

MANAGING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR  
IN THE CLASSROOM

by

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ABSTRACT

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Managing Disruptive Behavior in the Classroom

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The purpose of this study was to focus on classroom management strategies that enhances the classroom teacher and students to be successful and thrive in the school environment. Preventing undesirable student behavior and focusing on actual steps that can be taken to manage student behavior were researched. This study specifically identified strategies that promote student learning and ways to guide student behavior. To promote a well-managed classroom, teachers must have clear ideas of the types of classroom conditions and student behaviors necessary for a productive learning atmosphere.

Data was obtained from a public high school with an enrollment of 1518 students and 98 full-time educators, with 59 (60%) responding. The study was used to identify strengths and weaknesses in this high school pertaining to classroom management.

Results of this study will be provided to the school administration for the purpose of analysis and possible implementation.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Developing the skills of discipline and classroom management are essential for creating a positive learning atmosphere. In fact, a well managed classroom is a prerequisite for learning. It is every teacher's responsibility to provide an environment where learning can take place and for this to happen, a teacher must have a management plan that allows him/her to take charge. Once this is established, the rest of the classroom activities can be put in place. However, effective and comprehensive classroom management doesn't just happen. According to Mendler and Curwin, (1983) "Taking charge means facing up to the problems related to discipline. Effective classroom and school management occurs in a systematic, yet flexible, manner that allows and encourages both student and teacher growth through communication and understanding" (Mendler & Curwin, 1983, p.1).

It is essential that teachers use appropriate managerial and instructional methods in the classroom. Teachers who are proficient in their subject matter and use good teaching methods, yet lack an orderly, well-managed classroom are headed for major trouble. A disorderly classroom may produce students who do not come to class on time, who show up for class unprepared and who may sense a liberty to display an overall attitude of disrespect. According to Mendler and Curwin (1983), it is a widely accepted fact among educators that the vast majority of teachers are sent into the classroom with absolutely no training in managing student behavior. Yet, without adequate classroom management, a teacher is likely to experience undue stress and failure. "Problems with discipline is the number one reason that administrators fail to rehire teachers or award tenure. It is also the main source of career-related stress as reported by teachers, and the number one reason that former teachers report for having left the profession." (Partin, 1995) Clearly, becoming an expert in classroom management is a critical for all teachers.

Mendler (1997) suggest that "70 to 80 percent of challenging student behavior in school is primarily attributable to outside factors such as dysfunctional families, violence in our culture, the effects of drugs and alcohol and fragmented communities." Mendler and Curwin (1983) state that although it is best to resolve most behavioral problems in the classroom, certain types of behavior that are severe and problematic need to be dealt with outside the classroom setting, such as student violence or blatant defiance. In situations where student behavior requires outside support, enlisting the collaborative help of the administration, parents, law and social agencies may all be required. By attempting to resolve problematic behavior with the student first, a teacher demonstrates to the students that he is in charge, that he has their best interests at heart, that he is willing to work with them and strive to develop a mutual respect. According to Johnson and Bany (1970), successfully managing disruptive behavior is paramount to maintaining classroom concentration and achievement of the educational objectives. Classroom management either makes or breaks a teacher. Without it, students do not stay on task and necessary lessons are not learned. Ideas and meanings of effective classroom management are varied. These authors go on to encourage teachers to be open minded and willing to accept proven methods that are effective and produce positive results, even when it means the teacher himself/herself must change and learn new teaching styles and behaviors.

Good discipline means different things to different teachers. For some it means absolute quiet, while others will be happy with a low volume of work-related noise; for some it means self-control, and for others it means complete compliance. To all it means that students do as they are asked, and do not defy the teacher. (Chernow, 1989, p. 2)

Johnson and Bany suggests current methods of classroom management that are non-effective and at times, counter productive, need to be honestly evaluated by the teacher. It is a wise teacher who will first accept his/her own limitations and contributions that may encourage disruptive classroom behavior and make the necessary changes within himself/herself first. The authors state that once a teacher has

successfully identified and implemented the internal changes needed, he or she can begin to explore and implement the necessary classroom changes that will indeed impact the classroom.

According to Chernow (1989), there are three common elements that are vital to good discipline. They are: (a) working on task, (b) behaving appropriately, and (c) showing respect.

We constantly discuss education in terms of reading and mathematics growth, we lose sight of the fact that the primary function of public school education is to prepare students to be productive members of our society. The most important area in this preparation is the development of social skills and an appreciation for the roles by which a democracy is governed and managed. Yet we spend thousands of hours in the development of reading and mathematics curricula and little—if any—in the development of a social skills or discipline curricula. (Petty, 2001, p. xii)

According to Partin, looking for opportunities to purposefully model and encourage good work ethic in the every day lives of the students through open dialog and positive examples, would be a huge first step in helping build appropriate behavior and positive self respect. "The most common complaint expressed by students, teachers, parents and school administrators involves the following: lack of pupil discipline, poor classroom management and control, and disruptive student behavior" (Cangelosi, 1988, p. xiii). Mendler (1997) suggests to discuss the student's after school job or participation in extracurricular activities. How can the teacher assist the student to identify ways outside the classroom where they are successful because of their exercised and expected discipline and effective management skills? Helping them to identify those important details that make them successful *outside* the classroom, will increase the chances of those positive components spilling over *inside* the classroom.

Relating the students outside world to the classroom demonstrates that the teacher cares about them and is willing to invest in them (Partin 1995). He further suggests that it will also engage the student to be more active, rather than passive, in the learning process. Consequently, students will be more attentive and orderly in the classroom.

Some teachers constantly struggle to get the students' attention, gain some semblance of order, confront disruptions and maintain enough energy to get through their planned lessons. Other teachers have given up the struggle. While other teachers orchestrate smooth operating classrooms where students cooperatively and efficiently go about the business of learning with minimal disruptions (Duke & Meckel, 1984, p. 3).

