Managing the classroom environment to facilitate...
ABOUT THIS MANUAL

The sections of this manual are, with slight exception, a verbatim account of what is covered on the six video tapes. During the field testing and evaluation of the video tapes, viewers recommended that time be made available between sessions for participants to discuss and reflect on the information that was presented. Having the content available in print form will facilitate such discussions.

Accompanying the manual are the following:

1. Photo-ready copies of selected supporting materials that highlight and emphasize major points covered during the training sessions. These can be duplicated for those being trained using the training tapes. Do not duplicate any of these materials for general distribution without the author's written permission. They were prepared exclusively in support of this training program.

2. A copy of the Technical Report that summarizes the data from the field-testing of the training program.

The length of each video tape is shown below. Each tape begins with a formal presentation of content, followed by a number of questions and answers. The questions were all submitted, on the spot, by the participants.

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* During the question and answer period, participants were limited to call or fax in their questions, hence, telephone and fax numbers are shown on the screen. Please ignore these. They were of use only during the original teleconference presentation.

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this series of videotaped training sessions on managing the classroom environment to facilitate effective instruction. We have prepared six presentations, each dealing with a particular facet of the classroom environment and what teachers can do, through management, to create an environment that will facilitate effective instruction. The first session addresses four particularly relevant principles of human behavior which must be thoroughly understood by teachers if they are to hope to be able to systematically and skillfully manage the learning environment. Research in learning has taught us conclusively that in order to acquire a new skill to the level of mastery we must thoroughly understand the principles into which that skill is anchored. The effective and practical application of these four principles of human behavior is discussed in session two, and their use illustrated in classroom settings. Again, the research in skill development teaches us that to master a new skill we must have that skill demonstrated in settings similar to those in which the skill will be used. Sessions three through six address specific areas for which management skills have been shown to be particularly important. They are:

- Session 3  Getting and Keeping Students On Task
- Session 4  Improving the Quality of Teacher-to-Pupil Interactions
- Session 5  Increasing the Frequency of Successful Student Responding
- Session 6  Controlling Classroom Distractions

These sessions address only management strategies, not instructional or curriculum matters. It is altogether possible for a teacher to have good management skills but be less skilled in matters of instruction and curriculum, and vice versa. The important point to be understood here is that one does not necessarily become a better teacher, that is, better at pedagogy, by simply increasing one's classroom management skills. In that regard, it is important to note that improved instructional skills have a much greater
positive effect on student behavior than do improved management skills on student learning. Teachers don't become better teachers simply because children behave better; but, children do behave better as teachers are able to teach better. My appeal, therefore, is that teachers work as hard or even harder on improving their teaching skills as they do on improving their management skills. Certainly, the management of classroom behavior should not be an alternative to skillful teaching. I am reminded of a project with which I was associated several years ago during which we worked with 33 schools in helping teachers improve the quality of the learning environment through the more effective management of the classroom environment. The project was an immense success from the standpoint of improving teachers' management skills, but it taught us a great lesson about the need to improve teaching skills as well. While evaluating the effects of our intervention, nearly all teachers in the project noted that even though their classrooms were under better control, they were faced with a new dilemma: what to do with the extra instructional time that was suddenly available to them. They had been spending so much class time just getting and keeping students attention they hadn't realized how much instructional time was being lost. Once that instructional time was available, they were having difficulty knowing how to use it. In fact, as they began to improve their management skills, they were impressed with how much more productive their students were; how much more work they were generating (work which, by the way, increased the work load of the teachers). So as you consider the impact of improved classroom management skills, recognize that once additional instructional time becomes available through better classroom management, your instructional management skills are going to have to improve proportionately since there will be an increased level of student on-task behavior and productivity.

The range of abilities found in public school settings is so immense that it isn’t possible to demonstrate classroom management strategies in every conceivable setting; therefore, these sessions will focus on management strategies in regular education and resource room settings. Although the principles apply to any educational setting, illustrations and demonstrations are not included which involve work with students who are severely, multiply disabled, or children whose behavior is so severe as to require an almost constant one-on-one attention in institutional/fully self-contained settings.

As a result of this training, we sincerely hope teachers will return to their classrooms and make a serious and adequate effort at putting this
information to work. Research on the inservice training of teachers has shown that the effects of inservice training are more apparent in the classrooms of teachers who are already doing things that are similar to those things covered in the training. In other words, the training so closely approximates what is already being done that a "leap" to a higher skill level is not required; rather, only a slight adaptation or refinement is all that is necessary. We have tried to portray, illustrate, and demonstrate our points in a believable way, a way that will make it possible for teachers to identify with what is being suggested, a way that will not require big procedural or methodological leaps. But in any case, you are encouraged to consider these things seriously and, as the need exists, to put them to work in the classroom.

Research in learning also speaks to the importance of multiple trial learning, and you will see a respect for that research in these sessions as we visit and revisit important concepts and strategies in an attempt to make our points. Though at times, a presentation or illustrative sequences might seem redundant, please bear with us and carefully consider each illustration in light of the point being made.

Everything covered in these six sessions is anchored in solid research. We will not be proposing any snake-oil type remedies. Furthermore, as you implement these strategies and methods in your classrooms, should you encounter problems do not be discouraged or dissuaded. In time, it will get easier and become more natural and comfortable. If you get to the point where, despite all you are doing, you are still having no success, don't hesitate to contact us for help. We are confident that if you are teaching in what I call an "intellectually honest" situation, the probabilities of finding solutions for your management problems are remarkably good. I recognize that teachers occasionally work in intellectually dishonest situations. I have visited several inner city schools in large metropolitan communities and observed conditions there that were so bizarre that creating an effective learning environment would be a challenge by any standard: overcrowded classrooms; large numbers of students coming to school having been sexually abused, and where even more students suffered from the effects of alcohol and drug abuse; and where, were it not for meals served by the school, most of the students wouldn't have had a nutritious meal in the last 24 hours; where any number of students would be carrying in a purse or a pocket a lethal weapon; and where the principals talk more about their, and their teachers', survival than about student learning. But even in those difficult situations, as dishonest as they are, and as seemingly impossible as they are, what is discussed, illustrated, and demonstrated during these
sessions is absolutely applicable and I recommend them to you enthusiastically and unconditionally. I have seen their effects in very difficult classroom environments, I've taught teachers how to use them, and I know they can work wonders when appropriately applied!
There are laws operating in the universe with which we are all familiar. The universe is a lawful place. We know that given certain conditions, certain things will happen every single time as a result of those laws. For example, if into thin air one lets go of a heavier than air object, the law of gravity will take over and we all know exactly what will happen: the object will fall in a straight line toward the center of the earth precisely as one would expect it to do. There really is no question in anyone’s mind about what effect the law of gravity would have on such an object once it is released into thin air.

Human behavior is also lawful, though the laws that apply to human behavior don’t allow us to predict outcomes with such absolute certainty as we can with the law of gravity on a heavier than air object. With human behavior, we can predict events only in terms of probabilities, not certainties. Though we can’t predict events with absolute certainty, we can take great comfort in knowing that by skillfully managing selected variables within the environment, we can remarkably increase the probability that behavior will move in the desired direction and at the proper rate. A functional understanding of the four principles discussed here makes it highly probable that you will be able to properly manage a classroom environment that facilitates effective instruction. These principles are:

1. Behavior is largely a product of its immediate environment.
2. Behavior is strengthened or weakened by its consequences.
3. Behavior ultimately responds better to positive than to negative consequences.
4. Whether a behavior has been punished or reinforced is known only by the course of that behavior in the future.
Principle #1
BEHAVIOR IS LARGELY A PRODUCT OF ITS IMMEDIATE ENVIRONMENT

In the mid 1960's, Dr. James Coleman, a renowned sociologist from the University of Chicago, did a massive study to identify those variables that correlated significantly with the school achievement of children. He found that the only variable that had a statistically significant correlation with school achievement was home background. In other words, children who came from supportive homes, stable homes, and functional families where education was valued and parents saw to it that their children applied themselves to academics were the students who were most likely to achieve in school. A lot of educators seized the results of that study as a reason to excuse schools from taking responsibility for the academic achievement of children who came from less stable and less functional homes. Educators tended to throw their hands in the air and say, "Well, you can’t expect me to do anything with that kid given the terrible home and family he comes from." Unfortunately, that notion has prevailed in education despite subsequent research that has taught us that all children, even children from poor, less functional homes can still be properly managed and taught. In February, 1980, Dr. Benjamin Bloom, also of the University of Chicago, published a marvelous article in the Kappan magazine in which he drew a distinction between alterable and nonalterable variables. He pointed out that there are some variables teachers can’t alter; variables such as home background, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, and so on. But, he also pointed out that there are many other variables that teachers can alter; that is, variables that are under teachers’ control. He pointed out that, for the most part, despite childrens’ home backgrounds, teachers can arrange the environment in their classrooms to facilitate learning. He recognized that the behavior of children in classrooms is largely a product of the immediate environment of that classroom. The point I’m making is that if children misbehave, act out, are easily distracted, and so on, it is very likely that it is because something in that environment is producing that behavior; not some switch inside the kid that clicks on and off in some kind of random, unpredictable way. So rather than blame the nonalterable variables for why children will not pay attention and will not do what they are told to do and will not get their work done, it is much more appropriate to take an objective, data-based look at what is happening within the classroom and identify those things in that environment that are setting off behaviors and which are keeping both appropriate and inappropriate behaviors going. Etched in my mind for the
rest of my life is the recollection of two of my fellow teachers when I taught English at a junior high school. The school was located in a working class neighborhood and we had some pretty rowdy kids in the student body. One of my fellow teachers was a massive muscular fellow who could be fearsome just to look at. Despite his size and demeanor, he had almost no classroom control. Students ran over him like a bulldozer across level ground. On the other hand, when the very same students that were raising hell in his class walked into another classroom where the teacher was a petite, 5'3", middle aged woman, the students quickly took their seats, quietly got their books and pencils out, and by the time the tardy bell rang they were attentive and ready to be taught; the same students behaving dramatically differently in two different environments. The children didn’t make some massive metamorphic change as they walked from one class to another. They were exactly the same children. What was different was the environments of the classrooms.

As we proceed, I’ll be making some suggestions and giving you some examples about how you can systematically look at what's happening in your classroom environment to determine what it is that accounts for students being manageable or being unmanageable. For the moment, it is sufficient to say, again, that behavior is largely a product of its immediate environment, and the answers to problems within that environment are, for the most part, to be found within that environment.

**Principle #2**

**BEHAVIOR IS STRENGTHENED OR WEAKENED BY ITS CONSEQUENCES**

The immediate inclination of most people, when a child misbehaves or is out of order, is to assume there is something the matter with the child. How often I hear parents and teachers, responding to the inappropriate behavior of children, say something like, "I just can’t imagine what’s the matter with that kid," the assumption being that there is something going on inside of that child that would account for his behavior. Research in human behavior has taught us quite a different way of looking at children’s behavior. It has taught us to look at behavior relative to events in the environment that strengthen or weaken the behavior. Invariably, when I go into classrooms to observe the behavior of children who are disruptive or otherwise nonattentive, I’m able to find in that classroom the consequences of behavior which help explain its persistence. As an example, observations of a regular classroom of sixth graders in a culturally diverse metropolitan
school revealed the answer to a management problem that had been perplexing the teacher all year long.

The classroom teacher asked me to observe her class because she was having a very difficult time maintaining order. Children were speaking out, out of their seats, nonattentive, bothering one another—in other words, continually engaged in a plethora of unacceptable behavior. Upon entering the class, it wasn’t long before I had to agree with the teacher’s assessment of things. I gathered data on two variables: 1) the frequency of positive and negative teacher-to-pupil interactions, and 2) student on-task behavior, since these two variables are typically so closely related. Fifteen minutes into the observation, it was time for recess and of the 17 students in the class, only seven were allowed to go out to the playground. The remaining ten, who had been the most disruptive during class, were required to remain in the classroom and continue at their seat work. Since there was no teacher in the room, there were no data to collect relative to teacher-to-pupil interaction; but, I was able to take data on student time-on-task. During the time the teacher was in the classroom with the students, student on-task behavior was only 54%. However, during recess when the teacher was not in the classroom, the on-task behavior of students rose sharply to 88%. In fact, by the time recess was over it was at 92%!

Now, since behavior is strengthened or weakened by it’s consequences, what consequences were keeping on task behavior low while the teacher was in the room and allowing it to increase dramatically while the teacher was out of the room? The answer was found in the data on teacher-to-pupil interactions. While the teacher was in the classroom, and as children were disruptive, she was regularly and consistently attending to those disruptive behaviors. The consequence of disruptive behavior was teacher attention; hence, disruptive behavior maintained at a high level. While working with a small group, the quality of the teacher’s interactions with her pupils was quite good. She had seven positive interactions and no negative interactions. However, the quality of interactions between the teacher and individual pupils and the class as a whole was not good. With individual pupils, she had 28 negative interactions and no positive interactions. In total, her interactions with the class revealed only two positive interactions and ten negative interactions. Again, since the consequence for misbehavior was teacher attention, it was misbehavior that was maintained. By contrast, when the teacher was out of the room and there was no one there to attend to those misbehaviors, the students turned to their seat work and on-task behavior shot up to 92% by the end of recess. One might argue
that the reason the students were on task so much was because I was sitting there observing them. It would be quite remarkable that my mere presence in the classroom, saying nothing, not moving, not even making eye-to-eye contact, would have had that much effect on the student's behavior. I had been in the classroom for 15 minutes before recess and my presence certainly didn't have any effect on the students' behavior then, so I seriously doubt that my presence in the classroom was of much consequence during recess.

