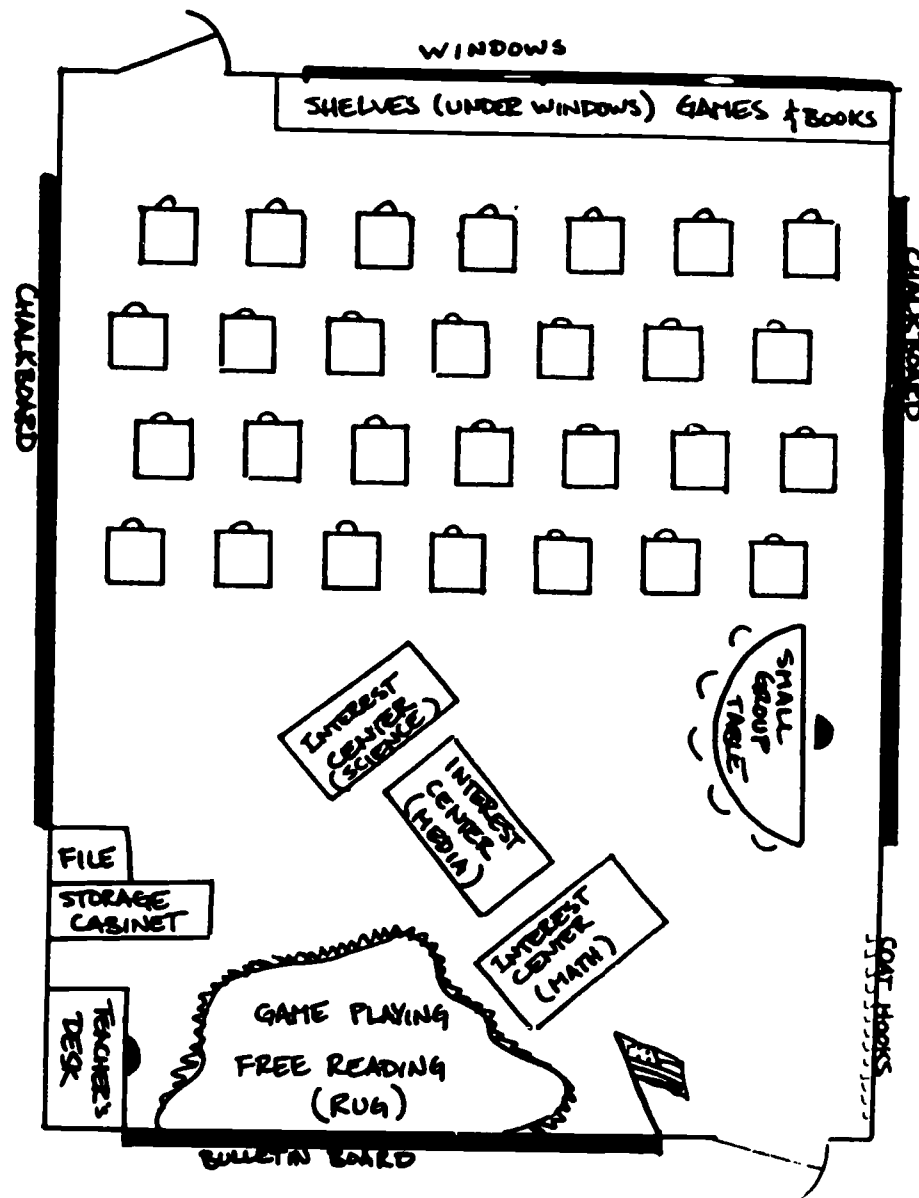
These diagrams portray extreme problems in arrangement: You may have identified other problems. There are some general "rules of thumb," however, to consider in setting up the physical environment of your classroom:

1. The arrangement of student desks should reflect the type of learning activities that will occur. For example, if you group five desks together the students can engage in a cooperative learning activity. However, if after arranging the room in this manner you expect completely independent work with no talking, you are increasing the likelihood of inappropriate behavior.
2. No area should be completely obscured from view by the teacher. All teaching areas-- the front of the room, the small group table, the teacher's desk-- should have a clear view of the entire room.
3. "Traffic patterns" to heavily-used areas of the room should allow for easy movement from all student desks. Such areas include the doors, trash can, pencil sharpener, bathrooms, paper turn-in baskets, etc.