### *Statement of the Problem*

Effectively managing classroom behavior is no small task. For many teachers, the responsibility of classroom management seems like an overwhelming nightmare, causing them to increasingly dread each new day spent in the classroom. Cangelosi (1988) made the observation that very capable, extremely talented and once highly motivated teachers are leaving the profession altogether because of their frustration over their lack of ability to maintain classroom control and because they often feel unsupported by their administration. If they stay, they may respond in a mean and nasty in their interactions with students as their bitter feelings spill out in the classroom. These bitter feelings are often projected on the very system they once loved. Most likely the teacher never acquired the necessary skills to create a positive learning atmosphere. Disruptive behavior is a universal problem, with so many factors and numerous variables that must be considered. Effective classroom management impacts our entire society. Without a place for meaningful, safe learning to occur, students are robbed of one of the most significant places for education and personal growth to take place. The purpose of this study was to focus on classroom management that allows the classroom teacher to deal positively with misbehavior through preventing undesirable student behavior and focusing on actual steps that can be taken to manage discipline problems when they arise. This allows both teachers and students to be successful and thrive in their world of learning.

### *Research objectives*

This study will have two research objectives:

1. To prevent student misbehavior through identifying classroom management strategies that guides student learning and promotes positive behavior.
2. To provide practical ways of dealing with student misbehavior.

#### *Definitions of terms*

*Classroom management:* Refers to the processes and provisions that are necessary to create and maintain environments in which teaching and learning can occur (Duke & Meckel, 1984, p. 3).

*Consequences:* What happens when rules are broken or followed.

*Disruptive behavior:* Actions which are annoying or disruptive, not malicious in nature.

*Procedures:* Communicate expectations for behavior. Usually apply to a specific activity, e.g., late homework, using the bathroom.

*Rules:* Identifies general expectations or standards, e.g., respect others and their property.

#### *Assumptions of the study*

The belief that the majority of teachers strive to serve their students in a way that academically and behaviorally helps them be successful. Teachers using their personal, unique style, allow for the following assumptions:

1. Student behavior in the classroom is a major concern to all teachers.
2. Classroom management varies in style, technique and delivery from teacher to teacher.

#### *Limitations of the study*

The fact that classroom behavior is impacted by numerous internal and external variables, the fact that participants of this study are greatly varied in background and experience, and the fact that the number of participants represent a limited locale, the limitations to this study are as follows:

1. Classroom management is multi-faceted, and therefore is difficult to identify and address all problem areas in this study.

2. Respondents to the survey will have varying degrees of experience with classroom management. Consequently, their responses will be varied.
3. The study reflects a small sample that was sent to 98 educators at a Northeast Wisconsin high school. Therefore the results cannot be generalized.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review will discuss two aspects of classroom management. Preventing undesirable student behavior will be the first item discussed, then focusing on actual steps that can be taken to manage student behavior will be presented.

There are several practical methods teachers can utilize to properly address student behavior. Preventing undesirable behaviors and maintaining class control when problems arise requires great skill and knowledge. "The ability to manage students' behavior is the number one concern of beginning teachers, and is near the top for most experienced teachers" (Partin, 1995, p. 21). "Each year, teachers confront increasing numbers of children who arrive at school unprepared to follow rules, cooperate or respect authority" (MacKenzie, 1996, p. ix). Often the student lives in a state of chaos outside the classroom, with little adult guidance and supervision, making the task of the teacher, one that is at best, extremely challenging.

#### *Preventing Discipline Problems*

Where does a teacher begin to lay the groundwork designed to prevent discipline problems in the classroom? Emmer et al. (1989) states to begin that process, it should be noted that good classroom management can only begin with the proper arrangement of the physical setting. Environment that is orderly and well thought out with purpose starts the foundation on which the teacher will build. Having 25 students in one room for a class period creates many challenges. Appropriate layout of the class desks and materials will help reduce interruptions, delays, and problems. Emmer, Evertson, Sanford, Clements and Worsham (1989) emphasized four keys to good room arrangement.

1. Keep high traffic areas free of congestion. Such areas include doorways, supply areas, teacher and student desks, and the pencil sharpener. Misplaced desks, bookshelves or other items that clutter the traffic area, impede the ease which students can move and also create

possible safety hazards. Electrical cords must be considered as safety hazards and steps taken to either remove the cord from the traffic area or obtain the proper covering that prevents the cord from tripping and/or entangling the student.

2. Be sure students are easily seen by the teacher. If a teacher cannot see all the students, it will be difficult to see who needs help or to prevent disruptions. Be aware of the student who hides behind another student to avoid eye contact with the teacher. Remove any physical barriers that exist that prevent teacher-student eye contact. Easel boards and portable bookshelves are an example.
3. Keep frequently used teaching materials and student supplies readily accessible. All students and parents should first be clearly informed what supplies they are expected to provide at the beginning of the school year. The organizational process used to access and store those supplies needs to also be clearly defined. Student success can be hampered when items that are used frequently are not readily accessible.
4. Be certain students can easily hear and see instructional presentations and displays. The fastest way to lose the attention of a student with disinterest and to make a well-prepared presentation ineffective is to not consider the barriers that hinder a student's visual or hearing field. The teacher should be aware of the student who consistently is squinting in an attempt to see what is being presented and either alert the school nurse or proper personnel of the possibility a student may require eye glasses. A short stature student will probably not do well if he or she is sitting the back of the classroom. It is also very important that the volume of the teacher's voice and/or video be at an appropriate level for all to hear. "White noise" may also be considered as a possibility for quiet, self-paced classroom time.

Proper physical setting is simply the beginning in taking the necessary steps that are proactive in preventing student misbehavior. At the core of classroom management is the need for structure and safety in the classroom. This provides the beginning framework necessary for focusing on the path that will provide for the greatest learning. According to Mendler and Curwin (1983), in a well-defined, safe and structured classroom, many of the conflicts and inappropriate behaviors are prevented because the student knows what the boundaries are. When rules, procedures, and daily routines have been clearly defined and established, students are less prone to test the system. When this structure has not been established, everyone loses. The teacher becomes exhausted with the daily battles and the entire classroom loses out on time that could be spent in instruction.