I sat with the teacher and we discussed the data. She was surprised at what they revealed. I suggested some remedial strategies, and at the end of the next school day the teacher came to me enthused and impressed at the impact a few simple rearrangements of consequences had on student behavior.

Behavior is strengthened or weakened by its consequences. Consequences in the form of teacher attention are among the most powerful in their effect on student behavior. I hope with all my heart to make you a believer of that. I hope you will operationalize this principle in your own classroom using it as a powerful tool in your repertoire of classroom management skills.

Principle #3

BEHAVIOR ULTIMATELY Responds Better TO Positive Than TO Negative Consequences

Dr. Sydney Bijou, writing for the International Encyclopedia of Education, 1988, made this vitally important point:

Research has shown that the most effective way to reduce problem behavior in children is to strengthen desirable behavior through positive reinforcement rather than trying to weaken undesirable behavior using aversive or negative processes.

Thomas, Becker, and Armstrong in a book edited by Bijou and Ruiz, Behavior Modification: Contributions to Education, wrote, "Frequent teacher attention in the form of praise is more effective than rules or teacher reprimands in increasing appropriate behavior." Both of these references speak to the need for teachers to apply positive consequences to student's behavior rather than aversive or negative consequences such as verbal reprimands as a way of weakening or eliminating undesirable behaviors. Unfortunately, as observed by Dr. Murray Sidman in his marvelous book Coercion and Its Fallout, "Teachers are so accustomed to coercion that they can comprehend no other way."
To most people, the power of being positive does not come as new information. Conventional wisdom tells us, as my eighth-grade-educated mother used to tell me, "A cup of honey draws more flies than a bucket of gall." We all know that it's better to be positive than to be negative, but despite that, in homes and classrooms alike, we observe some pretty disturbing things. From a study I am doing in schools across America, I have observed some quite remarkable things relative to teacher-to-pupil interactions. Here are three findings that concern me a great deal:

1. Teachers allow about 98% of all appropriate behavior to go unrecognized.
2. Teachers are two to three times more likely to recognize inappropriate behavior than they are to recognize appropriate behavior.
3. Teacher attention to inappropriate behavior typically increases the probability that the behavior will be strengthened; hence, will reoccur predictably and with regularity.

If this is the case nationally, as I am confident it is, is it any wonder that inappropriate student behavior persists as one of the greatest concerns in education today at the classroom level. Since misbehavior is what gets teachers' attention, and since teacher attention is such a powerful reinforcer, we can only expect this kind of behavior to prevail. But it needn't be this way, as illustrated by data I've collected which demonstrate just how much more powerful positive consequences are than negative consequences. A few years ago I was asked by a school district to help solve a dilemma related to the flow of children out of regular education into special education. The school served a very transient population of people who worked in the oil and gas fields of a burgeoning energy-impacted area. For the most part, families were only marginally functional. There was a lot of substance abuse in the community, lots of child and spouse abuse, not much value was placed on education by many of the parents, and children tended to enter school unprepared to perform at grade level. They were "at-risk" students. The upshot of all of this was that by Thanksgiving, 80% of the at-risk students entering kindergarten and first grade became classified as learning disabled, socially/emotionally maladjusted, and/or mildly mentally retarded and placed in special education. It was creating considerable fiscal and programmatic problems for the district—to say nothing about its effect on children!

In the spring of the year, before school let out for the summer, I spent a couple of weeks in classrooms taking data on what was happening there. It didn't take long before the problem became apparent. I observed that on average, teachers and their aides were having 34 negative interactions with students per class period compared to only eight positive interactions.
Following training, during which teachers and aides learned to increase the frequency of positive interactions and decrease the frequency of negative interactions, positive interactions reached an average of 167 per class period; negative interactions decreased to 3-4 per class period; and by the end of that school year only 11% of the incoming high-risk K and 1st grade students had been placed in special education.

It is safe to conclude that this skill and this skill alone—that is, the ability to "strengthen desirable behavior through positive reinforcement rather than trying to weaken undesirable behavior using aversive or negative processes," will do more to make a classroom conducive to learning than any other single skill!

Principle #4

WHETHER A BEHAVIOR HAS BEEN PUNISHED OR REINFORCED IS KNOWN ONLY BY THE COURSE OF THAT BEHAVIOR IN THE FUTURE

To illustrate this principle, see Figure 1.1. The horizontal line represents a behavior moving in some direction. The vertical line represents a response to or a consequence of that behavior. If, subsequent to that response, the behavior continues or increases in duration or frequency, was this response punishing or reinforcing? It was reinforcing, of course. And why? It was reinforcing because the behavior continued. On the other hand, if the behavior weakens or eliminates (extinguishes) as a result of that response, we can only conclude what? Correct, the response was punishing. Reinforcers strengthen behavior and punishers weaken behavior. Please, don't ever forget that. A situation I encounter regularly is a frustrated teacher who asks, almost desperately, "I just can't understand this kid! I punish him repeatedly, everyday, for shouting out and for bothering other students and for not being in his chair, and he just keeps doing it. I'm running out of ideas. I have no more punishers available to me."

Now, what is the matter with the teacher's assessment of the problem? If you said the teacher wasn't using punishers at all, you are exactly correct. The teacher might think punishers were being applied but since the behavior maintained, and in some instances even increased, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that the teacher's response was reinforcing and not punishing. I come across this circumstance wherever I go throughout the United States and beyond. Teachers persist in responding to children in ways they think are punishing but which, in fact, are reinforcing.
Figure 1.1 – The Effects of Reinforcers and Punishers on Behavior
We can never assume that a particular response will always be punishing or will always be reinforcing with all students. Recalling my days in the classroom, I can think of students who could be verbally berated, chastised, even beat on and they'd continue to misbehave to get the same treatment again and again. On the other hand, I can think of students who, if teachers even looked at them as though they were unhappy with their behavior, would almost wither. It's impossible to categorize responses as being always punishing or always reinforcing. The only way you can tell if a response to a behavior is punishing or reinforcing is to watch what happens to the behavior subsequently. Teachers are forever sending kids to the principal as a form of punishment or putting kids in timeout as a form of punishment when, in fact, these often turn out to be massive reinforcers which encourage, maintain, and even increase in frequency and duration the very behaviors that are troublesome. As is discussed in session #4, there are better ways of managing the classroom environment.

Now, to review:
1. Behavior is largely a product of its immediate environment.
2. Behavior is strengthened or weakened by its consequences.
3. Behavior ultimately responds better to positive than to negative consequences.
4. Whether a behavior has been punished or reinforced is known only by the course of that behavior in the future.

During Session 2, five strategies are discussed for applying behavioral principles in school settings. They are:
1. Communicating expectations.
2. Ignoring inconsequential behavior.
3. Selectively reinforcing appropriate behavior.
4. Stopping, then redirecting inappropriate behavior.
5. Applying consequences.
In this session, we discuss five strategies for applying the principles of human behavior that were discussed in Session 1. To review, those principles are:

1. Behavior is largely a product of its immediate environment.
2. Behavior is strengthened or weakened by its consequences.
3. Behavior ultimately responds better to positive than to negative consequences.
4. Whether a behavior has been punished or reinforced is known only by the course of that behavior in the future.

The five strategies discussed here are:

1. Communicating expectations.
2. Ignoring inconsequential behavior.
3. Selectively reinforcing appropriate behavior.
4. Stopping then redirecting inappropriate behavior.
5. Applying consequences.

**Strategy #1**

**COMMUNICATE EXPECTATIONS**

Before instruction begins, students should know exactly what is expected of them. By way of example, let's suppose that one of your expectations as a teacher is that before students speak they must raise their hands and be called on. Rather than just tell the students, "If you want my attention, raise your hand first," explain, demonstrate and role play your expectations. (By the way, I encourage teachers to manage their classrooms via expectations and not rules.) You might proceed this way, after explaining to your class what you expect:

Teacher: (Calling on an attentive student) Bill, thank you for paying attention. What do I expect you to do when I want you to answer a question or say something?
Student: You want me to raise my hand.

Teacher: That's right, Bill, I expect you to raise your hand.

It is a good idea to get a choral response from the entire class, as well. For older students, grades five through seven, as well as having the children actually raise their hands as demonstrations of their knowing exactly what is expected of them, emphasize your point through verbal exchange, as follows:

Teacher: Why would I want you to raise your hands if you want to say something or answer a question? If you have an answer to that question, please raise your hand. Mary, thank you for raising your hand. Why is it important for you to raise your hand if you want to answer a question or say something to me?

Mary: It helps keep order in the classroom.

Teacher: Good answer, Mary, it helps keep order in the classroom. Thank you.

For students who need extra direction, such as special education students, very precise detailing of expectations is typically necessary, and might involve a daily review of expectations for a week or two.

For eighth through 12 graders, stating your expectations is also necessary; however, since older students tend to be a bit more assertive, there is the strong possibility that students will question your expectations; even challenge them. Our responsibility as teachers is to not be reactive, harsh, defensive, or argumentative. Reactive responses are typically coercive, and as Dr. Sidman has so clearly observed, it’s that kind of response that drives wedges between students and schools. We all know the consequences of that. When students are defiant, overly assertive, and challenging, we find that in the great majority of instances, if the teacher is calm, and proactively invites an acceptable response, students will respond appropriately—typically requiring no more than two proactive invitations to respond. It is really quite amazing. Problems arise when a contest for power is sparked. Arguing occurs, people have positions to defend and faces to save. Well, that’s the only thing that gets saved, and very little, if any, of that. In the process, the classroom, as a learning environment, has been badly assaulted.

Once your expectations have been identified and modeled, it’s a good idea to post them visibly in the classroom. For young children, particularly for those who don’t know how to read, it’s a good idea to illustrate your expectations with pictures. For upper elementary age students including seventh grade, it would not be appropriate, of course, to pictorially illustrate
your expectations, but using pleasant graphics is certainly appropriate. At the high school level, it might be better to have the expectations printed nicely on 8-1/2 x 11 notebook paper for students to include in their three ring binders.

However it is done, it is important that before instruction proceeds, make certain you have clearly modeled the behaviors you desire of your students and reinforce appropriate responses.

**Strategy #2**

**IGNORE INCONSEQUENTIAL BEHAVIOR**

As I pointed out earlier, about 98% of all appropriate student behaviors are ignored, yet teachers are two to three times more likely to attend to students when they are behaving inappropriately. It's even worse for at-risk students! Effective classroom management demands that we turn that around by ignoring, when possible, the great majority of inappropriate student behaviors. I'm sure you have heard a lot said about ignoring inappropriate behavior. I'm also sure you have some pretty strong feelings about why that doesn't work; why it's important to nip problem behaviors in the bud. During our discussion of this strategy I want you to bear with me even though, at the outset, you might not agree with some of the things I'm going to suggest.

I don't doubt for one minute that you have had some bad experiences as a result of ignoring inappropriate behaviors. Nevertheless, I'm asking you to stick with me through the discussion of this strategy because the full impact of what I am going to suggest (i.e. ignoring most inappropriate behaviors) is not realized until and unless teachers skillfully use the other important strategies of (1) selectively reinforcing appropriate behavior, (2) redirecting inappropriate behavior, and (3) skillfully applying consequences (both positive and negative). The strategy of ignoring noncompliant behaviors is not a dynamic one if it stands alone. None of these strategies is dynamic if it stands alone. Like the ancient fable about the bundle of sticks, alone, each can be broken easily, but bound together they are nearly unbreakable.

As I observe in classrooms across the United States, I see rules and expectations prominently posted for all to see. For the most part, these are reasonable and enforceable expectations. Occasionally I'll see some troubling things. I'm reminded of a list of school rules that was posted prominently throughout an entire elementary school that was 19 items long. I'm altogether certain that not a soul in that building, from the principal on
down, was able to cite all 19 of those rules. But, for the most part, what I see is very reasonable in terms of both content and length. (By the way, keeping your expectations to five or fewer is strongly suggested.) It really distresses me, as I observe in classrooms, to note an almost total disrespect by teachers for their own posted expectations, and how frequently they violate them or at least show their disrespect for them. It is not unusual, for example, for a teacher to expect students to raise their hands if they want to be called on, yet teachers will call on students when they don’t raise their hands; thus, directly violating their own expectations by giving attention to students who blurt out answers without raising their hands. Even if the answer is correct, it should not be acknowledged if it is given in a manner inconsistent with stated expectations. Students pick up on this sort of thing immediately and, in effect, are saying, “If it’s of no value to the teacher, it’s of no value to me.” When students fail to meet expectations, the teacher should simply turn his/her attention away from the noncompliant student and to a compliant student, and acknowledge the appropriate behavior and accurate answer. Such a strategy teaches both expectations and content.