Resource Room



Second Grade Room



4. Items should be stored near where they will be used.
  - a. Frequently-used items should be easy to get to.
  - b. Art and science activities should be planned near the sink.
  - c. Equipment should be stored with extension cords and as near to fixtures as possible.
5. Areas requiring different behaviors should be clearly marked. For example, a quiet book corner could be indicated by a throw rug; a noisier game area could be marked off with masking tape. High-noise and low-noise areas should be far apart.

#### Consistent Scheduling of Activities--

The daily schedule of classroom activities can be used to facilitate appropriate, on-task behavior. Teachers vary in the order in which they prefer to present classroom events. A general guideline, however, is that activities requiring quiet concentration should occur when the students are fresh. Those requiring action and movement can be scheduled when the students are more tired. Favorite activities (art, music, computer, story time, etc.) can be scheduled after more demanding lessons (reading, spelling, math, etc.) in order to add interest and variety to the day and to "reward" students for their efforts. This can also help procrastinators with reminders like, "we will sing the song we have been practicing as soon as everyone has put away the math materials."

Activities should be scheduled predictably, although they can vary from day to day. Students soon learn to anticipate what a "typical" Monday is like and come to expect it. Most teachers soon learn that behavior problems can be exaggerated by unpredictable events-- fire drills, unexpected announcements or visitors, extreme weather conditions, etc. Students seem to function better when they know what to expect. Effective teachers plan predictable schedules and, when possible, prepare students in advance for potentially disruptive events.

Specific times during the day may require extra planning: the first activity of the morning, the last activity before the end of school, the activities following recess, lunch, or P.E. What you plan for these times can enable you to proceed smoothly into the next lessons. Often students will need reminders and transitional activities in order to get into the "mind set" for the subject or lesson. Examples of these transitional activities include a lining quietly up at the door so the teacher can give a direction for entering, a short period of silent reading, darkening the room somewhat and having students rest briefly at their desks, a puzzle or problem on the chalkboard that they solve as soon as they enter, writing in a personal journal.



Monday mornings and Friday afternoons may also require special planning. Students may come to school on Monday full of excitement or, occasionally, concern about their weekend. Attention may need to be given to these events in order to have a productive morning. Group sharing and/or a quiet, personal moment with the teacher may help the transition into the day's learning activities. By the same token, on Friday students may be excited or may dread the upcoming weekend. Activities involving talking, movement, and laughter can channel energy in a constructive direction.

### Procedures to Handle Classroom Routines--

Orchestrating the movements of a group of students through even the best planned schedule in a beautifully arranged room takes a great deal of planning. A lack of planned procedures for handling routine classroom events can lead to student confusion and/or specific behavior problems. The list of classroom events that require procedures is long and varies with the classroom situation, school routines, and teacher preferences. Among the areas that may need specific routines are the following-- you are probably able to think of others:

- \* Entering and leaving the classroom
- \* Use of restrooms
- \* Use of drinking fountains
- \* Use of pencil sharpener
- \* Cues or signals for students to get teacher attention
- \* Cues or signals for teacher to get student attention
- \* Talk among students
- \* Out-of-seat policies
- \* What to do when seat work is finished
- \* Passing out and collecting materials
- \* Turning in assignments
- \* Housekeeping chores and student monitors
- \* Use of designated materials and/or areas of the room
- \* Use and storage of personal belongings
- \* \_\_\_\_\_
- \* \_\_\_\_\_



The procedures developed to deal with these routine events need to be thoroughly taught early in the year. Time spent in identifying, explaining, modeling, and practicing these procedures is time gained for efficient instruction throughout the rest of the year.

