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ABSTRACT

Classroom management has become, in recent years, more frustrating and difficult for teachers as the social problems of the outside world find their way into schools. This study surveyed primary teachers from two Bronx schools to identify types of classroom management currently being used. Findings indicated that, consistent with a more democratic management philosophy, about 90 percent of the classrooms either had no teacher desk or had the desk at the side or back of the classroom, and almost all arranged student desks in clusters, with about half adding tables in learning centers. Also reflecting a move away from a teacher-dominated classroom, teaching methodologies included whole class instruction, small group instruction, cooperative learning, individualized instruction, and learning centers. Specifically related to teacher attitudes toward classroom management and discipline, most teachers considered their students to be average in manageability and shared responsibility for classroom rule-making with them. In their management philosophy, about half emphasized classroom structure and routines and allowing student input into rule-making. Almost 30 percent focused on material selection, conflict resolution, role playing, and teacher-student discussion. About 30 percent emphasized clear expectations, consistent rules, assertive teacher management, and tangible rewards and punishment. Most teachers asserted that discipline should be balanced evenly between prevention and correction of behavior problems. In summary, commonly used classroom management techniques reflected increased student input and a more positive approach to discipline. However, teachers still relied mostly on behavioristic management strategies with discipline at the core of classroom management. (Contains 11 references.) (KDFB)

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DISCIPLINE, DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE CURRICULUM: OR WHAT CONSTITUTES EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT IN THE EARLY PRIMARY GRADES

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Discipline, Democracy and Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum: or What Constitutes Effective Classroom Management in the Early Primary Grades

Abstract

Classroom management has become, in recent years, more frustrating and difficult for teachers of all grade levels as the social problems of the outside world have found their way into the schools. There are many "experts" giving contradictory advice about how to guide students behavior in school and prepare them for adulthood in an increasingly complex society. These methods span a spectrum of minimal to maximal teacher control, and place varying emphasis on prevention of problems through preparation of the classroom environment, teaching social interaction and problem-solving skills, and manipulation of behavior through rewards and punishments. A survey of early elementary grade teachers was performed, and results revealed a trend toward democratic classroom practices, but a strong dependence on extrinsic motivators remains.

INTRODUCTION

According to a 1989 Gallup poll of the American public, public schools have become a hotbed of violence, drug use and disrespectful, disruptive behavior on the part of students. Moreover, behavioral rather than educational difficulties have become the most prevalent reason for referral of students to special education programs (Smith and Misra, 1992, p. 354). Within the educational establishment, particularly among teachers, confusion and concern about how to handle discipline is rampant. There is a wealth of literature espousing various programs for improving the climate of the classroom, from various philosophical viewpoints. This article examines some of these approaches and presents the results of a survey of elementary school teachers.

A review of the literature on classroom management reveals that most authorities believe that creating a secure, well-organized environment and

enhancing the self-esteem of students leads to more desirable student attitudes and behavior than emphasis on rigid control and punishments. This is a holistic attitude which looks at child behavior as a product of the entire educational program, rather than as an isolated issue which is handled chiefly by proper "discipline." Moreover, disciplinary actions cannot be totally separated from the overall relationships between teachers and students and from the teacher's basic educational philosophy.

In Solving Discipline Problems: Methods and Models for Today's Teachers, Wolfgang (1995, pp. 1-7) points out that different models of classroom management run the gamut from minimal to maximal control by the teacher, and are based on different psychological theories. The teacher's own personality type, developed largely as a result of his own childhood experiences, has the greatest influence on which of the "three faces of discipline" he relies on: the Relationship-Listening face (minimal use of teacher power, uses "therapeutic" techniques) the Confronting-Contracting face (retaining teacher's power to direct student's behavior while encouraging student to decide how he or she will change); or the Rules and Consequences face (the teacher decides how student should behave, uses rewards and punishments to promote compliance). The types of actions teachers engage in to influence student's behavior range across the "Teacher Behavior Continuum" which encompasses the three faces and in some circumstances, includes a fourth face which Wolfgang calls Coercive-Legalistic (involves physical restraint and possible legal actions against assaultive students, and is normally only a last resort rather than an everyday method of dealing with problem behavior). The specific behaviors on the continuum include nonverbal cuing, non-directive statements, questions, directive statements, and physical intervention/modeling. Although each classroom management system can be associated with one of the three faces, Wolfgang recognizes that in reality most teachers span the continuum, using elements of the different faces, as they deal

with different students or even with the same student in different situations, but teachers who have a strong basic philosophy tend to wear one "face" and be more consistent in their disciplinary measures.