When I talk about ignoring inconsequential behavior I’m including students who speak out without being called on and without raising their hands, even though they know what is expected of them. I call it inconsequential behavior because it isn’t life threatening, it isn’t going to damage the building or it’s contents, it isn’t an indication that a student is on the road to personal rack and ruin and tragedy—no, it’s none of these; rather, it’s simply an age-typical, nuisance kind of behavior. It’s what kids do. It’s growing-up behavior. It’s the type of thing kids do in the process of becoming civilized. Remember, the younger the child the less civilized he is. To judge children’s behavior using adult standards is more inappropriate than the behavior being judged! And what I see so often in classrooms are teacher behaviors which, given the adult standards by which those behaviors are judged, is more inappropriate than the nuisance behaviors of the students. Figure 2.1 illustrates what I mean. Let’s suppose that this is a scale of civility. The bottom of the scale represents a low level of civility and the top of the scale represents a high level of civility or civilized. Students behave at a level of civility which one would expect of children. It isn’t necessarily inappropriate behavior, it is age-typical behavior. It’s kid behavior. It’s behavior in the process of growth on the road to civility. Unfortunately, what we often observe is teachers reacting to that behavior (as though it was inappropriate) at the same low level of civility.
When teachers, as adults, behave at a kid-level of civility, whose behavior is inappropriate? The kid behaves like a kid behaves and the teacher also behaves like a kid behaves. The behavior of the kid is absolutely inconsequential. In and of itself it is meaningless. It doesn’t acquire meaning, in fact, until the teacher acknowledges it, attends to it, pays it off, and increases the probability that the behavior will reoccur because, as pointed out in Principle #2, behavior is strengthened or weakened by its consequences. In a classroom setting, in the great, great, great majority of instances, teacher attention to this kind of behavior is, in the uncivilized eyes of a child, a positive consequence; the result being that the very behaviors teachers want to get rid of are the very behaviors they strengthen.

**Figure 2.1 – Teacher's Reactive vs. Proactive Responding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reactive Behavior</th>
<th>Proactive Behavior</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retards Desired Growth &amp; Development</td>
<td>Facilitates Desired Growth &amp; Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student's Age-Typical/Inappropriate Behavior</td>
<td>Teacher's Reactive/In-kind Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student's Age-Typical/Inappropriate Behavior</td>
<td>Teacher's Proactive/Mature Response</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As a general rule, an inconsequential behavior is an age-typical behavior that does not totally disrupt the learning environment and poses no meaningful threat to anyone or anything in the classroom. When I talk about the learning environment, I'm talking in holistic terms. If a student leaves his seat to go sharpen a pencil and on the way momentarily distracts a student from his or her seat work, I would personally regard that as an inconsequential behavior and ignore it. I would keep my eye on that behavior, and if over a period of time found the student doing that a lot and was frequently and regularly and predictably disruptive of others then I would no longer regard it as an inconsequential behavior; I would then apply a remedial strategy—as will be discussed and illustrated later. Also, I would be certain to acknowledge that student's appropriate behavior when he/she was not disrupting other students. As I sit in classrooms observing disruptive student behaviors, and take frequency and duration data on those behaviors, it's my experience that well above 90% of all of the so called disruptive behaviors of children that teachers seem inclined to pay attention to in an effort to keep the class in order should be completely ignored. Teachers should literally turn their backs on those behaviors, walk away from them, behave as though the children hadn't done or said a single thing, while selectively attending to other, appropriate, behaviors that are more deserving of their attention. I refer you again to the scale of civility: when children behave in age-typical, inconsequential ways, which, by adult standards are at a low level of civility, my admonition to teachers is to behave at a high level of civility. Such a response is infinitely better than yelling and scowling at kids to sit down, shut up, turn around, and on and on.

Now, no discussion of ignoring inappropriate behavior is complete without a discussion of Strategy #3, selectively reinforcing appropriate behavior. It is at this point that the dynamic remedial character of ignoring inconsequential behavior begins to become apparent. This is another stick in our bundle of sticks.

Strategy #3

SELECTIVELY REINFORCE APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR

If teacher expectations have been clearly stated as was demonstrated in Strategy #1, Communicating Expectations, then students will know exactly what behaviors are worthy of your attention as teachers. Occasionally, particularly with very young children, these expectations need to be rehearsed from time to time. In fact, at the kindergarten and first grade levels, for the first week or ten days of school it is not unreasonable to begin every school day with a few minutes spent rehearsing teacher expectations. If
teacher expectations have been clearly articulated, modeled, and role played, the children will know what it is they must do to get their teacher’s attention. And, by the way, positive teacher attention is the most, or among the most, valued reinforcers to children at any grade level. Remember: “Frequent teacher attention in the form of praise is more effective than rules or teacher reprimands in increasing appropriate behavior.”

Our job, then, is to be alert for opportunities to selectively reinforce appropriate behavior. I say selectively, because one should not reinforce every single appropriate behavior. To do that would be artificial, phony, strange, and pretty soon loathed by the students. But by intermittently and selectively acknowledging appropriate behavior, we are able to not only, as Bijou noted, “strengthen desirable behavior” but we are able to establish and maintain an environment that facilitates learning. It is at this point that ignoring inconsequential behavior takes on meaning. Not only am I asking you to ignore inconsequential behavior but I am asking you to frequently, albeit intermittently and selectively, reinforce appropriate behavior through verbal praise and other forms of acknowledgment. Our job is to find ways of selectively reinforcing appropriate behaviors, and then apply those reinforcers. By doing this, the teachers demonstrate to students their respect for their own expectations and the students’ respect for those expectations.

The teacher completely ignores the inconsequential behavior; but that is not enough. The appropriate behavior of other students must be selectively reinforced. Behavior responds better to positive than to negative consequences.

By linking these two principles, ignoring inconsequential behavior with selectively reinforcing appropriate behavior, we are well on our way to creating an environment that will facilitate learning.

**Strategy #4**

**STOP, THEN REDIRECT INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR**

Occasionally, a student will behave in a way that is so inappropriate that it cannot be ignored. There is nothing about it that can be reinforced and it must be stopped: a student persists in disruptive behavior and is increasingly destroying the learning environment, students are physically or verbally abusive to one another to the point where it could have a damaging affect, and so on. I suspect you know what I mean when I speak of behaviors that cannot be tolerated and must be stopped. The single most commonly used yet least effective method for stopping inappropriate behavior is to verbally scold and berate the student, ending with a warning to “knock it off or else.”
These kinds of reactions virtually never remediate a situation. As I observe and take data in classrooms, I notice time and time again that this approach encourages students to want to escape what should otherwise be a positive experience. Quoting again from Murray Sidman, "...we react to coercion by avoiding or escaping from our coercers if we can... Millions of pupils would escape from school immediately if the law permitted." Well they do anyway, and if you don't believe it read the literature on school dropouts!

Unfortunately, the use of coercion as a means of management has been the characterization of schools for centuries, and it's killing our educational system. This quote from Einstein is illustrative of my point:

The worst thing seems to be for a school principally to work with methods of fear, force, and artificial authority. Such treatment destroys the healthy feelings, the integrity, and self-confidence of students. All that it produces is a servile helot (which means, slave).

There is a better way, a way by which an inappropriate behavior can be stopped, then replaced by appropriate behavior that is ultimately reinforced, thereby increasing the probability that appropriate not inappropriate behavior will reoccur predictably. It is accomplished using what is called the "Teaching Interaction Strategy" (also known as the "Corrective Teaching Procedure").

When using this procedure (this should be done as privately as possible), the teacher approaches the misbehaving child and in a quiet voice, follows these six (6) steps:

1. Say something positive.
2. Briefly describe the problem behavior.
3. Describe the desired alternative behavior.
4. Give a reason why the new behavior is more desirable.
5. Practice the desired behavior.
6. Provide positive feedback.

The following illustrates how this would be done in a classroom setting:

These illustrations were provided by Dr. Richard Young, Professor of Education, Utah State University.

1. "Jim, I like having you in class. You always give good answers to my questions."
2. "Just now when I asked you to sit down and listen to the lesson, you continued to talk to Bill."
3. "When I ask you to do something, you need to look at me, say OK or nod, and do it immediately."
4. "When you follow my directions, our class is a better place to
learn for you and for everyone else in it."

5. "Jim, what are the three things you should do when I give you an instruction?" (Jim says, "Look at you, say OK, and do it.") If Jim doesn’t respond, prompt him. If he responds inappropriately, repeat the question without displaying anger. Then say, "Let’s practice. I’ll ask you to fold your arms and look at me, and you show me the correct way to follow my instructions."

6. Praise Jim’s correct responses and prompt him to redo any steps omitted or done incorrectly. For example, "Jim, you did a great job. You looked at me and folded your arms immediately, but you forgot to say OK. Let’s try it again, and this time remember to do all three steps." (Jim responds correctly the second time.) Teacher says, "Great! That time you looked at me you said OK and you folded your arms."

(Although this procedure may appear cumbersome at first, it will soon become natural as the teacher applies it consistently. This procedure is easily adapted to home settings.)

Example 2: Bill (age 14) calls Ralph (age 15) a derogatory name, and Ralph responds by hitting Bill and knocking him down. After separating the two young men, the teacher teaches Ralph a better way to solve the problem with the following corrective teaching episode:

1. "Ralph, I know that it really hurts when someone calls you a name."

2. "But you responded to Bill by fighting."

3. "A better way to handle name calling would be to walk away."

4. "By walking away, you won’t get in trouble for fighting, and Bill will probably forget about it. Then it won’t damage your friendship."

5. "Ralph, the next time someone calls you a name, how do you think you can handle it?" (Response, "I’ll try to walk away.")

6. "That’s great, Ralph. Even though it might be really hard, it will be easier for you in the long run."

(Note: A similar episode would need to be conducted with Bill regarding name calling.)

This strategy demonstrates some of the best that research has to offer in stopping inappropriate behavior. You might say, "Well that’s alright for young students, but not for the kids I work with." It might interest you to know that this strategy was developed at Boy’s Town in Omaha, Nebraska, and is used daily with boys and girls of all ages, all the way through high
school. It demonstrates the instructional character of behavioral intervention.

When children misbehave, parents and teachers alike almost always verbally accost them with questions about why they behave "that way". If you don't remember anything else as a result of this training, I hope you'll remember this: Never ask students questions about their inappropriate behavior unless you need information to aid you in problem solving.

There are two profound reasons why you should never ask a child to explain his or her inappropriate behavior. The first reason is you don't want an answer; you want compliance and a child can answer and still not be in compliance. For example, suppose one student hits another and you ask, "Why did you hit him?", and the student responds, "I hit him because he is ugly and I was only trying to fix his face. My long term goal in life, you see, is to be a plastic surgeon and to make ugly people beautiful. Since I haven't learned the precise surgical skills needed to do that, I am doing the best I can at the moment for a boy my age."

In that (admittedly absurd) illustration, the child answered the question. Did that answer satisfy anything? Has the teacher gotten any information to aid problem solving; that is, did the teacher learn anything from the child's answer that would help him remediate the child's hitting behavior? The answer to those questions, of course, is obvious. No! Nothing was learned and nothing was solved. In fact, such an answer would most likely infuriate the teacher and lead to the spewing forth of more useless questions!

The second reason you never question children about their inappropriate behavior is because in doing so you give attention to the very behavior you want to get rid of. This attention tends to strengthen behavior, which in turn increases the probability that the behavior will reoccur predictably.

Never ask students questions about their inappropriate behavior unless you need information to solve a problem. If you are just frustrated or blowing off steam, you will only make matters worse by asking a bunch of useless, counter-productive questions. Here are a few of the more common useless questions I hear teachers ask in classrooms, and virtually all of them are asked in anger and frustration—both of which can be very reinforcing to students.

How many times am I going to have to tell you students to stay in your seats (or words to that affect)?

Sam, didn't I just tell you to get your work done?

I just don't know what I am going to do with you, Sally!
Do you want me to send you to the office? I suppose you know what’s going to happen if you don’t get that work done?

All of these kinds of questions have another sad thing in common. They are admissions to the students that the teacher doesn’t know a better, more effective way. What kind of message does that bear? How much better it is to be in control, proactive, and directive.

**Strategy #5**

**APPLY CONSEQUENCES**

I have here only a few specific suggestions about how consequences can be effectively applied. What I really encourage you to do is turn to your professional literature for information and answers (see the list of references at the end of this book). There is some excellent literature with which you should become familiar and well acquainted. I’m distressed at how little we in education turn to the literature of our profession for help and answers in solving our problems. I recently completed a study entitled “Educators Use of the Literature of Their Profession” and I was terribly distressed at what I found. For the most part, educators spend little time reading their professional literature, and almost no time going into it looking for answers to the everyday problems they face in the classroom. In fact, when I compared their reading of the professional literature with that of a randomly selected group of subjects of other professions, educators were not only last on the list, but were a distant last! Please familiarize yourself with the literature of your profession.

