

# EXAMINING BEHAVIORAL TECHNIQUES, ENCOURAGEMENT, AND CONSISTENCY IN CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Diane Hamilton  
Ashford University  
diane.hamilton@faculty.ashford.edu

## ABSTRACT

*Classroom disruptive issues have been rigorously studied for decades. Some of the top research studies from nearly 40 years ago, deal with how instructors handled children through praise and reprimands (Gable, Hester, Rock, & Hughes, 2009). Classroom management has become an important area of research as schools have begun to lose many of their instructors due to burnout. Williams (2011) found that burnout was particularly high in Gen Y instructors causing them to drop at a rate 51% more frequently than past generations. It is important to consider some behavioral factors for an improved student an instructor experience. As part of this research, there are five areas addressed where educators can focus attention to improve classroom interaction. The strategies for classroom management reviewed here are based on the work of Dahlgren, Mala, Faulk, and Lattimer (2008); these include (1) Student mood awareness and rapid teacher response (SMARTR™), (2) “Teach-T’os™” teaching-to classroom rules, (3) Refocus™: eliminating multiple warnings and repeated requests, (4) Student and teacher relationships: unconditional positive regard, and (5) classroom arrangement and design. The results include benefits for teachers, students, administrators, and family members. The classroom management techniques studied here demonstrated benefits for the modern classroom that limit the time instructors spend with behavioral issues and focus that time on teaching students instead.*

*Keywords: Classroom, Education, Behavior, Techniques, Discipline*

## INTRODUCTION

Classroom management has become an important area of research due to increasing numbers of instructors leaving the field of education. Due to the increase in instructor burnout associated with behavioral issues in K-12 education, the value of encouragement and consistency in classroom management warrants scholarly attention. Williams (2011) explained,

GenY teachers—those under 30 years of age—account for at least one in five teachers in U.S. classrooms today. They start out intending to make teaching a lifelong profession. However, young teachers leave the profession at a rate 51% higher than older teachers and transfer to a different school at a rate 91% higher than their older colleagues. Studies also show that the national teacher turnover rate costs school districts approximately \$7 billion annually (p. 39).

Due to legislation like the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendment, Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, and No Child Left Behind, schools must use empirical data to support the use of strategies

that may impact specific students (Gable, Hester, Rock, & Hughes, 2009). Although the studies exist to prove the importance of positive and supportive behaviors, it is common to find classrooms where successful techniques have not been practiced (Gable, 2009). There are a variety of techniques used to discipline students including repeated warnings, use of time-out, many of which may lead to arguments and time wasted that could be used for more effective teaching. The use of time-out strategies has been used by instructors for decades (Ryan, Peterson & Rozalski, 2007). The term time-out has been used to encompass many different types of behavioral approaches which may include removing students from an activity or engaging them with a new one (Ryan, Peterson & Rozalski, 2007). There is no universal agreement that any singular technique may be most effective. Some instructors find changing tasks to be most helpful (Costenbader & Reading-Brown, 1995). Goal-related training techniques have found some success (Kaplan, Gheen & Midgley 2002). By setting clear expectations, instructors may avoid issues where students push buttons or ignite arguments with no-win scenarios. Students often misbehave to focus attention on them (Stormont, Rodriguez & Reinke, 2016).

## BODY

Disruptive issues impact students, administrators, and faculty. Instructor burnout is a serious issue and the cause for teachers leaving the profession is largely due to behavioral issues (Gable, 2009). Creative and innovative teaching solutions are a welcome option for teachers who have dealt with disruptive students who take the focus away from other students and limit the time teachers must provide instruction for those students who suffer from distracted instructors. Solving disruptive issues, places a high demand for instructors to learn techniques that help improve students’ attention (Lopes, Monteiro & Sil, 2004).

Mastering classroom management can be challenging. To have effective classroom management, Marzano (2003) explained that four actions must be addressed, including, “(1) establishing and enforcing rules and procedures, (2) carrying out disciplinary actions, (3) maintaining effective teacher and student relationships, and (4) maintaining an appropriate mental set for management” (p. 88-89). To be effective at classroom management, some have resorted to punishment, reinforcement, or other consequences. Bear (1998) found some mild forms of punishment are effective. However, Miller, Ferguson, and Simpson (1998) found that punishment should be balanced with rewards. Classroom management techniques vary based on teaching styles, the requirements of the school including adopted classroom management systems, and a variety of other factors. Stage and Quiroz (1997) found that punishment did not always solve behavioral problems; rather, punishment and reinforcement combined had more of an impact on decreasing disruptive classroom behaviors. This lack of effectiveness held

true for primarily through high school-aged students in public schools. Stage and Quiroz (1997) noted that “We hope that these findings serve to separate the myth that disruptive classroom behavior cannot be effectively managed from the reality that interventions widely used in our schools, do, in fact, reduce disruptive behavior” (p. 361-362).