On the "minimum power" end of the continuum we would find methods such as Thomas Gordon's Teacher Effectiveness Training (1974), which is based on Carl Roger's concept that a person grows emotionally in an atmosphere of acceptance and openness, where he is encouraged to talk through feelings and experiences and come to his own decisions. In this best-selling book, Gordon suggests the techniques of "active listening," (restating the essence of the child's expressed feelings to show understanding and empathy), "I-messages" (telling the child how his behavior makes you feel without putting him down, and "no-lose problem solving," (the child suggests solutions which are seriously considered and discussed until a mutually acceptable resolution is devised). Gordon stresses the need for teachers to demonstrate acceptance of the student as a person regardless of his behavior (sometimes referred to as "unconditional positive regard"), model proper communication and behavior patterns, and to establish "emotional contact" with every student through the use of small group or one-to-one interactions. He favors the use of "Type I authority," which the teacher establishes by demonstrating wisdom and knowledge, and discourages use of reinforcers, either positive or negative, as demonstrating "Type II authority," which he sees as the misuse of power by adults. Other authors who have given similar advice to parents and teachers are Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish (How to Talk So Kids Can Learn at Home and in School). The fact that these books have been so popular demonstrates that many adults really wish to establish positive and democratic relationships with the children in their charge. In Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise and Other Bribes (1993), Alfie Kohn takes this view further and condemns the entire system of motivating people of any age through rewards and punishments. He believes that they are overly

manipulative and cites research finding them ineffective in the long run in instilling positive values or encouraging quality work. Kohn urges educators to create school programs which are developmentally appropriate, challenging and creative so that we do not destroy children's inherent eagerness to learn, therefore reducing the need for artificial motivators of dubious educational value.

Specific means for carrying out the above philosophy in the classroom are laid out in Positive Discipline in the Classroom: How to Effectively use Class Meetings and Other Positive Discipline Strategies, by Nelson, Lott and Glenn (1993). They favor giving students a significant voice in their school life in order to prepare them for the responsibilities of adult life, as well as to give them a more productive early education. A message of caring and respect is transmitted to pupils, as are the crucial social skills learned through class meetings in which important issues are worked through. This engenders an atmosphere conducive to learning academic subjects and problem solving behaviors necessary in the real world. Disruptive behavior and disinterest in school decrease as a result.

In "Making School Fun for You and Your Students," Buehler (1992) proposes that teachers attempt to make the classroom a pleasant experience that students will want to return to day after day. Her prescription for achieving this goal involves providing what she calls the "three S's" - security, success and structure. *Security* involves setting realistic standards, making sure they are clearly understood by children, reinforcing behavior consistently, giving attention for good behavior as much as possible, and constantly evaluating the class's behavior. *Success* must be achieved by children, this happens when the teacher knows where each child is presently functioning and bases instruction on this knowledge, praising effort as well as product, providing a good model for each task, having kids actively involved in learning, using multi-sensory activities, and allowing them to "play teacher." *Structure* is insured when

children know the schedules, have settling periods upon arrival and after lunch or active play, are given academics in the morning, when transitions are directed smoothly, and when there is flexibility within the schedule to allow for unexpected events. When all these objectives are accomplished, children feel that school is fun, and parents and teachers know they are learning! Buehler's approach would, for the most part, fit into Wolfgang's "Confronting-Contracting face" due to its combination of teacher control, student input and consistent structure. In "Managing the Early Childhood Classroom," Sandra Crosser (1992) reinforces Buehler's viewpoint, and further stresses that the physical environment of the classroom is crucial to the success of the program