Since behavior is strengthened or weakened by its consequences, it is of monumental importance for teachers to be able to apply consequences appropriately. As a general rule of thumb, positive verbal praise, a pat on the back (as appropriate), a smile and other appropriate nonverbal gestures are among the very best consequences teachers can apply when attending to appropriate student behavior. Token economy systems, wall charts, point systems, stars, etc., can be powerful incentives for managing behavior, but they can also be something of a management problem and no management system is any better than how well it is managed. Also, most of these kinds of systems need to be faded out as quickly as possible. This, too, can become something of a management problem.

My suggestion is that the administration of consequences be kept as simple as possible. If this can be done with verbal praise and social reinforcers, stick with them. Only in instances where these don’t work do I suggest that you apply other techniques. Again, information about these systems are abundantly available in the professional literature.

Another rule of thumb is that you never threaten consequences that are unenforceable or unreasonable. Threatening a noncompliant student
with, "Another outburst like that in this class and you are out of this class, and hopefully out of this school, for the rest of your life! Now, do you understand that?" is simply foolishness. Threats like this make teachers tigers without teeth or claws.

Consequences are also to be made known to students before they are administered. In other words, consequences should not be sprung on kids out of nowhere. Students should know in advance what they can expect as a result of behavior—positive or negative. It's a good idea to discuss consequences while discussing expectations.

When I was a special education teacher at the junior high school level, I divided my classroom into two areas, separated by a strip of tape across the entire width of the classroom. The front part of the classroom was designated as the task area, and it was in this area where students were required to direct their full attention toward studying and the completion of academic assignments. It was in this area that all instruction took place. The back half of the classroom was called the reinforcement area. It was into this area students could go once they completed the work that was assigned to them. In the reinforcement area students could engage in any number of self-selected activities. I had a work bench and a tool closet in the area, and using building materials and supplies scrounged from local merchants and cabinet shops, members of my class, boys and girls, busied themselves in the building of trophy cabinets, gun cabinets, coffee tables, desks, knickknack shelves, and any number of other woodworking projects. There was also a game area, a reading and listening area, and so on. Students were not allowed to set foot into the reinforcement area until they had earned that privilege by completing work assigned to them in the task area. It proved to be an immensely successful strategy for managing a classroom by making positive consequences in the form of privileges available to students contingent upon their completing work in the academic area.

Now let's review the points made relative to the application of behavioral principles in classroom settings:

1. Communicate your expectations.
2. Ignore inconsequential behavior.
3. Selectively reinforce appropriate behavior.
4. Stop then redirect inappropriate behavior.
5. Apply consequences.

During session three, Getting and Keeping Students On Task, four strategies are discussed. They are:

1. Begin instruction immediately.
2. Manage by walking around.
3. Use intermittent beep tapes.
4. Practice good instruction.
The effective schools literature identifies student on-task behavior as being essential to academic success. Certainly, such a conclusion only makes sense. One cannot learn if one is not attending to what is being taught.

Unfortunately, as has been noted, the time allocated for schooling is typically used very badly. More schooling time, over the course of a year, is spent on things other than academics than on formal learning experiences.

Figure 3.1 reflects the on-task behavior of a group of students I recently observed and provides a very representative picture of what we typically see in classrooms throughout the country. Notice that the first five minutes of the class period were almost completely wasted. Only a third of the students were at their desks and ready to go to work. Finally, the class was pretty much on task for the next ten minutes. Then things started to break down. What happened—and this is something I observe so frequently—was that the more able and on task students began getting their work done but didn’t have a clear direction about what to do next so they spent time visiting, fidgeting, and hanging around the teacher’s desk wondering what to do. Finally, after six or seven minutes, these students were settled down, and on-task behavior for the class was high for just a few minutes. Then things began to progressively break down. This, again, was accounted for by the fact that students were finishing their seat work at different rates and each one had to be told, individually, what to do for the remainder of the class period. This usually amounted to being given additional work, or to redo the seat work that had not been done correctly. Such a situation can be improved dramatically using these four strategies:

1. Begin instruction immediately.
2. Manage by walking around.
3. Use intermittent beep tapes.
4. Practice good instruction.
Strategy #1
BEGIN INSTRUCTION IMMEDIATELY
The sooner you get students on task, the easier it is to keep them on task and the easier it is to get them back on task should they get off task. Once students learn that instruction is going to begin immediately with the beginning of class they soon become conditioned, upon entering the classroom, to go immediately to their desks, and get their materials out ready for instruction to begin. In fact, this might be one of your expectations that is role-played with the students at the very beginning of the school year or at

Figure 3.1 – Student Time on Task
that point when you decide you are going to implement it as standard operating procedure in your class. How to do this has already been discussed, so using these methodologies relative to getting and keeping students on task should not be difficult. The key is to state expectations, role play those expectations, and not allow one’s self to be drawn off task by student protest, argument, bad mouthing, and so on. If students complain, the teacher must be careful not to get drawn into a long, protracted, useless discussion about “Well this is what you better do” kind of junk. In complete control, the teacher simply responds with empathy, understanding, and firmness. The students will soon get the message. Of course, when students are on task and complying, the teacher should be careful to selectively reinforce that appropriate on-task behavior. Also, the teacher must be the most on-task person of all, and move immediately into instruction. No time should be wasted taking roll, shooting the breeze about events of the day, talking one-on-one with a member of the class, and so on. The teacher must demonstrate what on-task behavior means by being on task. The on-task behavior of the teacher should serve as a model for on task behavior of students.

The key to getting the class on task immediately is to state and role play expectations, state and apply consequences, deal proactively with distractors by using empathy and understanding, and lastly, the teacher moves immediately into instruction thus demonstrating to the students his/her respect for class time as well as for the class expectations.

Strategy #2

MANAGE BY WALKING AROUND

A great strategy for keeping students on task once they’ve gotten on task is for the teacher to move about the class in a random pattern stopping at students’ desks from time to time, again in random fashion, commenting on their work, giving direction and instruction, acknowledging in a reinforcing, positive way appropriate performance and behavior, and keeping in close proximity to the students. We know there is a direct relationship between how close a teacher is to students and how well students behave. Proximity is important! Therefore, the teacher should be up and around, moving about the classroom, making contact with students.

Another strategy that works well with “management by walking around” is the use of a non-verbal signaling device in the form of a color wheel which is placed at each students desk and by which the student lets the
teacher know how he or she is doing, as illustrated in Figure 3.2. I'm not necessarily suggesting you use this strategy, nor am I suggesting that you not use it, certainly. But it does illustrate an effective non-verbal approach to classroom management that keeps students on task. When the green is up it means the student has completed the assigned work and is waiting for the teacher to check the work and give the student further direction. When the yellow color is up it means the student is doing the work and doesn't feel a need for any help. When the red is up, it signals the teacher that the student needs help and is waiting for assistance. When students are introduced to this system, they are told that when the red or green colors are up, and they are waiting for the teacher to attend to them, they are to try to solve the problem alone or have ready at their desks something they can turn to keep them occupied until the teacher gets to them. It could be a book to read, an assignment from another class, additional work relative to the topic at hand, and so on. Interestingly, research indicates that children tend to learn better if they need to study a problem out on their own rather than be helped too quickly by the teacher.

A question that is frequently asked about the use of this system, or this kind of a system, is, "But how can the teacher be absolutely fair and absolutely certain that he/she helps students in the order in which they seek help?" Unfortunately, there is no way of being absolutely fair and absolutely certain that assistance is given in the order in which it is requested. Nevertheless, students understand this and if properly approached by the teacher once attention is given, they understand. Furthermore, in the classrooms where I have seen this system used, students seldom have to wait more than a minute, or a minute and a half at the most, before attention is delivered. Time waiting is virtually no problem. If students do have to wait, and even if they complain about having to wait, the teacher simply says "Thank you for waiting patiently. How can I help you?" then moves immediately into problem solutions.

Approached in this manner, the student would have no reason nor likely be inclined to complain about having to wait. However, suppose a student does complain. Suppose the student says, "But Mrs. Jones, I had my hand up before Billy did and you helped him before you came to me. That isn't fair." Simply look at the student's work, and ask, "How can I be of help. I noticed that this problem is correct and so is this one. Good job. Which problem seems to be giving you the most trouble?" Do not acknowledge the student's complaint nor allow the student to draw you off target into a justification or explanation or apology for not being Johnny-on-the-spot.
The teacher must be the model of on-task behavior. Acknowledge what the student has done correctly and move immediately into instruction.

Management by walking around, supported by a non-verbal signaling device of some sort, has proved to be very effective in keeping students on task. By the way, this type of strategy can be used effectively in special education classes up through high school. In regular education classes, I do not suggest the use of a signaling device beyond seventh grade. I don't have any data to support that, only observations in a lot of classrooms.

**Strategy #3**

**USE INTERMITTENT BEEP TAPES**

Teachers can't always be up and around in close proximity with students. Sometimes they have to be working in small groups for extended periods of time and can't leave those groups to attend to students individually. Sometimes (though, rarely, I hope) teachers need to remain at their desks to handle paperwork or make preparations for instruction. Sometimes, teachers have to spend extended periods of time with a single student working through an individual problem. For one reason or another, the teacher may not be able to manage the classroom by walking around during the entire class period. In such cases, the use of intermittent beep tapes can be very useful. These tapes can either be homemade or purchased commercially. On these tapes is nothing but a beep that is heard intermittently. It is a simple cassette tape which is activated when the teacher is not able to walk around the classroom. At moments that cannot be predicted by the students, the beep is heard.

When the beep is heard, the teacher visually sweeps the room and if students are on task, that is acknowledged in some appropriate way, such as a mild verbal praise statement, or a cotton ball in a jar that can later be used to purchase a classwide reinforcer.

I have learned as a result of working with hundreds of teachers throughout the United States and beyond that teachers can be very creative in coming up with marvelous management strategies. If you're using strategies that are effective and easily put to use by other teachers, I would appreciate knowing of them. Please drop me a line and describe what you're doing. I take a great deal of satisfaction in being able to share teacher's ideas with other teachers.
Strategy #4

PRACTICE GOOD INSTRUCTION

During Session #1, I pointed out that the single best strategy for effective classroom management is good instruction. That is evidenced perhaps no better in any area of management than in maintaining a high rate of on-task behavior. Students who are in an instructionally rich, rewarding, stimulating situation have no reason to be anything but on task; consequently, they are on task. In this regard, instructional strategies which employ the principles of mastery learning, direct instruction, and precision teaching have been shown, scientifically, time and time and time again to be the most effective strategies for not only instruction but for keeping students involved in the learning task.

Mastery learning, with its highly refined use of tests, correctives, and enrichment activities has established a track record of success that is remarkable by any measure.

The results of direct instruction in Headstart programs and in special education programs around the world has proved its worth beyond any reasonable doubt.

And precision teaching with its keen focus on student abilities and matching those abilities to the academic task has brought excellence into classrooms around the world.

I am the first to acknowledge that occasionally teachers will devise teaching methods that are immensely successful in both teaching students and in maintaining an effective learning environment. Unfortunately, in most instances, these methods are very unique, very idiosyncratic to that teacher, and the system works because there is something about that teacher that makes it work. Consequently, these systems tend not to be easily taught to others nor easily replicated in other settings. Unless you are one of those rare individuals (and they are rare, indeed), I strongly urge you to become familiar with mastery learning, direct instruction, and precision teaching, become expert in their use—or, using the language of Dr. Benjamin Bloom the creator of Mastery Learning, achieve "automaticity" in their use. By the way, automaticity refers to the ability to perform a task "unconsciously with speed and accuracy while consciously carrying on other brain functions." For example, an accomplished pianist is able to perform a complex work of music while thinking of other things. Most of us can drive a car through heavy traffic while at the same time listening to the radio, thinking about other problems, and even carrying on a conversation with somebody else in the car, and do all of this while managing the automobile safely and
well within the limits of the law. I recall on one occasion speeding down the freeway at 65 miles an hour and noticing that the driver in the car that was passing me had a book up on the steering wheel and was reading away while he was zipping along the freeway at what I'm sure was well over 70 miles an hour. I wouldn't recommend that, but it is illustrative of having achieved a level of automaticity.

Being able to get and keep students on task is a must for both effective classroom management and instruction. By implementing the strategies that have been demonstrated here, or others that have been based on the same important principles, I am altogether confident you will be able to manage the behavior of students in your class in a way that, by any standard, will be regarded as laudable. Furthermore, it will make your job as a teacher a lot more enjoyable. Consider this quote taken from a letter sent to me by a teacher who was fed up with teaching and literally on the verge of quitting; in fact, she had given notice to her principal midway into the school year that she was in her last year of teaching. This letter came in response to training she had received in the use of these strategies. "This program was responsible for my achieving my most successful teaching year. At the end of the year I found that I wasn't physically exhausted or emotionally burned out as in other years. I look forward to beginning the new school year with this most remarkable program." We have received similar comments from teachers and administrators relative to mastery learning, precision teaching and direct instruction.

A lot has been said about increasing the school year to 220 days and length of the school day to seven plus hours. Given how badly school time is used, by having students on task rather than off-task for only about 12 to 14 minutes per school hour, we, in effect, would add 40 days to the school year and an hour and a half to the school day, and it won't cost one additional red cent. I think that's a much better solution than simply increasing the amount of badly used time.