### Rules for Classroom Behavior--

In addition to procedures to handle routine classroom events, general rules for student behavior also need to be established. For the purposes of this paper, rules are distinct from procedures in two ways: (1) they are always in effect, not just during specific occurrences, and (2) they are determined by the students in collaboration with the teacher.

Allowing students to determine classroom rules, with teacher guidance, helps them to develop a sense of competence and belonging. The rules are not arbitrary guidelines set by the teacher but are "our" rules that are clearly understood and agreed to. When it is necessary to discuss behavior with students, you may avoid a power struggle by reminding the students of their role in composing the class rules.

Guidelines for developing class rules include the following-- you may have others to add:

1. Rules should be stated in POSITIVE language whenever possible.
2. Rules should be easily MEMORIZED; therefore, they should be FEW IN NUMBER (five or less).
3. Rules should be clearly UNDERSTOOD by all students. If a student breaks a rule, s/he should be asked to state it.
4. Rules should be developed through DISCUSSION and CONSENSUS-- all agree, not just the majority.
5. Rules may be CHANGED, but only after discussion and consensus agreement.
6. Rules should be clearly POSTED in the room.
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_



## ANTICIPATION & RE-DIRECTION OF STUDENT BEHAVIOR

A second major key in the prevention of behavior problems is the ability of the teacher to anticipate circumstances that may lead to misbehavior and re-direct students before the problem becomes serious. Anticipation and re-direction can occur in three ways: through LESSON PLANNING and DELIVERY; through the use of specific TEACHER BEHAVIORS; and through knowledge of INDIVIDUAL STUDENT BEHAVIOR PATTERNS.

### Lesson Planning and Delivery--

Effectively planned and delivered lessons may be the single most important factor in the prevention of behavior problems. Students seldom misbehave when they are involved in lessons at the correct skill level, are actively involved with the lesson, and are experiencing high levels of success.

By studying what happened in 80 elementary classrooms, Jacob Kounin (1970) was able to identify specific techniques of group management that were associated with high levels of task involvement and minimal student misbehavior. Kounin's findings do not suggest specific strategies to deal with individual discipline problems; rather they are lesson management techniques that contribute to overall classroom success. Kounin developed some rather creative terms to describe the techniques he observed effective teachers use. Among them are the following:

**WITHITNESS--** Being aware of what is happening in all parts of the classroom at all times, and demonstrating this knowledge to the students. Methods of demonstrating withitness include (1) intervening in cases of student misbehavior in a timely manner (i.e., to prevent problems "spreading" to other students), and (2) identifying the correct students to target (i.e., not correcting "minor" players while ignoring the major perpetrators of the misbehavior).

**OVERLAPPING--** Being able to deal effectively with two or more matters at the same time. A good example of overlapping occurs when the teacher is working with a small group of students. If a problem arises with a student in another part of the room, is the teacher able to deal with the problem without seriously disrupting the workings of the small group? If so, the teacher is effective at overlapping.

**MOMENTUM--** Keeping up a consistent pace with lessons, not allowing dead spots or too much haste. Effective teachers avoid behaviors that slow down lessons such as "overdwelling" or unnecessarily fragmenting lesson subtasks, instructions, or materials. Nagging or lecturing students on misbehavior is another way to slow down the momentum of a lesson.

**SMOOTHNESS--** Smooth, efficient lessons as well as transitions from one lesson to another are also important, and effective teachers avoid unnecessary "jerkiness." Jerkiness refers to teacher-initiated



behaviors that break the activity flow of the class. For example, a 6th grade teacher is giving a spelling test and notices quite a bit of paper on the floor. She makes the students pick up around their desks and put the paper in the trash before continuing with the spelling test. This was not effective teaching behavior as it disrupted the smooth flow of the lesson. The cleanup could have waited until the completion of the test.

**GROUP FOCUSING--** Maximizing involvement of all students in a lesson, even though only one student may be responding at a time. Examples of group focusing include alerting the class with a key question before randomly choosing a student to respond, creating suspense or challenge, keeping students accountable by having all students hold up their answers on slates, having unison responses, and circulating to monitor and check student progress.