The following two sources put forth classroom management programs which combine the "Confronting-Contracting" face and the "Rules-Consequences" face, and would probably appeal to teachers who wish to maintain a greater degree of authority or have found more student-centered methods ineffective in certain situations. In the book Making it Till Friday, Long and Frye (1985) caution against overoptimism from the use of preventive techniques such as those described in previous citations. They describe as a "myth" the belief that "effective teachers can prevent all discipline problems by keeping students interested in learning through the use of exciting classroom materials and classroom activities. The potential for problems exists beyond academics. Students experience difficulties at home which spill over into the classroom; students experience problems with peers during class breaks and in the classroom which often involve the teacher; and students experience mood changes which can generate problems, to name just a few" (pp.3-4). Another "myth" is that "all students should be treated the same." In their opinion, classroom management should be based on the philosophy that "positive, caring interactions with students are just as important as the academic subjects that are being studied" and what is adequate treatment for one student may be inadequate for another (p. 5). (For example, affluent

students may be exposed to many more educational opportunities outside of school and therefore be more predisposed toward academics, while economically disadvantaged classmates may not have this exposure. Therefore, the extra effort and attention expended to motivate the disadvantaged student is necessary and does not constitute unfairness to the others (p. 7).

These authors lay out guidelines for behavior management based on behaviorist theories, which use shaping techniques, positive reinforcements, parental involvement, and non-punitive strategies for inappropriate behavior in most situations. When punitive techniques are deemed necessary, they encourage those like time-outs, soft reprimands, and logical consequences and strongly discourage harsh punishments. In addition, they offer detailed suggestions for working with special needs students.

A similar program to Long and Frye's is laid out by Smith and Misra in "A Comprehensive Management Systems for Students in Regular Classrooms (1992), and is deemed especially important for students whose borderline behavior might cause them to be placed in special education. They describe an approach which emphasizes *prevention* of disruptive behavior through democratically created rules, peer modeling, warm and sincere teacher-student interactions, and appropriate curriculum; *corrective measures* including such positive methods as activity reinforcers, behavior contracts, and tokens and when necessary, *negative consequences* such as extinction, time-out, short reprimands, and overcorrection. Although these authors prefer the Confronting-Contracting face of discipline, they allow for firmer techniques when that approach does not achieve the desired results.

Wolfgang's "Rules and Consequence" face is epitomized in Assertive Discipline: A Take-Charge Approach for Today's Educator by Lee and Marlene Canter (1976) which offers exactly what its title implies, and is attractive to many teachers who feel locked in a power struggle with their students. The Canter's define the assertive teacher as "one who clearly and firmly

communicates her wants and needs to her students and is prepared to reinforce her words with appropriate actions. She responds in a manner which maximizes her potential to get her needs met, but in no way violates the best interests of the students." (p.9) Although written twenty years ago, it remains popular and has engendered many training workshops to show educators how to set "firm limits" and apply specific consequences for all types of unacceptable behavior. This method actually relies heavily on old-fashioned, authoritarian disciplinary tactics like standing the child in the corner, calling the parent, sending him to the principal, removal of privileges and detention after school. It seems focused almost exclusively on negative reinforcement, with only a short chapter at the end suggesting some positive reinforcement for good behavior. Although this approach may succeed in returning control of the classroom to the teacher, it may be doing so at the expense of teaching children self-discipline, self-respect and a positive attitude toward school and learning, and may therefore be, in actuality, violating the best interests of the students.

It is obvious that there is a wide range of classroom management styles (and this range is even wider if one considers the extreme method of corporal punishment, which is not allowed as an option by this author!), and the questions arises about which of these methods are actually favored by experienced, knowledgeable teachers in elementary schools. Wilford Weber (1981) attempted to find this out in his study of 163 teachers who had successfully completed a graduate course in classroom management. A survey of these teachers revealed the teachers to be quite pluralistic in their choice of effective strategies. Of the twenty listed, positive reinforcement, applying logical consequences, and exhibiting unconditional positive regard ranked in the top five; time-out, extinction, problem solving class meetings and establishing clear expectations and enforcing rules placed in the second five; and token economy/reward systems and punishments ranked in the bottom five.