Now, lets review the main points regarding getting and keeping students on task:

1. *Begin instruction immediately.* The sooner you get students on task, the easier it is to keep them on task, and the easier it is to get them back on task should they get off task.

2. *Manage by walking around.* There is a direct relationship between how close a teacher is to students and how well students behave.

3. *Use intermittent beep tapes.* Reinforcement provided on an intermittent schedule can have a powerful effect on on-task behavior.
4. *Practice good instruction.* Instruction that is based on solid science rather than intuition has a much higher probability of producing high rates of learning and school success. Particular attention should be given to the use of mastery learning, precision teaching, and direct instruction.¹

We will now turn our attention to strategies for improving the quality of teacher-to-pupil interactions. Particular attention will be paid to:

1. Avoiding negative traps.
2. Practicing positive interaction skills.

¹ There is another powerful approach to instruction which, though used mainly at the college level, can also be used with immense success at the public school level, particularly in the senior high school grades. It is called PSI: Personalized System of Instruction. It was developed by Dr. Fred Keller and is supported by a mountain of solid data. If you are interested in learning more about PSI, write to:

Dr. Fred Keller
University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
Session 4

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TEACHER TO PUPIL INTERACTIONS

AVOIDING NEGATIVE TRAPS

If there is any one thing that research in education and conventional wisdom agree upon it is that positive learning environments facilitate student achievement and improve students' attitudes toward school and learning better than does a negative learning environment. Despite this, despite what we all know intuitively to be true, attempts at managing children's behavior in classrooms, schools, on playgrounds, and in school buses tends to be negative and coercive rather than positive and reinforcing. As was noted earlier the majority of appropriate, laudable student behavior tends to be ignored. On the other hand, teachers are two to three times as likely to pay attention to inappropriate behavior than they are to attend to appropriate behavior. Furthermore, if a child is classified as emotionally disturbed or socially maladjusted or behaviorally disordered, the possibility of the child getting the teacher's attention through misbehavior increases dramatically to 6-10 times the amount of attention that would be expected if that child behaves appropriately. And lastly, the attention that is given to children while they are misbehaving tends to be so reinforcing that the probability of the child misbehaving again increases dramatically. As noted in a recent research report, "misbehavior will persist as long as it is reinforced with attention." Teachers and principals and other school personnel get themselves caught in "traps" that constrain them in their ability to be as effective as they should be. Here are 7 common traps:

Trap #1
THE CRITICISM TRAP

The criticism trap refers to that situation where the more students are criticized for their inappropriate behaviors the more likely they will behave inappropriately since it is only inappropriate behavior for which they get
attention. Not being able to get attention any other way, or at least not as efficiently or as frequently, it is in the child's best interest (as regarded by a child) to behave inappropriately. When teachers criticize children for their misbehavior they mistakenly regard this criticism as being either instructive or punishing. Telling a student to sit down and be quiet is usually done in an attempt to instruct the child about how he should behave at that moment. To rap a student's knuckles with a ruler or scold a child for misbehaving is typically an attempt to punish a child for misbehaving. Unfortunately, such reactions are neither instructive nor punishing; rather, they are counterproductive in the sense that they encourage more and more difficult-to-manage behavior. Remember our earlier discussion about punishment and reinforcement. The only way you can know if a behavior has been punished or reinforced is to observe the course of that behavior in the future. If the behavior increases or remains stable, the response to that behavior was reinforcing. On the other hand, if a behavior weakens or eliminates as a result of a response, then that response was punishing.

**Trap #2**

**COMMON SENSE TRAP**

The second trap is the Common Sense Trap, also known as the reasoning or logic trap. It goes like this:

Mary, let's go over this again. As I've told you in the past, unless you complete your homework assignments and get them in on time I can't possibly give you a passing grade. After all, Mary, I can't read your mind. I can't possibly know what's going on in your head or how much you know unless you complete these assignments. I'm sure that you understand what I'm saying! Look at this record, Mary. You have only handed in one of the last seven assignments that I've given to the class. Even though you tell me that you know this material, I can't assume that you do. If you continue to perform like this, you'll never be able to get into college. Now, Mary, I'm sure you know that my concern is only for your best interest but it is up to you to perform.

In such a setting, the student hasn't learned a thing she doesn't already know, nor has she been offered a single reasonable incentive to change her behavior; and with what result? Zero. Verbal directives based on common sense, logic, reason, and conventional wisdom are, for all intents and purposes, a total waste of time, resulting in an erosion of the credibility of the teacher in the student's eyes. The better way is to create an environment where there are incentives to change and where positive consequences reinforce that change.
Strategies for Improving the Quality of Teacher to Pupil Interactions

Trap #3
QUESTIONING TRAP
We've already talked about the counterproductive nature of questioning children about their inappropriate behavior. The following reemphasizes that point:

Teacher: "Why didn't you get your homework done?"
Student: "Gee, I don't know."

This perfectly illustrates why asking a question about inappropriate behavior is useless: an answer satisfies nothing! In fact, typically, answers to this type of question simply make teachers more angry and more frustrated and more inclined to be more negative. Remember, do not ask students questions about their inappropriate behavior unless you need information for problem solving.

Trap #4
SARCASM TRAP
Probably nothing lowers a student's respect for a teacher more than does the use of sarcasm:

Teacher: (Sarcastically to a boy who shows up to class wearing an earring): "My, my. Aren't we pretty today. Girls, honey boy here seems to have forgotten his make-up. Would any one of you care to loan him your make-up."

The foolishness of this kind of teacher-to-student interaction is so patently clear that nothing more needs to be said about it! Nevertheless, sarcasm is frequently used by teachers who are ignorant of a better way of interacting.

Trap #5
DESPAIR/PLEADING TRAP
Teachers often become their own worst enemies by convincing students that they (that is the teachers) are inadequate for the task at hand. When teachers approach students in a quandary and with pleadings, they are saying to the students, "I don't know what I'm doing, and I'm wondering if you'd help me." Consider this:

Teacher: (Wearing an expression of hopelessness): "I just don't know what to do with you. Nothing I say to you makes any difference at all. You keep doing the same stupid thing over and over and over again. What suggestions do you have? I would very much appreciate it if you have some answers. It would make life so much easier for you and certainly easier for me and for everybody else in this class."
STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TEACHER TO PUPIL INTERACTIONS

Session 4

I don't want to have to go over this time and time again every day. What am I going to have to do to get through to you?

Student: "Hey, don't ask me, you're the teacher!"

Is there any question in the world about the message that is delivered to students with this kind of response?

Trap #6

THREAT TRAP

Threats are just one step beyond despair and pleading on the scale of helplessness. As we all know, the great majority of threats are either inappropriate or unenforceable. They are typically hollow expressions of frustration which tell students that the teacher is at wit's end, out of control, and in over his or her head. As an example, consider this:

Teacher: (Enraged): "If you students don't sit down and be quiet right this minute I'm going to call your parents and have them come here and sit beside you all day long in class. If that's what it takes to make you behave, then that's what I'm going to have to do! I'm not running a baby sitting service, you know. If you need baby sitting, I'll just have to call in your parents and have them come into class and sit beside you!"

As foolish as that sounds, it's the kind of thing that occurs regularly in schools and classrooms across the country. How much better it is to formulate and state expectations in a proactive way, then positively and selectively reinforce appropriate behavior as students comply.

Trap #7

PHYSICAL FORCE TRAP

As a boy in school, physical force was used on me three times: once as a first grader by the school principal who rapped me across the rear end with a rubber hose for walking through a mud puddle on the playground, the second was in junior high school when the principal grabbed me by the back of the neck for sliding down a school banister and shook me until I thought he was going to break my neck, and the third time was in high school when I was brought before a student tribunal for running in the halls and given a swat across the butt by a member of the student body athletic club. All three contributed to my general distaste for my years of public schooling, and none of them taught me to not walk through playground mud puddles, to not slide down school banisters, nor to not run in the hall. The use of
physical force except in instances where life or property are at risk, is absolutely inappropriate; certainly, it is far less appropriate than the behavior to which it is related. Nothing speaks so eloquently to an educator's lack of skill and lack of knowledge about managing behavior than does the use of physical force as a behavior management tool.

The use of any of these, to any degree, is evidence of a frantic, desperate, even drastic attempt at managing student behavior and in time is virtually certain to backfire resulting in the steady deterioration of the school and classroom environment.

If you tend to have a problem with the overuse of negatives in your efforts to manage your classroom, I would suggest that you keep a record, or have a trusted colleague come into your class and observe you and make a record, of the frequency of positive and negative teacher-to-pupil interactions as well as a description of those interactions. If you are going to keep your own record, you might want to use a wrist counter. Each time you have a positive interaction with students you would record it with a push of a button and every time you have a negative interaction with students you would push another button, making sure that you have noted the period of time during which the record was kept. If you have a trusted colleague observe you and keep a record, the form shown in Figure 4.1 is a useful one. Whenever you have a negative interaction with a student the observer would put a tally mark in the negative column, and so on with positive interactions. Also, the observer would describe the character or the nature of the interaction. As a rule of thumb, we advise teachers to never have more than 1 negative or corrective interaction for every 4 or 5 positive interactions. This, in fact, is the maximum number of negative to positive interactions. It is hoped, of course, that teachers will become so skillful and so in control that they will have no negative interactions but many, many positive interactions each school hour. Being human, we know that we are going to err from time to time and a few negative interactions are tolerable; but, certainly, they should be far, far fewer than the number of positive interactions. For starters, I advise teachers to have at least 20 to 25 positive interactions with their students during every class period — in the form of verbal praise, a smile, a wink (as appropriate), a touch (again, as appropriate), an acknowledgment of laudable performance, and so on. These interactions needn't take a long time. In fact, on average they'd only take a few seconds. Certainly, none of us is too busy to do that!
To become more positive, it is generally necessary to learn new skills: positive interaction skills. Just saying to yourself that you are going to be more positive and less negative will probably not be sufficient. Generally speaking, one must practice and practice and practice positive interaction skills. An effective way of doing this is to first identify those situations in which you are most inclined to be negative and to describe those situations in writing. Using a form such as the one shown in Figure 4.2 can be helpful. On the left side of the paper is described the situation in which this particular teacher tended to be the most negative or was most inclined to be negative. In the right hand column the teacher scripted a positive, proactive response. Once this positive response has been framed, it should be practiced in a
simulated setting. For example, a fellow teacher, a family member, or a friend would play the part of the student who was behaving inappropriately and the teacher would practice proactive, positive responding. Suppose, for example, that the data you or your colleague has collected show that you’re likely to criticize a particular student for not being on task during class time. The description of that behavior might look as shown on Figure 4.2. In the right hand column you would describe your positive response, as shown. Then, in your classroom, in fact in that student’s seat, your helper would behave as the student generally behaved, and you would practice positive responding.

*Figure 4.2 – Positive, Proactive Problem-Solving*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anticipated Problem</th>
<th>Positive, Proactive Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I tend to scold or criticise Jason when he gets noisy or out of control.</td>
<td>I’ll either differentially reinforce a behaving student, then look for an opportunity 30 seconds to a minute later to verbally reinforce Jason for being on task, or I’ll use an instructive, remedial strategy, followed 30 seconds to a minute later by verbal praise for being on task.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To begin with, you will likely feel foolish, a bit embarrassed, and a bit awkward. The learning of any new skill is awkward at first, but as Benjamin Bloom noted in his marvelous article entitled “Automaticity: The Hands and Feet of Genius”, in time, with practice, one will get to the point where he/she will respond appropriately, in a timely way and without having to think about it. It will just be a natural thing. It will become automatic like driving a car or playing a piano or any number of things people do day in and day out without having to think about it.

Now, a word about practice. First, you must practice until you achieve the level of automaticity. There is some research that suggests that before one can begin to use a new skill with even a minimal level of proficiency it must be practiced many times — 25-30 times. Remember, when you’re learning a new skill, you are learning a new behavior to replace an old behavior. You are also unlearning the old behavior, and that takes time. The second point you must remember is that learning a new behavior is best accomplished by learning that behavior in the setting in which it is most likely to be used. In other words, practice these classroom management skills in the classroom in a simulated setting. Simulators make it possible for us to make mistakes without any damage being done. A simulator creates a risk free environment. I once visited a United States Air Force pilot training program and was amazed at how skillful students became in dealing with crisis situations through the use of simulation exercises. There’s a great lesson here for us as educators.

The third point I want to make is that in the process of learning a new skill there is the strong likelihood that mistakes will be made along the way, that there will be some discouragement, and that there will be a tendency to go back to the old reactive, negative way of doing things. This is a well understood phenomenon and is called “regression to baseline.” Figure 4.3 demonstrates what happens. Let’s suppose that data were collected on your interactions with students over a week’s time, and plotted on a graph (see Figure 4.3). With this “baseline” data in hand, you decide on a treatment strategy as represented by the vertical broken line. Data on your performance collected subsequent to treatment would very likely yield a curve that looks like the one shown. If you have done a good job keeping data, a good job with remedial strategies, and if you have done a good job practicing them, you can expect this kind of a treatment effect. Also, there is a certain amount of novelty associated with treatment and that tends to help produce the desired effect. Unfortunately, after a while, usually a few days or a week,
the novelty wears off, there’s a tendency to get sloppy with treatment — to go back to the old ways of doing things — and the curve begins moving back toward baseline. When that happens, and it very likely will happen, do not be discouraged and do not be alarmed. Rather, review and refine your scripted responses. Practice those responses again and again in a simulated setting. Practice. Practice. Practice. If necessary, have a knowledgeable, trusted colleague come into your classroom and observe to see if something might be happening that is escaping you and that could be contributing to regression to baseline.