Partin (1995) compiled a list of practical strategies and management techniques derived from experienced teachers' depositories of "all the things I wish I had known when I started" or the "things I had to learn the hard way." The purpose of the following tips is to help the teacher organize and manage the classroom:

1. Showing interest in the lives of your students before and after class can pay big dividends when it comes to classroom management. Partin referred to making an investment in the psychological bank account of each student. The old adage, "They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care" does not imply one needs to be their buddy, but to show concern in their lives is important. Partin stated if you have made regular deposits to the psychological bank account, you can make withdrawals later when you ask students to comply with your requests.
2. Maintain your classroom momentum at all costs. Most discipline problems occur when something has broken the momentum of the lesson. This can be beyond the teacher's control (knock at the door, fire engine siren). Teachers can also unwittingly break their

own momentum due to being unprepared (i.e. such things as failing to have the audio-visual equipment ready or misplacing handouts).

3. Be sure your rules and expectations are clear. Sometimes it may require that the teacher restate the expectations in various ways and ask for feedback and necessary clarification from the students to ensure each student properly understands the rules and expectations.
4. Avoid causing students to lose face in front of their peers. To challenge or embarrass a student in front of their peers is humiliating to the student and might cause them to feel shame towards themselves. This is harmful to a person's self worth and is to be avoided whenever possible! The other reaction a student may have to losing face in front of their peers is to feel the need to protect themselves, causing them to either verbally or physically retaliate.
5. Keep your eyes moving. Eye contact is a teacher's most powerful tool to maintain classroom control. Most potential classroom distractions can be resolved immediately through direct eye contact.
6. Continually monitor what is happening in your classroom. Avoid standing or sitting with your back to the class. Do not leave the classroom unattended, if at all possible.
7. Practice the principle of "escalation." If you have a small problem, use a small tool. If your initial strategy does not work, you can always escalate to a more potent strategy. Direct eye contact might be the lowest level of challenge. If that does not work, move into close proximity of the student. All of this can be done without losing momentum.
8. Do not overreact. When you lose your composure in class, they, not you, are in control of your behavior.
9. Develop selective hearing. Learn to ignore some minor infractions. This is especially true when you sense a student is trying to make an issue with you. If there are blatant,

aggressive outbursts, they must be dealt with immediately. Always remember, some situations that are ignored during class can be dealt with later.

10. Understand the school's student behavior code. When it comes to serious infractions (fights, drugs, truancy, alcohol), know what the school's discipline actions are. A teacher should know how to report these problems and they should know how parents are to be involved in these issues.
11. Reinforce positive behavior. Utilize these opportunities to recognize these students and acknowledge what they have done. All too often these are the students who usually don't create a disturbance. Find ways, regardless of how big or small the actions are and reinforce the student's good behavior. Catch the student being good and reinforce that behavior.
12. Use praise effectively. Praise needs to be used in specific ways, not just a general "good job." Examples of this might be: (a) "Your extra effort today on your welds was great," or (b) "Excellent work on your blueprints!" Always keep in mind that public praise does not always work for everyone. Some peers may give flack to the student receiving praise and shout out, "Teacher's pet!" In this case it may be better to provide the student with private words of praise.
13. Express appreciation when appropriate. Koenig (1995) suggested saying these things in a low voice or privately. Most students tend to get embarrassed when they are singled out. However, all students thrive on appreciation and positive feedback.
14. Develop classroom routines at the beginning of the school year. As clearly as possible explain to your students how certain classroom activities will be handled (e.g., attendance, tardiness, bathroom breaks and late homework).

The foundation for a successful school year is laid on the first day of school.

Everything you do sets the tone for the rest of the year. Your three primary

objectives the first day of school are to get acquainted, establish your expectations and to stimulate enthusiasm and interest in what you are teaching (Partin, 1995, p.21).

15. Be careful of touching students who are angry. Some students will erupt if this happens.
16. Be aware of concealment activities occasionally used by students. Make sure you frequently move about the class. This helps to discourage this type of behavior. Examples of this would be passing notes, piling up materials on his or her desk to hide their food or drink, or covering his or her mouth and whispering.
17. Avoid punishing the whole class for the misbehavior of one student. This is not always possible, but do your best to address the issue with the guilty party.
18. Do not be too quick to send the student to the principal's office. If this is done prematurely or too frequently, the message conveyed to the administrators could be that you have poor class management.
19. Do not send students out in the hallway for punishment. Students may get hurt away from your presence, or reinforce their ability to get out of work or into trouble.
20. Consult with other professionals when you feel overwhelmed by a student's challenging behavior. Utilize your principal, other teachers, school psychologists, or counselors. More than likely they have dealt with the same problems and you can learn from their successes and failures.
21. Expect consistent and accurate completion of academic work. This is a critical goal for effective management. When procedures for managing student work are not working or when students are not held accountable for their performance, then several problems can occur. Grades are tangible evidence of a student's accomplishments both to themselves and to their parents. Consequently, it is essential that a teacher's grading system accurately

reflect the quality of a student's performance. There are several items to consider when establishing your grading policy:

- A. Determine whether your department, school, or district has any grading policies.
- B. Identify the components of your grading system: (1) daily grades, (2) journal grades, (3) organized notebook of assignments, (4) project grades, (5) assignment grades, (6) tests and quizzes, (7) absences and tardies, and (8) make-up work.
- C. Determine a means of providing feedback and monitoring student achievement

Partin (1995), states that the ability to manage student's behaviors is the number one concern of beginning teachers, and is near the top for most experienced teachers. On the opposite side, he believes that the ability to develop harmonious, mutually respectful relationships with students is one of the best predictors of who will survive in the teaching profession. Partin suggests the following tips for classroom management gleaned from research and observations of effective teachers.