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METHOD

A twenty-three question survey focusing on classroom management beliefs and techniques and how they were developed was placed in the office mailboxes of forty teachers in two Bronx public elementary schools, and returned by mail. Each participant received the same form and giving one's name was optional. Questions were grouped into five categories: Current Classroom Data (8 questions), Teacher's Educational Background (1 question), Current Classroom Arrangement (1 question), Current Teaching Methodology, (1 question), and Classroom Management (12 questions). Twenty of the questions were short-answer, two of those provided space for additional comments if desired. Three questions were open ended and elicited answers of a paragraph or less, and there was space at the end for any additional comments on any aspect of classroom management. The respondents were asked to return the questionnaires within two weeks. Eleven surveys were returned within this time period, nine were signed. A thank-you note was posted in each school office at the end of the two-week period.

REVIEW OF RESULTS

Current Classroom Data: (Questions 1-8) Of the total number who responded, (N=11), 18.2% currently teach kindergarten, 35.4% teach first grade, 9.1% teach second grade, and 35.4% are cluster teachers serving children of mixed grade levels in the areas of reading, writing process, ESL and art. Of these teachers, none have been teaching for less than one year, 18.2 % have been teaching for 1-5 years, 9.1% for 6-10 years, and 72.7% for more than ten years. Moreover, 9.1% have been teaching their current grade level for less than one year, 45.5% for 1-5 years, 36.4% for 6-10 years and 9.1% for more than ten years. All respondents work in urban public schools. Classes are of heterogeneous ability levels for 81.8% and of homogeneous levels for 18.2% (these were cluster teachers who give special services). The socio-economic levels of the students

were described as affluent by 0%, middle class by 9.0%, working class by 27.3%, underprivileged by 36.4%, and mixed by 27.3%.

*Educational Background: (Question 9)*Teachers were asked to check all the choices that applied. The possibilities included degree programs, non-degree courses and supervised experience working in classrooms. 81.8% had taken undergraduate education courses, 81.8% completed at least six graduate education credits (7 out of 9 had master's degrees in education), 45.5% had participated in-service training in classroom management, 54.5% had been student teachers, 9.1% had served as teacher's assistants and 9.1% had been supervised by mentors while in paid teaching positions.

The above data indicate that the respondents are primarily experienced, professionally educated teachers serving a population of children who have not, for the most part, had financial or educational advantages equal to those associated with suburban environments. Of these two schools, one serves an almost exclusively minority population, mostly Hispanic, and the other a more ethnically and economically mixed group.

Current Classroom Arrangement: (Question 10) The physical arrangement of a classroom plays an important role in setting the tone of the class, marking it as either child-centered or teacher-centered and determining, in part, how much children can interact with each other and with materials. Results of this survey are consistent with a trend away from rows of desks facing a teacher's desk and blackboard, toward a more interactive, less teacher-dominated type of environment. This, in turn, effects the management issues teachers face such as where children's attention is directed, the noise level and the opportunities for the children to move around the room. The majority of respondents (54.5%) do not have a teacher's desk, 36.4% have a desk either on the side or in back of the room, and 9.1% have a desk in front of the room. None of the classrooms

contain student desks in rows, 45.5% have student desks in clusters, 9.1% use tables in learning centers, and 45.5% have a combination of desks in clusters and tables in centers.

Current Teaching Methodology: (Question 11) Another factor affecting management issues is teaching style; which includes the type of grouping used for teaching. A generation ago, whole class instruction predominated, with all students being expected to work at the same pace at the same activity. Results of this questionnaire reflect current educational philosophy which tends to favor more individualized instruction and tolerance of diverse student needs. Fewer than half of the teachers (45.4%) report that they usually use whole class instruction; 27.3% use it often, 27.3% occasionally, and 0% never. Small group instruction is usually used by 9.1%, often used by 45.5%, occasionally used by 36.5%. 9.0% did not answer this category. Cooperative learning is a modality usually used by 9.1%, often by 27.3%, occasionally by 54.5% (9.1% did not respond). Individualized instruction is cited as usual by 0%, often by 54.5%, occasionally by 36.4%, and not cited by 9.1%. 9.1% of the teachers usually assign independent work or projects, 36.4% do so often, 18.2% occasionally and 18.2% never do so. Learning centers are usually utilized by 18.2%, often by 36.4%, occasionally by 18.2%, and never by 18.2% of the respondents.