In the process of putting a new system in place, the need for fine tuning along the way is to be expected. The amount of tuning needed is usually quite minimal. It’s not unlike a radio, with just a slight adjustment of the tuning dial, the radio signal comes in clear.

Figure 4.3 - The Treatment
The fourth and last point which you should keep in mind is that in the process of putting positive teacher-to-pupil interactions to work, situations will arise which will so annoy you or so unnerve you that your mind just goes blank relative to the use of positive strategies. The inclination to be reactive and negative, i.e., to regress to baseline, comes flooding over you. In such an instance, that is, when you can’t think of an appropriate way of responding but you’re overwhelmed with an urge to react and to be negative, don’t do anything. Remember this admonition: Unless what you are about to say or do has a high probability for making things better, don’t say it and don’t do it. I suggest you put that on your desk where you can see it everyday as a reminder of what to do when all of a sudden you are overwhelmed, perplexed and tempted to react negatively. Before reacting, wait until your wits are about you or until you are able review your notes and practice a more appropriate way of responding. In the meantime, just walk away.

In time—and do not forget, learning and skill development take time—things will steadily improve, you will be more effective, and the class environment will improve remarkably in its ability to facilitate learning. Furthermore, as the quality of teacher-to-pupil-interactions improves time on task increases. It is a predictable cause and effect relationship.

It is a well documented fact that human behavior moves in the direction of things that are positive, pleasant, and reinforcing and away from things that are negative, unpleasant, and punishing. The rate at which students drop out of school is dramatic evidence of how they perceive the school environment to be. This leaving of school could be more adequately described as running away from school, fleeing school, escaping school. If students are learning and getting reinforced for that learning and enjoying a solid, positive relationship with their teachers there is little reason to leave school prematurely. Recently I was in an alternative high school which serves students who had been failing in the regular schools they had been attending. This alternative high school was serving the most difficult-to-educate youngsters in that inner-city school district. These were students who were otherwise failing, dropping out, hating school, roaming the streets aimlessly, and so on. But in this high school, these very kids were attending school everyday. In fact, they were anxious to attend school everyday. They were in class and on task and achieving and graduating. I spent several hours in this school and wasn’t there very long before I realized why this was happening. To the principal, every one of those students was her child. Teachers were smiling and interacting in a very positive, mature, adult way with students. When the students misbehaved, corrective action
was taken, not disciplinary action. One instance is fresh in my memory. I was visiting with the principal and another student. We were in the principal's office and the principal was talking with the student about his having come to school late that morning. It went like this:

Principal: Wayne, I missed you this morning when school started. I was really disappointed that you weren't here on time. Let's review your personal attendance goal again. Please tell me what that goal is.

Wayne: Well, my goal is that I will be to class on time everyday and that I won't miss school.

Principal: That's right, Wayne. I'm glad you remember that goal so well. What can I expect of you tomorrow and from now on?

Wayne: Oh, I'm gonna be to school.

Principal: What should you do, Wayne, if it doesn't look like you're going to be able to make it to school on time because you got up too late or something happened?

Wayne: Well, I'm going to call you and tell you that I am having a problem and I don't have a way to school.

Principal: Wayne, thank you. That's exactly what I expect of you. Furthermore, Wayne, I'm certain that when you do need a ride to school you're absolutely honest with me about that. Am I correct in assuming that when you call me it's because you really have had something come up that was unavoidable and that you really are in need of a ride?

Wayne: That's right, Mrs. Jones. I won't lie to you.

Principal: I trust you, Wayne. You have been honest in the past and I trust you to be honest with me in the future. Thank you. You are very special to me, Wayne. I hope you know that.

Wayne: I do, Mrs. Jones. Thank you.

Notice that the principal never once told Wayne what to do. She had him tell her. Never tell a student something he already knows. Let the student tell you. Your job is to create the environment for that to be done.

The student did all the telling. I then asked Wayne what his academic goals were. He said, "I hope to be able to pass the eleventh grade and go on into twelfth grade next year." The principal said, "Wayne, what did you say about finishing this year and going on to next year?" Wayne answered, "I hope to pass the eleventh grade so I can go on to twelfth grade." The principal then said, "You hope to finish the eleventh grade so you can go on to the twelfth grade. Did I hear you say you hope to?" Wayne quickly realized what he had said and responded, "I will pass the eleventh grade and
go on into twelfth grade!" to which the principal said, "That's better, Wayne, you will complete the eleventh grade and go on to the twelfth grade."

Everything was positive and everything was instructive and everything was directive. Later the principal told me, "They keep telling me that these are at-risk students. They might be at risk in some settings, but in this school no student is at risk. This is a risk free environment." Positive teacher-to-pupil interactions go a long way to creating a risk free environment and to relieving students of the label of being at risk.

Regarding the principal's interaction with the student, you might say, "Well, that wouldn't work for my students. My students wouldn't tell me the truth or they would find it reinforcing for me to go out of my way to get them a ride to school, or they'd do a con job on me," or something to that effect. That might very well be true for some students, but it doesn't mean there isn't some positive, proactive way of interacting with virtually any student. In this instance, the principal knew the student, had experience with him, and knew what she could expect from him. A basic principle of human behavior teaches us that past performance is the best predictor of future performance. In this instance, past performance had taught the principal what she could expect from this student in the future and she responded accordingly. The basic principles of human behavior apply to all human beings; our job as teachers is to learn to skillfully apply those principles in such a way as to facilitate the child's growth and development in a school setting. I'm convinced that can be done with virtually every student in America. Our job as educators is to be wiser and more skillful at managing the school environment than are the students.

Now to review. To improve the quality of teacher-to-pupil interactions:

1. Avoid the negative traps:
   - criticism,
   - common sense,
   - questioning,
   - sarcasm,
   - despair and pleading,
   - threats, and
   - physical force.

2. Practice positive interaction skills.
Session 5 discusses three strategies for increasing the frequency of appropriate student responding. They are:

   1. Few words and many questions,
   2. Assuring that all students respond, and
   3. Ensuring risk-free responding.
Session 5

INCREASING THE FREQUENCY OF SUCCESSFUL STUDENT Responding

Teaching is typically portrayed, unfortunately, as someone standing before a class of students and talking to them. Typically that person is standing by a blackboard, suggesting that the focus of student attention should be entirely on the teacher and what he or she does and says in front of the class. In truth, this is not the best characterization of good teaching. Good teaching isn’t found in how much teachers say or how long it takes them to say it. Rather, good teaching is found in what students do and how successful they are at it; how many opportunities they have to engage in learning activities until they master them. During this session, strategies are presented that illustrate how to increase the frequency of appropriate student responding. Particularly, we will discuss three strategies:

1. Lecture little and query much.
2. Assure that all students respond.
3. Ensure risk-free responding.

In its purest sense, and addressed thoroughly, this topic is more a matter of instruction than of management. It is addressed here, however, because the frequency of student responding is so tightly linked to classroom management that it seems, at least to me, to be a topic that should be addressed when talking about classroom management. I began this training by pointing out that better instruction always leads to better classroom management; certainly, much more than does better classroom management lead to better instruction.

During this session, I am not going to get into the science and research as they relate to student response rates. Rather, I’m going to focus attention entirely on three very practical and very easy-to-apply strategies that can keep students responding to instructional matters rather than to the distractors around them that can destroy the quality of a learning environment. Figure 5.1 illustrates what we typically observe in classrooms, particularly at the
increasing the frequency of successful student responding

upper elementary, middle and high school grades. This is a composite of data that I’ve collected over the years through classroom observations, and which is generally verified by the research of others. Teachers spend somewhere between 70-80% of the time talking and students spend 15-20% of the time responding. Any remaining time tends to be wasted. In fact, about half of the time spent in instruction finds students passively attending to what teachers say: watching, listening, and taking notes. One study revealed that less than 1% of the school day is spent on each of the following: reading aloud, answering questions, asking questions, and reciting. These are all forms of active, overt student responding, all of which are critically important to learning but none of which occurs in frequency or duration to the extent that is necessary to promote learning.

The three strategies discussed in a moment, when skillfully employed, maintain student interest and involvement, make learning exciting and rewarding, and portray to the students a teacher who is very much in charge and in control of a pleasant and reinforcing learning environment. Of all of my high school classes I can recall only two as having been enjoyable, the most enjoyable of which was Miss Anderson’s English class. Through an endless stream of questions and invitations to share a point of view, that class was alive with excitement. No one slept in Miss Anderson’s English class. No one wanted to sleep in Miss Anderson’s class. Even to this day, nearly 45 years later, my heart still skips a beat as I recall the anticipation and excitement that was generated every time my classmate and friend, Bob, would challenge Miss Anderson with, “Now just a darn minute!” With a gleam in her eye, and Bob leading the challenge, the entire class was soon engaged in engrossing and exciting discussions that spilled out into the hall after the bell rang and students were scurrying off to other classes. Not only was it good instruction, but it was classroom management at its best. There was no need for rules to post on the walls of the classroom nor time spent role playing teacher expectations relative to those rules. There was no need for in-school suspension programs nor elaborate disciplinary systems. No one ever had to be sent to the office. Why would anyone want to go to the office? The action was in the classroom! I recall one time when a student got so excited she passed out!

Here are three strategies which will help you achieve a high level of positive classroom management through student responding.
Strategy #1

**LECTURE LITTLE AND QUERY MUCH**

Say only a few words, speak for only a short period of time, and then ask students questions to drive home the points you are making. I observed a teacher who was regarded by her peers as a first rate "disciplinarian." This teacher never sent students to the office, she never referred students for psychological testing, and to everyone's amazement, students never transferred from her regular education class to special education. No one could explain why that was the case, not even the teacher herself, since the school in which she taught was located smack dab in the middle of one of the most violent crime areas of America, and nearly everyone of her students came from non-functional, or at best, marginally functional families. It remained a mystery to everyone, but after I had been in her classroom for about an hour and had observed her interacting with her students, it was no mystery to me. The data said it all. As I observed her, it suddenly occurred to me that she was doing very little talking and students were doing a lot of responding. I took data on the length of time she talked before inviting students to respond. In all but one instance, only seconds elapsed before students were responding. On average, she spoke only 17 seconds before getting a response from students (Figure 5.2).

Teachers tend not to ask questions during their lecture presentation of content feeling that by doing so they won't be able to cover everything that "needs" to be covered. My question is, "Why cover it if it isn't going to be learned or remembered? Why allow the presentation of content invite students to be distracted, and to ultimately become a management problem?" I can never remember Miss Anderson lecturing on content but I remember an awful lot about sentence structure, punctuation, and clarity in writing. On the other hand, in the health class I took the same year, the teacher spent the whole period prattling on about something about which I remember nothing because I was never invited to take part in the discussion.

Strategy #2

**BE SURE ALL STUDENTS HAVE A CHANCE TO RESPOND**

Typically, there is a remarkable imbalance in the rate and duration of responding by members of a class. I'm sure you all experience students whose hands are always in the air and who are always anxious to say something whether they have anything worth saying or not. On the other hand, there are those students who sit in class like a lump, never asking a

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**Figure 5.2 - Length of Time the Teacher Talked Before Asking Students to Respond**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Students to Respond</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11 seconds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 seconds</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4 seconds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 min 10 seconds</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>42 seconds</td>
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<td>2 seconds</td>
<td></td>
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<td>22 seconds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 seconds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 seconds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average=17 seconds
INCREASING THE FREQUENCY OF SUCCESSFUL STUDENT RESPONDING

Session 5

Complicating this is the inclination of teachers to call regularly on selected students while totally ignoring others. Parenthetically, as I have taken data in classrooms, it has often interested me how much more likely teachers are to call on students who are seated in the right hand side of the classroom.

I recently took data in a regular education junior high school class that illustrates how easy it is for teachers to be caught up in the events of the moment and completely miss the fact that out of an entire class, very few students had an opportunity to respond. The instructional format of the activity was that of a popular daytime TV game show involving the spinning of a large roulette-type wheel. Each stop of the wheel generated a question that the teacher then asked of the class. Interestingly, but for reasons I never found out, the teacher only called on three students to respond. The game was quite exciting and engrossing and students hands were up all over the class but the teacher repeatedly called on just those three students.

Although this is perhaps an extreme example, it is illustrative of the tendency of teachers to not give equal opportunity to all students to respond nor to invite students to respond who are more retiring.

There are a couple of things teachers can do to make certain that all students have an equal chance to respond while at the same time maintaining student’s attention. One way is to put the students’ names into a container, and draw those names out randomly. When doing this, always put the names back in the jar so that students don’t lose interest thinking they won’t be called on again. It’s called “selection with replacement”. Another way is to record on a seating chart (see Figure 5.3) a tally mark every time a student is asked a question or volunteers a comment. This then serves as a visual prompt to the teacher to make certain that all students have an opportunity to respond.