1. Expect to be tested by some students to determine the boundaries of acceptable behavior and your competency to respond. It is important to react immediately, calmly, and appropriately to misbehavior, but be careful not to overreact.
2. Practice the principle of "escalation." If your initial strategy does not work, use a more aggressive means of discipline. Eye contact is one of the lowest levels of challenge. Should this not work, you can move into the student's body space near his or her desk and, if necessary, verbally address the student.
3. Use the power of silence. After you have made a behavioral directive, pause and maintain eye contact. Silence is both powerful and constructive. Take a couple of deep breaths to keep yourself calm. You do not want to display fear or hostility toward the student.
4. Do not overreact. When you lose your composure, you are no longer in control,

someone else is. There are students in every class who like to test a teacher's "hot buttons."

Remember, most students' misbehavior is not maliciously done; rather it is inappropriate and not acceptable. Avoid dwelling on a student's bad behavior; the purpose is to correct the behavior, not alienate the student.

5. Divide and conquer. If two or three students are misbehaving, separate the offenders as necessary. Sometimes this means putting them in separate groups, while other times it means changing the seating chart.
6. Never argue with a student in class. Offer to discuss the matter privately, but not in front of class. Someone is going to lose face. Even if it is the student and not you, you have now alienated the student.
7. When you do discuss the student's misbehavior, make it clear that you find the behavior, not the student unacceptable. It is important to be firm, yet understanding. If it is possible, acknowledge what the student does well, yet encourage improvement in his or her behavior.
8. Do not be too quick to send students to the principal's office or to call their parents. If this is done too often or too quickly, it implies that you have a problem with classroom management. When continual or blatant misbehavior persists, this is the time to involve others.
9. Do not send students out into the hallway as punishment. The main reason for this is liability issues. However, for some students, the hallway can be an adventurous place to be a reward, when meant as a punishment.
10. For persistent, serious problems with a student, use the private teacher-student conference. Explain to the student in a non-threatening way exactly what behavior you find inappropriate and why. Avoid listening to his or her version of the story and push

him or her toward a plan to correct the behavior in the future and to make a commitment to follow through with it.

### *Dealing With Discipline Problems*

It is a given that preventative measures are more desirable than reactive ones. However, the best preventative environment does not ensure that reactive strategies are not needed at times.

According to Emmer et al. (1989) there are many disruptive behaviors in the classroom ranging from verbal distractions (talking out of turn, name calling, laughing), off-task behaviors (reading other material, daydreaming, group discussions), and disrespect toward teachers and other students (arguing, joking around, inappropriate comments). While the goal is to not merely control the student's behavior, surface behaviors can be dealt with immediately and with very little disruption to the learning process.

Emmer et al. (1989) suggests using the following non-verbal responses are one way to deal with minor misbehavior. Ignore the behavior. This is sometimes the best way to deal with a situation. By withholding reinforcement, the goal is that the behavior will lessen and change. This method should be used only with behaviors that cause little interference to the classroom. Examples of this might be tapping of the foot, talking out of turn, or interrupting. One risk of this method is that the student may think the teacher is aware of what is going on and continue the behavior.

You can ignore inappropriate behavior when it meets the following criteria: a) It is of short duration and not likely to persist or spread; b) It is a minor deviation; or c) Reacting to it would interrupt a lesson or call attention to the behavior. (Emmer et al., 1989, p. 105).

Silently staring at a student who is misbehaving communicates dislike for what they are doing. Should that not work, walk toward the student, shake your head "no," or merely stand in close proximity. Proximity control, according to Emmer, is useful when the student is preoccupied with off-task behavior. This might include a student who is reading material other than classroom work. Consequently, the

student may not ever look up. These types of techniques are subtle and usually only picked up on by the student who needs the correction.

Should these approaches fail to cause the student to comply, Emmer suggests that direct verbal reminders would be the next approach. Caution must be used to not unnecessarily humiliate or embarrass the student in front of peers. It is important to focus on the behavior you want the student to model, rather than the misbehavior you are attempting to change. During this whole process, remember to talk to your students as you would adults.

Most misbehavior is nothing more than a momentary slip by an otherwise cooperative student and should be handled as such. As long as we remember the principle of minimum intervention, correcting inappropriate behavior will be painless for both student and teacher. (Holden, 1989, p. 81)

Emmer et al. (1989) states behaviors that should concern every teacher are lack of involvement in learning activities, prolonged inattention or work avoidance, and blatant violations of classroom rules and procedures. He suggests four ways to manage inappropriate behavior:

1. When the student is off task-who is not working on an assignment-redirect his or her attention to the task: "Robert, you should be writing now." Or "Becky, the assignment is to complete all the problems on the page."
2. Make eye contact with or move closer to the student. Use a signal, such as a finger to the lips or a head shake, to prompt the appropriate behavior. Monitor until the student complies.
3. If the student is not following a procedure correctly, simply reminding the student of the correct procedure may be effective. You can either state the correct procedure or ask the student if he or she remembers it.
4. Ask or tell the student to stop the inappropriate behavior. Then monitor until it stops

and the student begins constructive activity.

According to Mendler (1997) when dealing with students who display difficult behavior, usually labeled as "problem students," "troublemakers," "defiant," or "out of control," two things should be considered. When such behavior is encountered, one needs to look at the immediate response and a long-range strategy. Initially the concern is to bring the distraction to a stop, it is important not to fuel the problem by letting one's emotions of anger and anxiety get out of control. Telling a student how you feel is acceptable, but avoid an argument or an emotional no-win situation, otherwise a power struggle between the student and teacher may ensue.

Mendler (1997) suggested the following defusing statements be used to avoid power struggles.

1. I'm disappointed that you are choosing to use such angry words, even though I'm sure there is much to be upset about.
2. I'm really concerned! It is very important that I understand why you are so mad. Please tell me later when I can really listen.
3. You are just not yourself today and that must feel lousy.
4. We both know there are other ways of telling how we feel while still being respectful. I look forward to hearing from you after class.
5. Throwing chairs doesn't make problems go away. It only creates new ones. Let's use our words to say why we feel so mad!
6. I really want to understand what I did to annoy you. But swearing at me doesn't help. Let's talk later when we can be alone.
7. Wow, you must be feeling awfully mad to use those words in front of everyone.
8. Wow, you must be mad to embarrass me like this in front of everyone. It makes me want to fight back, but then we'd never solve the problem. Later is the time to handle this.