Classroom Management: (Question 12-13) Data collected in this survey did not reinforce the impression created by reviewing the current literature on this topic, which is that discipline is a major problem in today's elementary schools. 18.2 % state that their present students are relatively easy to manage, 9.1% said they are relatively difficult, and 72.7% consider them about average in manageability. When asked to respond to the following statement: "I find it difficult to teach academics to my class because discipline problems monopolize my time and energy," all said "no," this is not true.

(Question 14) A significant indicator of a teacher's need for control is who makes the rules. 27.3% of the respondents said that rules and consequences are drawn up by the teacher alone, and 72.7% share this responsibility with the students. None give the full power to the children.

(Questions 15 and 20) Teachers were asked for a brief description of their philosophy of classroom management, and for their favorite techniques. Some of the answers were limited to disciplinary methods, while some encompassed other aspects of the curriculum and classroom environment. Their answers to these two questions, indicate approximately which of Wolfgang's "faces of discipline" each teacher fits into. 27.3% of the teachers seemed to favor the Relationship-Listening face, using such terms as self-motivation, challenging curriculum, making children feel special and important, working together as a community, helping each other and the importance of inquiry in the learning process as the roots of their philosophies. Regarding their techniques, they support using selection of appropriate materials, conflict resolution, role playing, class meetings, and teacher/student discussions of problems. These methods were developed through a combination of professional and in-service training and teaching experience. 45.4% of the respondents appeared to fit into the Confronting-Contracting face, emphasizing the classroom structure and routines (repetition, consistency, predictability, a positive attitude and positive reinforcements including "caught being good" rewards, praise, ignoring misbehavior, good access to materials, having fun) and allowing student input into rule-making. These techniques were also gleaned from a variety of sources, including advice and observation of colleagues. The "Rules and Consequences" group includes 27.3 % who devise the class rules themselves and emphasize clear expectations, consistent rules and consequences for infractions, assertive teacher management, rewards (tangible and intangible) and punishments, such as exclusion from free play. However, two out of the three teachers maintain a positive attitude and try to maintain a balance between prevention and

correction of behavior problems. Sources for these techniques were listed as observing colleagues and self-developed.

(Question 16) This question gave choices as to what the teachers role in maintaining discipline should be primarily based upon, and 35.4% said prevention of behavior problems, 0% said correction of behavior problems, and 63.6% answered that it should involve a fairly even balance between the two.

(Question 17) Teachers were then asked to state whether they were familiar with six particular approaches to classroom management and if so, whether they approved, disapproved or were undecided about each. The results were as followed:

Token economy system: 54% familiar. Of those, 50% approve, 16.7% disapprove, 33.3% undecided.

Reward/Punishment System other than Token Economy: 72.7% familiar. Of those, 75% approve, 0% disapprove, 25% undecided.

"Assertive Discipline" Approach: 63.6% familiar. Of those, 28.6% approve, 14.2% disapprove, 57.2% undecided.

"Positive Discipline using Class Meetings:" 72.7% familiar. Of those, 100% approve.

"Active Listening" or "Teacher Effectiveness Training:" 54.5% familiar. Of those, 100% approve.

Prevention of Discipline Problems through Implementation of Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum: 90.9% familiar. Of those, 100% approve.

(Since no definitions of these methods were given by researcher or required from respondents, it is difficult to interpret these results with any certainty.)

(Question 18) A variety of strategies were listed for dealing with conflicts between students, and teachers asked which ones they use. The answers given were: *Teachers and students discuss problem together- 100%, Teacher speaks to each student individually- 81.8%, Role playing - 63.6%, Peer mediation- 54.5%,*

Students write about problem and possible solutions- 27.3%. This indicates that although most teachers still involve themselves in student conflict, a majority also allow for students to work them out themselves in some situations.