Strategy #3
ENSURE RISK-FREE RESPONDING

This strategy has two parts: 1) responding free of failure, and 2) responding free of criticism.

If students respond inaccurately or inappropriately or even foolishly, do not allow yourself to be drawn off target and into the student’s control. Simply redirect the question to another student who you know is likely to respond correctly and appropriately and move right ahead with the discussion.

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Even though student's responses are not acceptable, and even though they generate inappropriate responses from the class, the teacher must not be distracted one bit by this. The teacher must maintain the flow of instruction without criticism for either the student or reactive class members.

Next, there should be no risk to students in responding. This can be accomplished by a) simply asking the student to repeat what has been said, b) by heavily prompting the student in the direction of a correct response, c) by asking questions of students who you are certain will know the answer, and d) by directing students’ attention to a correct response. Remember, failure is an awful teacher, and since we want the classroom to be a risk-free environment, the teacher must evoke responses from students that are correct, thus providing the student with success experiences, and allowing the teacher an opportunity to positively acknowledge these successes. Remember, behavior responds better to positive then to negative consequences. A well managed classroom environment is an environment in which students succeed. A risk-free environment is a well managed environment; it’s an environment where there is not a fear of failure.

There are two major reasons why you want to make certain that a student responds correctly. The first is that it is instructive both to the class and to the students. When one student gives a correct answer the rest of the students hear it, and when it becomes acknowledged by the teacher as a correct answer, it becomes instructive. It is information out of the mouth of a peer that will likely have a greater impact than if you the teacher say it. The second reason is that it provides you as a teacher an opportunity to verbally praise a correct behavior thus reminding the students once again what it is that gets your positive attention.

Suppose you asked a student a question expecting a correct answer but the student didn’t give a correct answer for whatever reason. Though we have illustrated this corrective strategy before, I want to revisit it here for emphasis and to make another important point. If a student gives an incorrect answer, do not dwell on the failure of the student or the incorrectness of the answer. Rather, say, “Listen carefully, Bill” then direct your question—and the student’s attention—to another student who you are quite sure knows the correct answer and then ask the question of that student. Once the question has been answered correctly, come back to the original student and ask the same question to make certain you leave the student with a success experience.

Now there are a couple of reasons for redirecting the question to
another student and ending the querying on a positive note. The first reason is that if one student doesn't know the answer it is altogether likely that 1/3 of the rest of the students don't know the answer. I'm sure you've all had the experience, like I have had many, many times; while sitting in a university class somewhat confused about what the professor was talking about but not wanting to ask a question because you didn't want to appear stupid. Then, mercifully, a fellow student asked your question and you heard a sigh of relief coming from students all around you. Also, have you ever remembered how instructive those experiences were; how well you tended to remember what the professor said in these circumstances.

So, one reason for redirecting the question until a correct response is forthcoming is because the likelihood is very great that other students in the class don't know the answer, so it becomes doubly instructive. And the second reason, of course, is that once again instruction and management proceed on a positive tone, the environment is a risk-free environment—an environment in which students feel safe to respond.

Rate of responding, risk-free responding, instructive responding, these are all effective strategies for creating a positive classroom environment that facilitates learning.

Now to review. During this session we discussed three strategies for increasing the frequency of successful student responding. They were:

1. Lecture little and query much.
2. Assure that all students respond.
3. Ensure risk-free responding.

In Session #6 we will discuss ways of controlling classroom distractors, with particular emphasis on:

1. Avoiding unnecessary, unsound innovation.
2. Eliminating ineffective out-of-classroom disciplinary measures.
3. Eliminating instruction-time thieves.
4. Eliminating common in-class distractions.
5. Eliminating assaults from without.
CONTROLLING CLASSROOM DISTRACTIONS

The educational system in America, at all levels, is continually being battered with distractions, defined here as anything happening in the classroom that interferes with student achievement. Distractors come from many sources and in many forms. They come in the form of grand schemes and momentous movements which do little more than generate false expectations all the while draining precious resources and diverting attention away from student achievement. They come from within and from without the classroom, cumulatively robbing students of immense amounts of instruction, as illustrated in Figure 6.1. Imagine, 57% of the time allocated for schooling is never even available for instruction!

During this session I will address five common distractors and make suggestions for how to eliminate them completely, or decrease them to a reasonable, manageable level. They are:

1. Avoiding unnecessary, unsound innovations.
2. Eliminating ineffective out-of-classroom disciplinary measures.
3. Eliminating "instruction-time" thieves.
4. Eliminating common in-class distractors.
5. Eliminating assaults from without.

AVOIDING UNNECESSARY, UNSOUND INNOVATIONS

I’m reminded of the “open classroom” movement that came on the scene several years ago resulting in the expenditure of huge sums of money to architecturally redefine schools, as though the absence of walls would improve instruction. It is one of those data-less efforts that came to a predictable end: no documented improvement in student performance. I’m thinking of the concept of ungraded classes as though somehow or another the lack of grade level identification would improve instruction. I think of merit pay issues which seem to assume that teachers are withholding
CONTROLLING CLASSROOM DISTRACTIONS

Figure 6.1 – How Schooling Time Is Typically Used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time Allocation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Instructional Activities</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un-Utilized Instruction Time</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Learning Time</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

knowledge and skills until they get more money, all the while failing to realize that teacher pay is an equity issue and not a student performance issue. I think of the introduction of innovative strategies into the school system which tend to serve more as distractors than as facilitators of student achievement. A few years ago I did a study on the impact of innovation in school systems, the findings of which were both interesting and alarming. Typically, as illustrated in Figure 6.2, an attempt at innovation is introduced into a school system at a very high level of interest; an interest generally promoted by some influential individual within the system who has become taken by the innovation and is convinced that it has a lot to offer the system. Interest in the innovation tends to increase for about a year and a half during which time a lot of effort, money, and human resources are spent in purchasing materials, equipment, inservice training, and sometimes architectural changes. Since most innovation is introduced into a system more on the hope that it will make teaching easier, once teachers realize that they must change first and adapt to the demands of the innovation, interest in the system begins to wane and then plummet precipitously eventually fading into oblivion by about four years after the innovation was introduced. However, as that attempt at innovation begins its slide into oblivion, a new form of innovation is waiting in the wings and makes its appearance on the scene only to go through the same birth and death cycle. And so it is across time: overlapping curves representing the comings and goings of innovation and huge amounts of the school’s limited resources with them. However, an interesting illusion is created. If one is to run a trend line through the intersections of these overlapping curves, the impression is created that a great deal of innovation is occurring in the system when in fact virtually zero impact is realized in terms of student achievement. It also results in teachers’ low expectations when new, potentially effective data-based strategies are introduced.

Don’t allow any of this kind of stuff into your school and classroom unless it meets the following conditions:
1. **It is supported with scientifically sound data.** As noted by the authors of an engrossing paper entitled "Academic Child Abuse" (Bateman, et.al. 1991), "The primary criteria for adopting practices should be: does it work well with children? Does it work well with teachers? These are questions of fact that can be documented." All too much of what is allowed into the classroom in the name of innovation is supported by little more than face validity and hollow testimonials. Again, quoting from the paper "Academic Child Abuse," "Such programs that have not been learner-verified, have very little chance of working with students, and run a great risk of creating academic child abuse."

2. **Adequate resources are made available to fully and effectively implement the program.** This includes supervisory resources which assure that the program is not dismantled by those who are inclined to rebuild such programs to their own liking rather than

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**Figure 6.2 - Birth and Death Cycles of Educational Innovations**

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to make them function as they were field tested and found to be both valid and reliable.

3. There should be a commitment by the school that the programs will remain in effect once their value has been documented. This sometimes takes several years. With educational programming, we have to think in "generational" terms, not simply for a year or two years or a few years. Time is an important variable and must be respected when introducing innovative programs.

But closer to home, within the building and the classroom, there tends to be a steady stream of interruptions and distractions: hand carried messages from the office, classroom visitors, and then, of course, PA announcements that take up about 6% of the school day and exist primarily for administrative convenience — not only not serving the instructional aims of education but, in fact, interfering with it! — as I will point out later. Within the classroom itself, distractions appear in the form of unnecessary trips to the pencil sharpener, misbehaving students, students surrounding the teacher’s desk all demanding attention, etc. But whether it is a distraction in the form of some baseless scheme to overhaul the school system or an acting-out child in the classroom, it diverts attention away from the central function of education; that is, the healthy growth and development of children through formal instruction, and must, therefore, be regarded as intolerable and eliminated.

Since it is beyond the scope of this training to take on the entire universe of distractions that are imposed on the school from within and without, I am discussing here only things that administrators and teachers can do to keep distractions to an absolute minimum within the building and within the classroom, beginning with ineffective, out-of-classroom disciplinary measures.

**ELIMINATING INEFFECTIVE OUT-OF-CLASSROOM DISCIPLINARY MEASURES**

Ineffective use of out-of-classroom disciplinary measures frequently include sending children to the principal’s office, time out, in-school suspension, and expulsion. I’m not saying there is never a time when a student shouldn’t be sent to the principal’s office for disciplinary action or that a student should never be put into time-out or sent to in-school suspension, or that a student should never be expelled from school. I suspect that there are times when, if well managed, any of these would be an advisable management strategy for protecting the sanctity of the learning environ-
ment. Having said that, however, it is my experience after visiting class­
rooms throughout the United States, that the degree to, and manner with,
which these are used does not typically serve the instructional needs of a
child. Rather, they tend more to needlessly separate students from the very
environment where they need most of all to be: the learning environment.
A couple of examples. Recently the mother of an elementary aged child was
in my office simply beside herself about the behavior of her son at school.
Then she said, “For awhile, the teacher’s threats to send the boy to the
principal’s office were enough to keep him in line. Then, he finally got sent
and the principal was so nice to him that now he does anything he needs to
do to get sent to the principal’s office.” I don’t want anyone to interpret this
to mean that principals should not be nice to children who are sent to them.
What I am saying is that being sent to the principal’s office can be a highly
reinforcing event. What did we learn about the effect of reinforcement on
behavior? If you said that it increases the probability that behavior will
reoccur, you are exactly correct. And that is precisely the effect it had on this
boy.

Now another example. A few years ago, I was asked by a school to help
it deal with a particularly difficult student. The boy was described to me as
an absolute, incorrigible terror who would do anything to get out of class.
Predictably, his behavior found him out of class and being put into time-out.
Now remember, time-out is simply an abbreviation for the larger, more
descriptive, term, “Time-out from positive reinforcement.” In this precise
sense, then, once the student is in time-out, he/she is in a very sterile,
unresponsive, non-reinforcing environment. On the other hand, if the child
is not in-time out, he/she would be in a very positive, responsive, reinforcing
environment. Now, keep that in mind as I recall this experience.

When I got to the school, which was about halfway into the first class
period, I went directly to the principal’s office. The boy was already in the
so called time-out area. The floor plan shown in figure 6.3 is the configura­
tion of the front office. Along one wall were the teachers’ mail boxes. The
principal’s office was in the corner, next to that was the vice-principal’s
office, and the attendance secretary’s and school secretary’s desks were in
the outer office space. The entire outside wall was windowed and back in the
corner was a desk and a chair which was the school’s time-out area. I hope
by now that you are getting some sense of the counter-productive character
of the time-out procedure as used in this school. Below the windows were
chairs for visitors and I was sitting there when a wonderful drama unfolded
which made time-out an engrossing, even marvelous, experience. As the
Figure 6.3 – Floor Plan of the School Office
principal entered the office, he turned and waved cheerily to the boy sitting in time-out and said, “Well, I see you haven’t wasted any time this morning.” The boy waved back, smiling, and the principal went into his office sort of chuckling. Teachers came in and out of the office to get their mail and each one waved to the boy sitting in time-out and extended affectionate verbal greetings to him. Students passing the windows also greeted the boy with waves and smiles and laughs. It was really quite wonderful for the boy. He was in the catbird seat for sure. Then, things really began to liven up. An irate teacher came storming into the office! He was furious and verbally explosive as he complained about an administrative decision that had been made about his duties that day but about which he had not been informed. As he was shouting his displeasure, the vice principal came storming out of his office and the two of them met literally nose to nose shouting at each other at the top of their lungs. I was embarrassed at what was happening and looked at the boy sitting in time-out to see what his reaction was. He had a huge grin on his face. I mean, he was in seventh heaven. He was having no problem with attention span at that moment. Finally, in a huff, the irate teacher stormed out of the office and as he went down the hall you could hear him say in angry tones, “I’m leaving this damn place and I won’t be back until tomorrow!” And sure enough he left the building.

Well, that boy not being in the classroom, might have provided some relief to the teacher, but being in time-out, as used by that school, was certainly a counter productive management strategy that was encouraging inappropriate behavior and working against that child’s academic growth and development.

The very same thing can be said about trips to the principal's office, in-school suspension and student expulsion programs. As generally used, they might provide some temporary relief to the classroom teacher, but unless they are extremely well managed, they do not generally do anything to facilitate the student's schooling. My caution is that none of these strategies should be allowed in a school setting unless data taken on their effect reveal the following:

1. **Students’ in-class behavior is steadily improving.** There needs to be solid evidence to verify that because of these measures, students are behaving better in class.