Mendler (1997) states that if the power struggle does not come to an agreeable close for the time being, it may be necessary for you to say something like the following to the student: "Frank, this needs to stop right now or I will have to ask you to leave. My hope is that you decide to stay, but if you feel you must leave, I will understand. If you do leave, come back when you are ready." Mendler (1997) continues to say that usually this occurs when the teacher implements a consequence and the student refuses to comply with or cooperate with what he or she is told. The situation intensifies when the teacher, in a more adamant tone, demands that the student comply and once again the student refuses or makes an inappropriate comment. At this point individuals have their pride on the line and an audience of students watching to see the final outcome.

There will be times when it is necessary to contact the parents. A phone conversation should be informative and effective. Most discipline problems can be solved over the phone. Canter (1991) suggested the following procedure when making a phone call to the parents.

1. Begin with a statement of concern. Be positive and sensitive. Do not complain or place blame. You are calling because you care. Let the parent know his or her child is your concern. Example: "Ms. Smith, I'm calling because I'm concerned about how little work Jess is doing," or "I'm concerned about how Brian gets along with other students."
2. Describe the specific behavior that necessitated the call. Tell specific, observable things his or her child did or did not do. Always mention the specific behavior and the number of times the problem has occurred. Example: "The reason I'm concerned is Seth shouted out in class seven times today," or "Lawrence refused to do any of his work in class for two days now." Avoid making negative, judgmental statements. Example: "The reason I'm calling is your child has a bad attitude," or "your child is mean," or "your child is lazy."

3. Describe steps you have taken to solve the problem. Example: "I had a conference with your son about his fighting. He was sent to the principal's office when he continued to fight, and the principal and I had a conference regarding how to help him."
4. Get parental input: (a) ask if there is anything he or she can add that will help and (b) listen carefully.
5. Present your solutions to the problem: a) tell the parents exactly what you are going to do, b) tell parents what you would like them to do, c) tell parent to let the child know you have called, and d) have parents tell the child that you and they are concerned.
6. Express confidence in your ability to solve the problem: a) parents need to know they are dealing with a skilled teacher, b) let the parents know that you know what to do, and c) emphasize that with the parents, support you will get results. Example: "Mr. Hill, I've worked with many children like your Tom. Don't worry. Together we will help him," or "Mrs. Jacobs, I've had a lot of experience with young people who have the same problem as Tamar. I know that by working together we will get results."
7. Inform parents about follow-up contact from you: a) tell the parents you will follow up on the conversation, and b) assure them of your commitment to their son or daughter.  
Example: "I will contact you in two days and let you know how things are going."

Just as important *what* a teachers says, is *how* the teacher communicates. Emmer et al. (1989) states that parents will react best if they don't feel that they are being held responsible for their child's behavior in school, so don't put the parent on the defensive. Canter (1997) emphasizes a few things not to do when contacting parents:

1. Do not apologize for "bothering" the parent. Remember, you are acting in his or her child's best interests.
2. Do not hesitate to call a parent at work if you are unable to reach him or her at home.

3. Contact both parents when appropriate.
4. Do not make vague statements about student's behavior.

Emmer et al. (1989) also suggests to remember to approach parents as team members. Both the teacher and parents want what is best for the child. It is also important to remember to that parents who had difficulty in school themselves may be intimidated by schools and teachers. This may come across as avoidance, anger, or defensiveness. Teachers should remain respectful and non-threatening. Emmer also encourages the use of constructive assertiveness, empathetic responding, and problem solving in the interactions with parents.

In summary, according to Koenig (1995), it is important to remember that preventing problem behavior and developing effective classroom management is a series of day-to-day victories that occur over an extended period of time. It won't happen overnight. It takes thoughtful planning, implementation and maintenance. Well-developed plans implemented by a positive and respectful teacher result in well-managed classrooms that are conducive to learning. Teachers, by learning skill and gaining experience can foster a classroom in which students feel valued and motivated. A statement in the introduction deserves repeating:

Good classroom management does not just happen. Smoothly running classrooms whose students are highly involved in learning activities and which are free from disruption and chronic misbehavior are not accidental. They exist because effective teachers have a very clear idea of the types of classroom conditions and student behaviors that are needed for good learning environments (Emmer et al. (1989).

When teachers remember that they do not teach *subjects*, but rather *students*, a community within the classroom develops that fosters positive behavior and empowers and nurtures the learner *and* the teacher.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Introduction*

This chapter will include a description of the subjects from which the data was collected, a description of the instruments used in obtaining data will be described, the procedure for determining what data was used. How data was obtained, and the methods used for analyzing the statistical data will also be reviewed. This chapter will conclude with the methodological limitations.

#### *Subject Selection and Description*

Approval for the survey was received from the IRB before proceeding with the study and a copy of the letter of approval was included in Appendix C. A public high school with an enrollment of 1518 students, located in northeast Wisconsin was chosen as the place to conduct this study. All teachers from this Wisconsin school received a letter in their mailboxes of the intent of the study and a request to participate. Attached to the letter of intent was a one page, 20-question survey. The Principal of the school was initially contacted and his approval sought prior to contacting the teachers. A copy of the letter of intent was included in Appendix A.

#### *Instrumentation*

The survey tool was an original design, constructed specifically for this study, by this researcher, therefore, a means to measure the validity or reliability of this study does not exist. A copy of the finalized survey was included in Appendix B. The survey portion of this study was designed to be easy and required between 5-10 minutes to complete. Each individual question required a simple yes or no response.

#### *Data Collection*

Permission was sought from the Principal of this Wisconsin high school. This occurred during the Spring semester of 2003. Once permission was granted, a copy of the intent letter and survey questionnaire was placed in each teacher's school mailbox. There was a specifically designated receptacle for completed surveys to be placed. There was a one week period in which the survey forms were to be completed and returned.