There may be no one correct way to manage a classroom. It may be important for instructors to focus on the reasons students misbehave. “Common reasons students may escape a task include (a) high frustration with task often due to academic or other skill deficits, (b) boredom with task, and (c) preference for a different task/activity” (Stormont, Rodriguez & Reinke, 2016, p. 302). The challenge for instructors may be how to deal with outbreaks due to these issues. Instructors may choose a technique that they believe produces the best results. However, there are different ways of interacting with students. This literature review explored five areas where educators could focus attention to decrease the amount of time spent with discipline and allow more time for teaching and learning. The strategies for classroom management studied here are based on the work of Dahlgren, Mala, Faulk, and Lattimer (2008) and include (1) Student mood awareness and rapid teacher response (SMARTR™), (2) “Teach-T’os™” teaching-to classroom rules, (3) Refocus™: eliminating multiple warnings and repeated requests, (4) Student and teacher relationships: unconditional positive regard, and (5) classroom arrangement and design.

### **Component One: Student mood awareness and rapid teacher response (SMARTR™)**

The first component of classroom management techniques to improve student behavior includes having instructors tap into student moods and respond properly. The term *withitness* has been used to describe this ability. Several authors have defined or interpreted this term. Marzano (2003) described the term *withitness* to include managing classrooms without allowing emotions to impact actions. Brophy (1996) interpreted the term *withitness* to include overall awareness of the classroom and activities, including prompt intervention when necessary for disruptive behavior. Dahlgren, Mala, Faulk, and Lattimer (2008) explained *withitness* as having “the appropriate mental set, emotional objectivity, or *withitness* as maintaining keen student mood awareness and skillful teacher response” (p. 6). This is a major component of their class management training. It is important to keep self-control and react appropriately. Dahlgren, Mala, Faulk, and Lattimer (2008) refer to this response as “Student Mood Awareness and Rapid Teacher Response” (p. 6).

If teachers appropriately respond to disruptive students with compassion and self-control, students’ reactions could improve. Gable, Hester, Rock, and Hughes (2009) explained that students endeavor to please instructors if they receive a positive response. Therefore, instructors should endeavor to respond in positive ways to maintain *withitness*. Gable, Hester, Rock, and Hughes (2009) found that negative responses can alienate students. Skinner (1953) explained the importance of positivity and negativity on behavior. Maintaining a negative tone or using avoidance techniques was found ineffective (Cook et al., 2014).

### **Component Two: “Teach-T’os™” teaching-to classroom rules**

The second component of teaching-to classroom rules and expectations is common in all forms of classrooms. Dahlgren, Mala, Faulk, and Lattimer (2008) first coined the expression “Teach-To’s”™ nearly four decades ago and have incorporated this component into their five core components of classroom management. Cotton (1990) explained, “effective managers teach behavioral rules and classroom routines in much the same way as they teach instructional content, and they review these frequently at the beginning of the school year and periodically thereafter.” (p. 1). If students are not prepared to socialize in expected ways, instructors have had to develop rules and routines to guide them and paint a picture of what expected behavior resembles. Evertson et al. (1984) in their explanation of the importance of teaching-to expectations stated,

Rules and procedures vary in different classrooms, but we do not find effectively managed classrooms operating without them. It is simply not possible for a teacher to conduct instruction for children to work productively, if they have no guidelines for how to behave, when to move about the room, and where to sit or if they interrupt the teacher frequently and make whatever amount of noise pleases them (p. 17).

Teachers begin their school year with a list of rules and routines that they expect students to follow. Cotton (1990) explained that these rules should frequently be visited throughout the school year. If students do not follow these rules, they may cause interruptions that waste teacher’s time and takes away focus from the lesson. That is why it is important that guidelines are set early and clearly. Evertson et al. (1984) explained that “it is simply not possible for a teacher to conduct instruction for children to work productively if they have no guidelines for how to behave.” (p. 17). By giving rules and routines, students have a clear picture of what is expected of them. Gable, Hester, Rock, and Hughes (2009) explained that there should not be too many rules, but they should be clearly stated. However, if teachers do not enforce these rules, they might find that they spend more time arguing, giving repeated warnings, and getting burned out by the frustration of their interactions throughout the day. Gable, Hester, Rock, and Hughes (2009) noted that it might help to have rules that cover several situations. Cook et al. (2014) found that behaviors must have consequences. If students are given multiple warnings, they can continue to misbehave, unless there are consequences for their behavior.

Teachers must first be able to model proper behavior so that students understand clear expectations. Gable, Hester, Rock, and Hughes (2009) explained the importance of defining behavior through clearly defined expectations. This modeling sets a tone for what is good, almost good, and clearly inappropriate behavior. For students to appreciate the importance of the rules, it is important that teachers build relationships. Gable, Hester, Rock, and Hughes (2009) stated that uncertainty could cause students to misbehave. Consistency may be an important part of developing trust. When students learn interpersonal skills from their teachers, they learn to model that behavior. Modeling behavior is another key component of the classroom management techniques embraced in the techniques practiced by the classroom management style reviewed here. Brophy (1998) explained that modeling and maximizing time with effective activities had been some of the most effective classroom management techniques.