2. **The need for such programs throughout the school year steadily grows less rather than greater;** i.e., fewer and fewer students are being referred to the principal's office, fewer and fewer students are being placed in time-out, fewer and fewer students are being placed into in-school suspension, and fewer and fewer students are being expelled.
3. Teacher's ability to manage students' behavior in the classroom steadily increases; i.e., they become increasingly more skilled at managing the classroom environment so that the need for out-of-class disciplinary action steadily declines.

The question that logically follows is, "How do you propose to accomplish all of that?" The answer comes in two parts. First, become skilled in using the management principles, strategies and techniques covered in the first five sessions of this training, including having a working knowledge of the four principles of human behavior that were addressed at the outset. Without that, there really is no answer to the question short of simply excluding from school every kid who gets out of line.

The second part of this answer addresses the need for schools to have a well defined and well managed out-of-classroom behavior management support system. This system must be so precise and so thoroughly understood by students, teachers, administrators, and everyone else who works in or frequents the building, that there would be no question whatsoever about what the consequences would be if, given every reasonable effort on the part of the teacher, students have to be removed from the classroom in order to protect the learning environment in behalf of the rest of the students—which sometimes needs to be done, though rarely! A few years ago I worked with a school district in which teachers were averaging 22 referrals per day to the principal for disciplinary action. As a function of the program that was put into place in that district, referrals to the principal for disciplinary purposes decreased from 22 a day to 1-3 per week. It can be done, but it isn't going to be done intuitively, desperately, nor by flying by the seat of our pants. There is a science and technology and literature that address these matters and if well implemented and managed, can produce what some consider to be miraculous results. These so called miraculous results are not produced without effort and without precision. But they are altogether worth that effort and that precision both for the sake of the teacher and the students.

ELIMINATING "INSTRUCTION-TIME" THIEVES

Another category of distractors operating school-wide that steal huge amounts of valuable instruction time include assemblies, field trips, field days, pep rallies, athletic events, special interest clubs, and other such things that take students away from formal instruction. We are altogether too quick in education to assume that these things are not only to be tolerated but are necessary to the well-rounded education of children. I've studied this and I haven't found anything that supports that assumption other than conventional wisdom and the face validity of it, none of which can provide
this and I haven’t found anything that supports that assumption other than conventional wisdom and the face validity of it, none of which can provide a compelling case in its defense. There are those who feel that such activities provide the leaven in the loaf of education, the spice that makes the peas and carrots of learning palatable. Little to nothing I see in my observations in schools suggest any of that to be the case. On the contrary, it has been my experience that education, when provided correctly, is plenty spicy; academic success is all the leaven that is needed. My playing on my high school golf team didn’t make one single contribution to my academic growth and development. Quite to the contrary. I only met absolutely minimum academic standards — which I have since learned was well below my ability — that qualified me to play on the golf team; which, I might add, got me out of some miserable classes. It didn’t enhance my schooling one iota. Assemblies were fun and entertaining but certainly didn’t contribute to my social development nor did they enhance my general growth and development. The pleasure in such things was found first in getting out of class, and second in whatever was happening on stage. In the final analysis, these things combine to take students away from the learning environment and to rob them of opportunities to achieve academically, as documented by the fact that between 55% and 60% of the time allocated for schooling never gets used for instruction, in large measure because of all of these distractors.

It seems like an altogether reasonable appeal to make that school staff consider carefully and critically all of these activities in terms of their viability as facilitators of an effective learning environment. If they don’t pass that test, they should be eliminated.

An occasional school assembly, well planned, of high character, offering students an opportunity to express their talents, and to be personally enriched would be reasonable. A field trip with a well defined educational goal and well planned advanced organizers to draw student attention to things to be learned, followed by well planned classroom activities which would be enriched by the field trip experience — these kinds of field trips would very likely be worthwhile. Pep rallies? I doubt that any justification whatsoever, in a schooling sense, could ever be marshalled to justify the dismissal of a student body to attend a pep rally. I was recently informed by a distraught parent that the rural school district that served her community was moving to a 4-day school week. Fridays would be off so students could
attend athletic events! How in the world can a decision such as that be justified in light of the facts?

**ELIMINATING COMMON IN-CLASS DISTRACTORS**

Another category of distractors includes those that occur within the classroom, including assaults that originate outside of the classroom. First, a look at in-class distractors. I have been in many, many classrooms where radios and cassette players were allowed to operate, where students were allowed free access to anything or anyone in the classroom at anytime, where computers were available non-contingently — not for instruction, but to play games — and where permission to leave the classroom to go to the bathroom was simply a matter of, “Where’s the hall pass?” Using the strategies and methodologies that have been discussed would make it possible for a teacher to eliminate any and all of these distractors. The management of them is simply a function of the management of the environment. Having computer hardware and computer-game software in the classroom is not a bad idea, but availability to it should be contingent upon successful academic performance. Engaging another student, or other students, during classroom time is excellent when it is in pursuit of academic achievement. And so on for moving about the classroom, going to the pencil sharpener or whatever. I’m not promoting, as a viable classroom environment, a morgue-like atmosphere where students’ noses are never out of the textbook and productivity is measured only in terms of how much paper work is handed in. We all know that there is busy, production-oriented activity and noise in a classroom. But the difference between that and just plain noise is not difficult to distinguish.

If in-class distractors are a problem, I suggest you invite a trusted colleague, a friend, or your principal into your classroom to take data and determine precisely what the matter is. Figure 6.4 is an example of what such a record might look like.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Distractions</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hitting other students</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of seat</td>
<td>I-I-I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking Out</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Interruptions</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments: John made several trips to the pencil sharpener, and while away from his desk, he bothered other students.
ELIMINATING ASSAULTS FROM WITHOUT

Assaults to the sanctity of the classroom from outside the classroom often include so-called educational TV programming, PA announcements, messages from the office, unplanned visits to the classroom, etc. I'm sure you can think of things I haven't listed. These distractors are bad enough just given the amount of time they take up, but added to that is the amount of time lost getting students back on task after an interruption has occurred. As I sit in classrooms as an observer, it is only rarely that a full class period elapses without a distraction of some sort or another invading the classroom. Consider with me each of these and identify some antidotes to them.

First, educational TV. Several years ago a state office of public instruction contracted with me to do a study of educational television programming in that state. The overwhelming finding of the study was that educational television added almost nothing to the education of children. Very little that came across that tube had any well-defined instructional intent. Time and time again I saw instruction interrupted by a teacher saying, "Well it's time for our educational TV program," and the teacher would turn on the television, children would put down their pencils and books, watch television for half an hour while the teacher did some desk work, and when the program was over, the teacher would say, "Now students go back to your work," and things would resume where they left off before the programming began, usually with little or nothing to do with what was shown on TV. This is not to say that there aren't instances where educational TV programming in the classroom is used to good advantage. I have just seen so little of it that I simply have to classify it, by-in-large, as a distractor. This does not include instructional programming that uses television technology such as effective videodisc teaching programs. I have seen some excellent things in that regard.

Educational TV programming, to have value, must yield to a classroom teacher's overall instructional plan. Unfortunately, too often the teacher yields to it, whether it has any instructional value or whether it doesn't. The antidote to that, of course, is for classroom teachers to be incredibly selective about what educational television programming they will allow into their classroom. After all, all they have to do is turn off the switch or never turn it on. I advise teachers not to be intimidated by an educational television schedule that comes to the school and assume that they have an obligation to participate, particularly at the times the programs are offered. Using video recording technology, teachers can record a program for playback at a time that is convenient and supportive of
CONTROLLING CLASSROOM DISTRACTIONS

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instruction. Other than that, I would just leave the television off. Also, there are times that an entertaining program can be used as a reinforcing event for exemplary student performance and behavior. Like computer games, they can be powerful reinforcers when used appropriately and contingently.

Now for a word about PA announcements. I have a very difficult time being supportive of how PA systems are typically used in public school settings. As I said earlier, they are there basically for administrative convenience and not to promote or aid instruction. On the contrary, they typically interrupt instruction terribly! When I was a classroom teacher, I got so tired of the dribble and prattle that invaded my classroom over the PA system that I brought a screwdriver and a set of wire nippers to class one day and dealt it a lethal blow. And you know what, for the years I taught in that school—not having that system operable in my classroom—we never missed one single thing of importance. The only announcement that I ever heard come across our school PA system that was worth being broadcast was the news that John F. Kennedy had been shot. And that occurred at noon when the students were at lunch. I would hazard a guess that 99.999% of all of what comes across PA systems could be put on a piece of paper and distributed to teachers; but it is just too easy for administrators and office staff to turn on that switch and talk away. When I was a principal, the PA system in my building was never turned on for any reason for the two years I was there with no ill effects being felt in that school. The antidote to the PA system is a simple one: printed bulletins and messages. Since, based on my experience, every teacher can read, such an alternative is altogether viable. And believe me, it is a whole lot less expensive than to wire up a building with an umpteen thousand dollar PA system. That money could be used in many better ways to facilitate student learning. I know how unthinkable this must sound because PA systems, and ready access to them, have become such an accepted part of the administration of a school building. A message needs to be gotten to a teacher, so someone in the office simply flips a switch and without the slightest resistance, or concern for instruction, interrupts a class with a message which is assumed to be more important than what is being taught. I take great issue with this cavalier approach to invading the classroom. A written message delivered quietly to the classroom by a student office helper would accomplish the same thing and would be remarkably less distracting. Earlier, I used the term "the sanctity of the classroom environment." I mean that literally. Is it any wonder that students themselves don't respect the classroom environment when they see it continually and frivolously and casually and thoughtlessly allowed to be
assaulted by one distractor after another! I'm sure this appeal will not result in the elimination of one single school PA system. But I plead with you, use it prudently, sparingly, and only as a last resort.

*Among the assaults from the outside are visitors to classrooms* who come unannounced, unplanned and/or without good reason. I know there are times when it is reasonable and even appropriate for classrooms to be visited. Certainly, principals should visit classrooms in their role as instructional leaders, parents should be allowed to visit classrooms for a firsthand view of the education of their children, educational scientists in pursuit of data and the testing of instructional systems to improve the quality of education need to be in classrooms from time to time, and fellow teachers as observers to observe exemplary teaching practices and methodologies should be allowed in the classroom. When people do visit your classrooms, their visits for the most part, should be as unobtrusive as possible. I suggest the following guidelines:

1. *Any visit to a classroom must be purposeful and ultimately in the best interest of the children.* For a parent, that might be to learn something about how better linkages can be established between home and school. For an administrator it would be for instructional supervision purposes. For a researcher it would be to gather data, or in some meaningful way advance the cause of education.
2. *Visitors should be seated toward the back of the room, or in a place where they are not distracting the students.* Unless it is necessary, to accomplish their purpose for being there, they should not move around the classroom or disturb students at their desks or work stations.
3. *Visitors, unless it is necessary to accomplish their purpose for being there, should not interact with students.* If students come to them and ask them a question or inquire as to why they are there, they should do nothing that would encourage the students to remain off task.

Putting students on extinction is a very reasonable strategy for visitors to use. If the child gets little to no response whatsoever, the probability is very great that within a minute or less, the child will lose interest and go on to other things. It really isn't difficult for visitors to classrooms to become just another inanimate object so far as the class is concerned, if *visitors consciously employ a simple, nonreinforcing strategy.* It's when visitors smile at children and look at them and touch them and say things to them that
they become significant distractors in the classroom.

4. *The classroom teacher should say as little as possible, if anything at all, about the presence of visitors.* Unless it is germane to the visitor's being there, do not ask the visitor to say anything to the class or for the class to say anything to the visitor. A simple, "We have a visitor who will be with us during this class period. We will now proceed with our work," is adequate. Then move directly into instruction as though the visitor wasn't even there. I realize that in some settings, where there is a strong cultural disposition to do so, it is considered common courtesy for students to stand in unison and extend a verbal greeting to a visitor. I have experienced this frequently during visits to schools in other countries. But unless there is a strong cultural disposition to do it, I suggest that it not be done. It just tends to be too distracting.

Now to review: Distractors needlessly compromise the learning environment and rob students of valuable learning time and opportunities. These can be eliminated by:

1. Avoiding unnecessary, unsound innovations.
2. Eliminating ineffective out-of-classroom disciplinary measures.
3. Eliminating "Instruction-time" thieves.
4. Eliminating common in-class distractors.
5. Eliminating assaults from without.
CONCLUSION

In bringing to a close these discussions about how to manage the classroom environment to facilitate effective instruction, I want to end with the point on which all that has been covered converges: The sanctity of the learning environment and our responsibilities as educators to enlighten it, to protect it, to service it, and to make of it all that it must be if it is to accomplish the ends for which it exists. As a colleague of mine noted to me recently, the learning environment is not to be tinkered with. Those it serves should not be treated with indifference. Every learner who enters our classrooms should leave a better and more able person. When that learning environment is managed properly, this is more a possibility than it is simply an ideal.

Thank you and best success in your work.
REFERENCES

As you seek solutions to every day management problems, I strongly urge you to turn to the following references. Specific problem-solving strategies are readily available in references 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, and 12.

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