#### *Data Analysis*

The data was analyzed by manually tabulating the number of respondents to each individual question. The percent of yes and no responses to each question were calculated and recorded in a self-designed table format.

#### *Limitations*

The first limitation of the instrument was that it had no measures of validity or reliability. Yes or no questions only measure generalities and did not allow room for individual exceptions. Another limitation was that only one school participated in this study, which limited the overall interpretation of this study to be considered.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### *Introduction*

This chapter will include the results of the study. Item analysis will be discussed as they related the research objectives of this study. This chapter concludes with the research objectives under investigation.

#### *Results*

There were 98 teachers who were initially contacted by mail to participate in the study. Of those 98, 59 or 60%, completed and returned the questionnaire. Refer to Table 1 on page 27 for an overview of the following findings.

Respondents answered questions regarding the prevention of undesirable behavior as follows: When asked if they had an effective classroom management plan, 89% respondents said yes, 9% said no, and one respondent did not answer the question. When asked if they had utilized a formal classroom management plan, 15% said yes, while 83% said no and one respondent did not answer the question. 27% of the respondents said yes that they would like to develop and implement a classroom management plan, while 69% said no and two did not answer the question. There were no respondents that said yes that verbal praise should be used only in exceptional situations, 100% said no. 69% respondents said that yes they were quick to praise any type of positive behavior and 28% said no, while one did not answer the question. When respondents were asked if they try to keep their classroom so quiet you could hear a pin drop, none said yes and 96% said no; two did not answer the question. 97% of the respondents said yes to being able to tolerate a low level of noise, while 1.6% said no to the same question. One did not answer the question. 49.2% of the respondents said yes that the school's behavior code is clearly defined and communicated. 50.8% said no to the same question. 17% said yes that the school's behavior code is consistently being upheld, 81% said no and one did not answer the question. 93% of the respondents said

yes, as a whole, their students show respect for one another; 7% said no. 100% of the respondents said yes, as a whole, their students show them respect.

Respondents answered questions regarding actual steps that can be taken to manage discipline problems are as follows: 75% of the respondents said yes there is at least one student who displays challenging behavior on a daily basis. 25% said no to the same question. 6.7% of the respondents said yes when a student is being disruptive in class, they ignore the behavior and hope it stops without intervention. 86% said no they did not ignore the behavior and hope it stops without intervention. Four did not answer the question. 100% of the respondents said their students feel safe in their classroom. 96.6% of the respondents said yes they felt safe in their classroom, while 1.6% said no and one did not answer the question. 85% of the respondents said that yes the administration was available to assist them with difficult behavioral problems in the classroom, 15% said no to the same question. 86% of the respondents said yes they did not hesitate to call the parents of a student with frequent disruptive behavior, 12% said no and one did not answer the question. 95% of the respondents said yes that they utilize preventative measures in their classroom to minimize disruptive behavior, 5% said no to the same question. When respondents were asked if they had a system of documenting disruptive behavior in the classroom, 56% said yes and 42% said no. When a student is being disruptive in class, 73% said yes they find that entering close proximity to him/her quickly resolves the problematic behavior, 22% said no to the question and three did not answer the question.

### *Research Objectives*

The first objective was to research ways that prevent student misbehavior through identifying classroom management strategies that guides student learning and promotes positive behavior. The following survey items dealt with this objective:

1. I have an effective classroom management plan.
2. I have never utilized a formal classroom management plan.

3. I would like to develop and implement a classroom management plan.
9. As a whole, my students show respect for one another.
10. As a whole, my students show me respect.
13. I utilize preventative measures in my classroom to minimize disruptive behavior.
14. I try to keep my classroom so quiet you could hear a pin drop.
15. I can tolerate a low level of noise in my classroom.
16. Verbal praise should be used only in exceptional situations.
17. I am quick to praise any type of positive behavior.
18. Our school's behavior code is clearly defined and communicated.

The second research objective was to research ways that provide practical ways of dealing with student misbehavior. The following survey items dealt with this objective:

4. I have at least one student who displays challenging/disruptive behavior on a daily basis.
5. When I have a student that is being disruptive in class, I ignore the behavior and hope it stops without intervention.
6. My students feel safe in my classroom.
7. I feel safe in my classroom.
8. The administration is available to assist me with difficult behavioral problems in my classroom.
11. I have a system of documenting disruptive behavior in my classroom.
12. I do not hesitate to call the parents of a student with frequent disruptive behavior.
19. Our schools behavior code is consistently upheld.
20. When a student is being disruptive during class, I find that entering close proximity to him/her quickly resolves the problematic behavior.

The survey questions dealt with two areas: a classroom management plan consistent with the research objectives of preventing undesirable student behavior and focusing on actual steps that can be taken to manage discipline problems.

Questions regarding a classroom management plan included: (a) Is your plan effective? (b) Do you use a plan? (c) Would you like to develop and implement one? (d) Do you have a system for documenting disruptive students? and (e) Do you call parents when necessary?

Questions concerning administration centered around the school's code of behavior and the administration's availability to assist with student misbehavior (intervention). For example, (a) Is the school's code of behavior consistently upheld? (b) Is the school's code of behavior clearly defined, and (c) Is the administration available to assist in difficult behavioral problems.

Questions regarding students focused on respect and safety, (prevention) to include: (a) Do you feel safe in the classroom? (b) Do the students show respect for one another? and (c) Do the students show respect for the teacher?

### *Conclusion*

Most respondents reported it is necessary to have a classroom management plan, but surprisingly, most do not utilize such a plan. While most said they utilize preventative measures in their classroom to minimize disruptive behavior, just over half of the respondents have a system by which they document disruptive behavior. Most respondents do not hesitate to call parents and also feel that the administration is supportive in assisting them with difficult behavioral problems in their classroom.