(Question 19) Teachers were asked whether they rely more on positive reinforcement for desired behaviors or negative reinforcement for undesired behaviors. 90.9% said positive, and 9.1% answered negative. This is consistent with current popular beliefs about child rearing, both at home and in school.

(Question 21) Thirteen management techniques were listed and respondents asked to rate each as very appropriate, sometimes appropriate or not appropriate for their grade level. The following choices were judged as **very appropriate** by more than half: *Praise, Logical consequences, Establishing clear expectations and enforcing rules consistently, Group problem solving meetings, Active listening, Displaying unconditional positive regard, Parent/child/teacher conferences, and Prevention of behavior problems through developmentally appropriate curriculum.* The majority considered as **sometimes appropriate:** *Reprimands and Punishments.* There were no techniques considered not appropriate by more than 27.3% of the respondents. These data support the trend toward a more positive approach to discipline than most of the teachers experienced in their childhood.

(Question 22) When asked if they were comfortable with their current classroom management practices, 90.9% answered yes, 0% said no, and 9.1% said somewhat. This teacher added that she "must remember to remain consistent. This is the most important measure in classroom management." One of the teachers who answered *yes* added, "constantly re-valuating, looking for ways to increase student's active engagement in the learning process."

(Question 23) This was a request for recommendations of written literature, training programs, or other publically available information on classroom management. Three books were mentioned (Invitations, by Regie Routman; Joyful Learning: The Whole Language Kindergarten, by Bobbi

Fisher; and The Author Studies Handbook by Laura Kotch and Leslie Zachman). Another source given was the decision-making research by Dr. Elias and Dr. Clabby of Rutgers University Medical School. All of these citations promote a student-centered approach to classroom management and curriculum development.

Finally, teachers were asked for any additional comments on any aspect of classroom management. Those who answered mentioned the importance of consistency, a positive approach to discipline, making even the most difficult students feel special, taking the time and making the effort to find procedures you're comfortable with, and the benefit of a mentor for new teachers.

DISCUSSION

Data collected from the teacher survey reflect the current movement toward increased student input into classroom life and toward a more positive approach to discipline issues. It is interesting to note that all of the teachers in this sample who allow student participation in class rule-making have had in-service training in classroom management, while none of those who maintain teacher control of rules have done so. This implies that current professional development workshops encourage democratic classroom practices. Secondly, although the teachers in the first two "faces" use all types of teaching methodologies, those in the third face rely primarily on whole group instruction. In general, results of this study show that teachers are attempting to create more student-centered classroom environments and use more individualized teaching methodologies. On the other side of the coin, teachers still rely predominantly on behavioristic management techniques, although the emphasis has shifted from punishing undesired behavior to rewarding desired behavior. These findings imply that teachers are still interested in retaining sovereignty in their classrooms, but are trying to create a more positive climate for learning. The belief that discipline is still seen as the core of classroom

management is revealed by the preponderance of teachers who listed disciplinary measures, rather than classroom arrangement, curriculum or other environmental factors as their classroom management philosophies and favorite techniques.

CONCLUSION

Like parents, teachers have a profound influence on the type of people children grow up to be. It is therefore very important for teachers to consider the values and attitudes they are transmitting to students through their classroom management methods. Are they training pupils to work and learn primarily for rewards, or for the intrinsic value of working and learning? Are they teaching and modeling positive social relationships and conflict-prevention techniques that children can carry with them through adulthood? Are the behaviors they encourage from children becoming sufficiently ingrained so that they are maintained when someone else is supervising the class, or if the children are left on their own for brief periods?

Whatever the teacher's philosophical viewpoint may be, it is not enough to "control the class" in the short-term, although it does help one get through each day. By treating classroom management issues as an integral part of the educational process, teachers provide an essential "education for life."

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About the Author

Marcy Taitz has been working as an educational assistant in District 10 public schools for the past eight years. Prior to this, she was an assistant teacher in nursery school for two years. After completing the Lehman College master's degree program in Early Childhood Education, she hopes to become a teacher in the early elementary grades. She thanks her husband and two teenage daughters for encouraging her to return to school and for their constant support and interest in her work, and all her students, past and present, for giving her the inspiration to continue!