The lesson management techniques that Kounin describes develop with effort and experience. Most teachers can recall times when they failed to demonstrate withitness or "lost" the class by overdwelling on a particular subtask. Less experienced teachers are often so concerned with the content of a lesson that they fail to attend to student behavior cues. Nevertheless, Kounin's description of effective group and lesson management gives teachers specific suggestions for anticipating when misbehavior might occur during lessons, and identifies steps teachers can take to prevent problems and maximize student involvement.

### Specific Teacher Behaviors--

In addition to the group and lesson management techniques described above, other teacher behaviors can be directed at individual students or groups to re-direct students and prevent minor problems from escalating. These teacher behaviors are neither negative nor "heavy"-- they are neutral, non value-laden ways of preventing discipline problems. These behaviors include TEACHER MOVEMENT and PROXIMITY, INTERFERENCE and SIGNALING, and the use of HUMOR.

1. TEACHER MOVEMENT AND PROXIMITY can be used very positively to re-direct student behavior. Students who are off-task, daydreaming, or playing with personal items at inappropriate times usually get back on-task when the teacher stands next to their desks during the lesson. Such teacher behaviors can occur without disrupting the lesson or drawing unnecessary attention to the student-- the student has not been reprimanded or embarrassed, but s/he has stopped the inappropriate behavior.

The effectiveness of teacher proximity suggests that teachers should move frequently while teaching, rather than stay in the front of the room (Fifer, 1986). This movement not only keeps students engaged and reduces behavior problems, but it allows the teacher to glance at student work and monitor their understanding of what is being taught.



Students who are easily distracted, impulsive, overactive, or day dreamers can be seated so that the teacher is never far away. If the right classroom climate exists (to be discussed in the following section) these children will feel supported and reinforced by such close teacher proximity.

Teachers who are interested in evaluating their own movement patterns can ask a colleague to actually diagram their movements during an instructional period. Such an exercise often illustrates that teachers generally interact with students seated in the front and down the center of the classroom. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that most student misbehavior occurs in areas farthest from the teacher (Fifer, 1986).

2. **INTERFERENCE AND SIGNALING** refers to direct teacher behaviors that communicate "get back on task" to the student in a non-threatening way. Interference can be asking the day dreaming student to read the next paragraph; quietly removing the compass from the student boring the hole in the desk and pointing to the correct math problem; or actually using the name of off-task students as part of the lesson ("Let's say Aaron had six apples and gave June three. . ."). As with teacher proximity, the behavior has been corrected, but the lesson has continued and class attention has not shifted to the "problem."

Signals are nonverbal behaviors that re-direct students to the task at hand. Simply making eye contact followed with a shake of the head can be a signal for a student to stop a particular behavior. Some teachers prefer a more systematic signaling procedure such as writing names on the board or using some type of token system. Here is an example:

Ms. F uses a token system to signal appropriate and inappropriate behavior to her classroom for learning disabled students. Color coded chips are dropped into a large jar throughout the day. Red chips indicate inappropriate behavior of an individual or group; green chips signal desired behavior. When tallied at the end of the day, if the green chips outnumber a red ones by an agreed-on number, the class earns a valued activity or privilege.

Token systems have been criticized by many (e.g., Jones & Jones, 1986), but they can be very effective. In this case, Ms. F's plan was to fade out the system when possible. While the use of the tokens often intruded on lessons and brought attention to a student's misbehavior, Ms. F found that the students began reminding each other of the correct behavior so the group would not earn a red chip.

Teachers often find it useful to have a signal to gain whole class attention in order to end an activity or make an announcement about class behavior. Such signals can be a bell, dimming the lights, a clapped sequence that the class joins, a raised hand, or something more creative. Whatever signal is used, the class should be instructed in what it is, why it is used, and their expected response to it.



Demonstrating and practicing the use of the signal helps ensure that it will get the desired response when used.