Most respondents found that entering into a students close proximity helped to quickly resolve problematic behavior and most were also quick to praise any type of positive behavior. Almost all respondents do not try to maintain a perfectly quiet environment and are comfortable in tolerating a low level of noise.

Barely half of the respondents responded that their school's behavior code was clearly defined

and communicated efficiently to students. 16.9% responded that the school's behavior code was consistently being upheld. All agreed that their students felt safe in their classroom and the majority of respondents felt safe as well in their classroom.

Table 1

Item Analysis (N = 59)

| Item  | Yes   | No    | No Response |
|---|-------|-------|-------------|
| 1. I have an effective classroom management plan.   | 89%   | 8.4%  | 1           |
| 2. I have never utilized a formal classroom management plan.  | 9%    | 83%   | 1           |
| 3. I would like to develop and implement a classroom management plan.   | 27%   | 69%   | 2           |
| 4. I have at least one student who displays challenging/ disruptive behavior on a daily basis.  | 75%   | 25%   | 0           |
| 5. When I have a student that is being disruptive in class, I ignore the behavior and hope it stops without intervention.                       | 6.7%  | 86%   | 4           |
| 6. My students feel safe in my classroom.   | 100%  | 0     | 0           |
| 7. I feel safe in my classroom.   | 96.6% | 1.6%  | 1           |
| 8. The administration is available to assist me with difficult behavioral problems in my classroom.   | 85%   | 15%   | 0           |
| 9. As a whole, my students show respect for one another.  | 93%   | 7%    | 0           |
| 10. As a whole, my students show me respect.  | 100%  | 0     | 0           |
| 11. I have a system of documenting disruptive behavior in my classroom.   | 56%   | 42%   | 1           |
| 12. I do not hesitate to call the parents of a student with frequent disruptive behavior.   | 86%   | 12%   | 1           |
| 13. I utilize preventative measures in my classroom to minimize disruptive behavior.  | 95%   | 5%    | 0           |
| 14. I try to keep my classroom so quiet you could hear a pin drop.  | 0     | 96%   | 2           |
| 15. I can tolerate a low level of noise in my classroom.  | 97%   | 1.6%  | 1           |
| 16. Verbal praise should be used only in exceptional situations.  | 0     | 100%  | 0           |
| 17. I am quick to praise any type of positive behavior.   | 69%   | 28%   | 1           |
| 18. Our school's behavior code is clearly defined and communicated.   | 49.2% | 50.8% | 0           |
| 19. Our school's behavior code is consistently upheld.  | 17%   | 81%   | 1           |
| 20. When a student is being disruptive during class, I find that entering close proximity to him/her quickly resolves the problematic behavior. | 73%   | 22%   | 3           |

CHAPTER FIVE  
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*Introduction*

This chapter will be divided into three sections: (a) discussion of the results of the study will be compared to the recommendations made in Chapter II, (b) conclusions will be presented based on the results from the survey, and (c) recommendations related to this study with recommendations to the school and teachers who participated in this study.

*Discussion*

The purpose of preventing undesirable student behavior and focusing on actual steps that can be taken to manage discipline problems as discussed in the literature review and compared to the results of the survey are quite supportive of each other. According to the literature review, having an effective classroom management plan that addresses both the prevention of student misbehavior and the correction of student misbehavior is paramount to a teacher's success in the classroom. According to Partin (1995), "The ability to manage students' behavior is the number one concern of beginning teachers, and is near the top for most experienced teachers." The study revealed that most teachers believe it is necessary to have a classroom management plan, but surprisingly, most teachers do not utilize such a plan. With this being said, the survey indicated that 16 of the 98 teachers surveyed would like help developing and implementing a classroom management plan. It is critical for the administration to address this issue and properly equip its teachers for managing their classrooms.

Caution to not unnecessarily humiliate or embarrass the student in front of their peers and to talk to the student displaying misbehavior as you would talk to an adult was reinforced in the literature review. Teachers are encouraging positive behavior as evidenced in the study. Respect for each other and respect toward the teachers was clearly affirmed in the survey results. This action needs to be publicly praised so that everyone will continue to display this type of behavior. Yet, the literature

cautions that praise needs to be used in specific ways, not just in general terms. The study revealed that most teachers are quick to praise any type of positive behavior.

This study indicates that it is important to take necessary steps that do not fuel a problem by letting one's emotions of anger and anxiety get out of control. Consulting other professionals when a teacher feels overwhelmed by a student's behavior was discussed in this study. This might include talking to other teachers, counselors, or the administration. In the survey results, 85% of the teachers responding said the administration is available to assist with difficult behavior.

This study also agrees that parents are a key team player when dealing with student misbehavior. Contacting the parents is necessary when the student displays frequent disruptive behavior. The survey results indicated 86% of teachers do not hesitate to call parents when it is necessary. Evidently, not all teachers are comfortable in enlisting a parent as a solution to their students' problematic behaviors.

Classroom management is a series of day-to-day decisions that are consistently made throughout the school year. Planning, implementation and continual evaluation of one's classroom management plan are necessary for every teacher. Good classroom management does not just happen. Smooth running classrooms exist because effective teachers have definite expectations for their students' behavior and clearly defined consequences for those who chose to fight the system. The goal of the teacher needs to be providing an environment where learning can take place. For this to happen, a management plan must be defined and implemented.

### *Conclusions*

This study reinforced the findings in the survey. The survey indicated that 89% of the teachers had a classroom management plan, however 27% said they would like help to develop and implement a classroom management plan. Only 56% of the respondents have a developed means by which they can document disruptive behavior. It is not known what type of classroom management plan the teachers have. The survey does not indicate whether the teachers have had any classroom management classes

either during their college experience or while they have been teaching. Developing an effective classroom management plan and implementing it is a significant need expressed by the teachers of this high school.

How the schools behavior code was defined and consistently upheld was a controversial issue. Fifty-one percent of the respondents said the schools' behavior code is not clearly defined. Eighty-one percent of the respondents said the schools' behavior code is not consistently upheld. Obviously there needs to be open dialogue between the teachers and administration to see what the issues are and how they can be addressed appropriately.

Cangelosi (1988) stated that the most common complaint express by students, teachers, parents and school administrators involves the following: lack of pupil discipline, poor classroom management and control and disruptive student behavior. It is critical that the school administration addresses these issues and for teachers to be proactive in improving their skills regarding classroom behavior.

#### *Recommendations*

1. There needs to be time spent helping the teachers develop an effective classroom management plan. This can be addressed during teacher inservice days using a guest lecturer or a brainstorming session by small groups. The key is to discuss it and start moving.
2. A system for documenting disruptive behavior needs to be developed and implemented. This system needs to be user friendly for the teacher to benefit from it.
3. The behavior code needs to be clearly defined and communicated. There needs to be discussion between among the teachers and administrators as to where the breakdown is with the issue of the behavior code.
4. Once the behavior code is defined and communicated, the issue of consistently upholding it needs to be discussed—areas of inconsistency and how they can be altered.

The administration, students and the teachers with a classroom management plan are the three critical components that affect the daily classroom. Each of these components need time and attention to provide the best possible learning environment for the student.

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## APPENDIX A

## Consent Form

I understand that by returning this questionnaire, I am giving my informed consent as a participating volunteer in this study. I understand the basic nature of the study and agree that any potential risks are exceedingly small. One potential risk may be that after compiling the results of the survey, some teachers or administrators may become uncomfortable with any changes that may result. I also understand the potential benefits, such as identifying areas of classroom management that can be strengthened, may result from the successful completion of this study. I am aware that the information is being sought in a specific manner so that only minimal identifiers are necessary and so that confidentiality is guaranteed. No names will be requested and in no way will participants be identified. The surveys will also be destroyed as soon as the data is tabulated. I realize that I have the right to refuse to participate and that my right to withdraw from participation at any time during the study will be respected with no coercion or prejudice.

Questions or concerns about the research study should be addressed to Vern Widmer, the researcher, phone (920) 231-4045, or to Dr. Amy Carole Schlieve, research advisor, phone (715)834-0270. Questions about the rights of research subjects can be addressed to Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11 Harvey Hall, Menomonie, WI, 54751, phone (715) 232-1126.

## APPENDIX B

## Classroom Management Survey

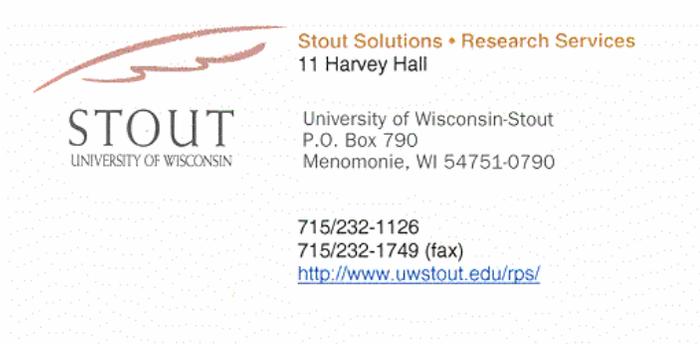
Please take five minutes to answer the following YES or NO questions. Your help is greatly appreciated. Remember, participation is strictly voluntary and you may quit at any time.

**Thank you, Vern Widmer**

| <b>CIRCLE</b> | <b>QUESTION</b>  |
|---------------|--|
| YES NO        | 1. I have an effective classroom management plan.  |
| YES NO        | 2. I have never utilized a formal classroom management plan.   |
| YES NO        | 3. I would like help to develop and implement a classroom management plan.   |
| YES NO        | 4. I have at least one student who displays challenging/disruptive behavior on a daily basis.  |
| YES NO        | 5. When I have a student that is being disruptive in class, I ignore the behavior and hope it stops without intervention.                    |
| YES NO        | 6. My students feel safe in my classroom   |
| YES NO        | 7. I feel safe in my classroom.  |
| YES NO        | 8. The administration is available to assist me with difficult behavioral problems in my classroom.  |
| YES NO        | 9. As a whole, my students show respect for one another.   |
| YES NO        | 10. As a whole, my students show me respect.   |
| YES NO        | 11. I have a system of documenting disruptive behavior in my classroom.  |
| YES NO        | 12. I do not hesitate to call the parents of a student with frequent disruptive behavior.  |
| YES NO        | 13. I utilize preventative measures in my classroom to minimize disruptive behavior.   |
| YES NO        | 14. I try to keep my classroom so quiet you could hear a pin drop.   |
| YES NO        | 15. I can tolerate a low level of noise in my classroom.   |
| YES NO        | 16. Verbal praise should be used only in exceptional situations.   |
| YES NO        | 17. I am quick to praise any type of positive behavior.  |
| YES NO        | 18. Our school's behavior code is clearly defined and communicated.  |
| YES NO        | 19. Our school's behavior code is consistently upheld.   |
| YES NO        | 20. When a student is being disruptive during class, I find that entering close proximity to them quickly resolves the problematic behavior. |

## APPENDIX C

## Stout IRB Approval Letter



**Date:** May 22, 2003

**To:** Vernon J. Widmer

cc: Amy Schlieve  
Psychology

**From:** Sue Foxwell, Research Administrator and Human  
Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional  
Review Board for the Protection of Human  
Subjects in Research (IRB)

**Subject: Protection of Human Subjects--Expedited Review**

Your project, "Classroom Management," has been approved by the IRB through the expedited review process. This protocol has been approved provided the following items are addressed. Then the measures you have taken to protect human subjects are adequate to protect everyone involved, including subjects and researchers.

- Provide benefits and risks in the informed consent and survey.
- The research advisor did not indicate whether she had completed the Human Subjects Training.

This project is approved through May 19, 2004. Research not completed by this date must be submitted again outlining changes, expansions, etc. Annual review and approval by the IRB is required.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and best wishes with your project.

**\*NOTE: This is the only notice you will receive – no paper copy will be sent.**

SF:ls