3. THE USE OF HUMOR can be a very valuable management tool for the teacher. Humor can reduce tension, lighten the classroom climate, and build rapport. Using humor to laugh at your own mistakes also models this important behavior for students. It is crucial, however, to distinguish humor from sarcasm. Sarcasm is often enjoyed by all the students except the one it is aimed at. It humiliates and has a negative impact on classroom climate. It also models for students a trait they learn very easily-- how to "put down" others.

Try to think of a humorous responses to the following situations. Some could easily lend themselves to a sarcastic remark so be careful--

- \* Bernice is stumbling over her answer to a question due to her shyness and she is in danger of ridicule by other students.
- \* Two students are in the back of the room playing tic-tac-toe.
- \* Jim, a student with CP, just noisily knocked all his books off his desk.

A last note about humor-- it can also be used to deal with direct student confrontation. Since it is such an unexpected teacher response, it may allow the student to "back down" while saving face. The trick, of course, is having the presence of mind to use a humorous response instead of an angry one!

#### Knowledge of Individual Student Behavior Patterns--

After getting to know the students in the class as individuals, a teacher may begin to identify certain students as easily frustrated, active and impulsive, and/or prone to misbehavior. The perceptive teacher is able to anticipate events or times of the day that may excite or "set off" certain students, and may make specific plans that will help control those occurrences. Consider this example:

Charles is in 5th grade and has been labeled as having an Attention Deficit Disorder. His teacher has noticed that when coming in from the playground after lunch it is very difficult to get Charles to go to his seat. He wanders around the room, talks to or annoys other students, and cannot seem to get organized for work. The teacher decided to have her students line up outside the classroom door. There she would tell them that they were to enter the classroom and take a one-page "brain teaser" from the monitor, go quietly to their desks, and attempt to solve the puzzle. Charles was the monitor who handed out the assignment. When that was completed, the teacher would often ask him to perform simple chores for her. After a few minutes, Charles was usually ready to go to his seat and continue with the afternoon's work.



Some children who are more vulnerable to frustration or behavior problems have characteristic ways of acting before they "blow up." Students may tap a pencil or seem restless or agitated. Others may hold their bodies in characteristic ways, bite their fingers, or hit their heads with their hands. These behaviors should serve as signals to assist the student or to re-direct him/her to another type of activity. Kelly is an example of such a student.

Kelly is 13 and classified as moderately mentally handicapped. Visual-motor tasks are often quite difficult for her, especially when she is tired. When Kelly becomes frustrated with a task she will begin to pull on her hair and mumble, growing more and more agitated. When this behavior has been allowed to escalate, she has become aggressive-- throwing materials and striking out at others. Now that her teacher knows Kelly, however, he monitors her for signs of frustration (especially in the afternoon). If he notices Kelly pulling her hair and becoming agitated, he suggests she take a break and has her complete a less demanding activity. This anticipation and re-direction of Kelly's behavior has resulted in the complete elimination of her aggressive behavior.





## POSITIVE INTERACTIONS WITH STUDENTS

The third key to preventing discipline problems in the classroom is through positive, encouraging interactions with students. There are many benefits of positive interactions with students-- they promote the development of a warm and safe classroom climate; they model desirable behavior for students; research has linked positive teacher behaviors with fewer student behavior problems-- and all this makes the act of teaching more enjoyable.

Creating a positive, encouraging classroom environment, however, does not mean that all behaviors are acceptable or that students are allowed to indulge their every wish. Positive and encouraging interactions are in no way incompatible with a businesslike classroom with high expectations for student behavior and academic achievement. The keys to establishing a supportive classroom climate include: high levels of student SUCCESS and INVOLVEMENT in classroom activities, the use of ENCOURAGEMENT instead of praise, and NO CRITICISM or demeaning of students when they misbehave or make academic errors.

### Student Involvement and Success--

Academic and behavioral success in the classroom and active involvement in learning have tremendous effects on student self-esteem. Simply helping students avoid failure is not enough to enable them to feel good about themselves-- they must also gain a feeling of accomplishment. Attending to the teacher behaviors discussed above-- management of classroom elements and anticipation and re-direction of student behavior-- will go a long way in promoting student success and involvement.

### The Use of Encouragement Instead of Praise--

Most teachers feel that students need praise in order to shape their behavior and build their confidence. Observing what happens when Mr. G praises Ron, however, may provide some interesting insights:

Ron, a 7th grader who seldom finishes any work, was actually writing the answers to the social studies questions in his notebook. Mr. G is so surprised by this unusual behavior that he wants to acknowledge Ron. "Ron, your answers to the social studies questions are really great." Ron looks at the teacher and sneers, "How do you know, did you read them?" Ron puts away his work and spends the rest of the period with his head down. Sam, who sits near Ron follows Mr. G to the front of the room and asks, "How about my answers, Mr. G? Are they great too?"

Several things happened in this classroom that are common results of praise. One student, Ron, may have felt it was manipulative and insincere. This student was not used to praise and handled it poorly.



Another student, Sam, may have felt slighted because he did not get praise and stopped working to see teacher attention. He is not secure enough to judge the quality of his own work and is dependent on teacher opinion.

Praise sets the teacher as the standard by which everything is judged. It emphasizes the finished product as opposed to the process used. Praise can be discouraging for those not receiving it. Failure to earn praise is often interpreted as a criticism. Some students are ridiculed by others when their behavior or work is singled out for attention. When students set exceedingly high standards for themselves and fail to meet those standards, even sincere praise can sound like scorn or may convince the student that the teacher does not have very good judgment.

An alternative to praise is ENCOURAGEMENT. Encouragement focuses on the effort the child has put into the work-- it emphasizes the problem-solving process over the product. Encouragement may factually describe the students' work or behavior, allowing the students to make their own judgment of the quality. Encouragement recognizes the act, not the actor. Read the following statements and indicate whether they are praise (P) or encouragement (E):

1. \_\_\_ What a good girl to clean up your room.
2. \_\_\_ I'm so glad that you enjoy learning.
3. \_\_\_ Your story is exciting and uses very colorful language.
4. \_\_\_ I'm proud of you for learning your multiplication tables.
5. \_\_\_ I am very pleased at your behavior on the field trip.
6. \_\_\_ You figured that out all by yourself. Aren't you pleased?

(Answers: 1-P; 2-E; 3-E; 4-P; 5-P; 6-E)

Breaking the praise-giving habit and weaning students off teacher praise are difficult tasks. With effort, however, you can begin using more encouraging statements with your students-- you may find them requiring less of your attention and approval of their work.

### Avoiding Criticism & Demeaning Language--

Eventually, every teacher experiences students who fail to meet the class's academic or behavioral standards. Criticizing or demeaning students for these failures, however, is the surest way to undermine a positive classroom climate. Behavioral problems that do arise should be dealt with in a swift and logical manner, making it clear that the behavior is inappropriate. The student, however, should not feel personally diminished or belittled by the teacher's actions. Demeaning teacher behavior invariably leads to lack of student trust and a



reduction of academic risk-taking. Students who are unwilling to take academic risks learn very little.

### SUMMARY

The focus of this paper has been on the prevention of behavior problems through classroom management. There are many theorists who have written on effective ways of dealing with students who present serious behavior challenges to educators. The intent here, however, was to emphasize what teachers can do to keep many behavior problems from occurring in the first place. The key elements discussed are presented in outline form.

#### I. Organization of classroom elements

- A. Physical arrangement of the classroom
- B. Consistent scheduling of classroom events
- C. Procedures to handle classroom routines
- D. Rules for classroom behavior

#### II. Anticipation and re-direction of student behavior

- A. Lesson planning and delivery
- B. Specific teacher behaviors
  - 1. Movement and proximity
  - 2. Interference and signaling
  - 3. Use of humor
- C. Knowledge of individual student behavior patterns

#### III. Positive interactions with students

- A. Creating involvement and success
- B. The use of encouragement instead of praise
- C. Avoiding criticism and demeaning language



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