### **Component Three: Refocus™: eliminating multiple warnings and repeated requests**

The third component of consequential responses to behavior includes a technique for remediation using accurate and timely consequences called Refocus™. Unlike seclusion, allowing the student to remain in the class and continue with an activity can provide a viable alternative. Dahlgren, Mala, Faulk, and Lattimer (2008) explained, “Refocus™ is a disciplinary technique that requires 4-5 minutes of student time and not teacher time” (p. 8). It is important to note that seclusion has been the focus of attention of lawsuits and might be considered a violation of their rights (Ryan, Peterson & Rozalski, 2007). By focusing on accurate and timely consequences instructors provide another activity, and that does not seclude the student. Based on the type of emergent misbehavior, early intervention could determine ways to retain classroom integrity. Stormont, Rodriguez, and Reinke (2016) found that it may be helpful for fellow instructors to help with interventions to ensure it is effective. Redl and Wineman (1951) found a time-out technique called antiseptic bouncing helpful in avoiding classroom interruption.

A technique that may be useful is to remove the student from the classroom. Time-out strategies have been used for decades. Rowe (1972) referred to it as wait-time. However, having a positive rather than punitive technique may be more effective. The way teachers react to negative behavior may be important. Good and Brophy (1995) explained that teachers must demonstrate empathy toward students. Empathy is an aspect of emotional intelligence and soft skill development. If teachers maintain control, students have a better chance of learning (Good & Brophy, 1995). To maintain control, it is important that instructors set clear guidelines and high standards. They must demonstrate that there are consequences for behavior and that respect should be mutual.

### **Component Four: Student and teacher relationships: unconditional positive regard**

The fourth component of developing student and student relationships based unconditional positive regard includes providing the student with positive attention without requiring an action in exchange. Dahlgren, Mala, Faulk, and Lattimer (2008) explained the importance of including respect and dignity when building relationships with children. Good and Brophy (1995) found certain traits endeared students to instructors, including consideration, buoyancy, and patience. Students may respond more positively when they have been treated with respect. Gable, Hester, Rock, and Hughes (2009) explained that contingent praise works best if combined with other strategies. For students to respect instructors, instructors need to respect their students. Wubbels et al. (1999) emphasized the importance of the teacher/student relationship stated,

Teachers should be effective instructors and lecturers, as well as friendly, helpful and congenial. They should be able to empathize with students, understand their world, and listen to them. Good teachers are not uncertain, undecided, or confusing in the way they communicate to students. They are not grouchy, gloomy, dissatisfied, aggressive, sarcastic, or quick-tempered. [Good teachers] should be able to set standards and maintain control, while still allowing students responsibility and freedom to learn (p. 167).

### **Component Five: classroom arrangement and design**

The fifth and final component of classroom arrangement and design includes the ability for teachers to understand the importance of the school environment. Dahlgren, Mala, Faulk, and Lattimer (2008) found, “proper classroom design is an integral component of academic achievement” (p. 10). Gump (1987) determined that the classroom design impacted the relationship between the students and instructors. Schneekloth and Shibley (1995) called for teachers to become “placemakers” for their students. Lackney (1996) stressed the importance of order within the classroom. Weinstein (1981) found the furniture arrangement important to learning. Instructors should arrange their classrooms to promote effective interaction. Loughlin and Suina (1982) explained that pedagogical issues have taken precedent and caused some instructors to neglect classroom arrangements. Instructors have traditionally learned what works through trial and error. However, there is a movement toward training teachers to learn about environmental competence. Schneekloth and Shibley (1995) found this is important for effective instruction.

## **CONCLUSION**

Teachers continue to struggle with classroom management techniques, which has caused younger generations to leave the profession at an alarming rate. Keeping students engaged, while maintaining an atmosphere of respect remains a challenge. Students must be made aware of behavioral expectations and any consequences to misbehavior. When teachers have set forth clear goals, demonstrated proper behavior, followed through with consequences for improper behavior, shown unconditional positive regard for students, and done within a properly arranged classroom, students may have more opportunity to learn and teachers more opportunity to teach. There are many different techniques that schools have adopted to help with classroom management. Some have had some success. Students who learn proper behavior at an early age have the foundation to be better students throughout their education. This preparation may set the stage for their success in k-12 and in higher education. When students learn respect, and allow teachers the time to teach, everyone benefits.

## REFERENCES

- Bear, G. G. (1998). School discipline in the United States: Prevention, correction, and long-term social development. *School Psychology Review, 27*(1), 14-32.
- Brophy, J. (1996). *Teaching problem students*. New York: Guilford.
- Brophy, J. (1998). Classroom management and socializing students into clearly articulated roles. *Journal of Classroom Interaction, 45*(1), 41-45.
- Cook, C., Collins, T., Dart, E., Vance, M., McIntosh, K., Grady, E., & Decano, P. (2014). Evaluation of the class pass intervention for typically developing students with hypothesized escape-motivated disruptive classroom behavior. *Psychology in Schools, 51*(2), 107-125.
- Costenbader, V. & Reading-Brown, M. (1995). Isolation timeout used with students with emotional disturbance. *Exceptional Children, 6*(4), 353-363.
- Cotton, K. (1990). *Schoolwide and classroom discipline – Close-up #9* Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. School Improvement Research Series (SIRS).
- Dahlgren, R., Malas, B., Faulk, J. & Lattimer, M. (2008). *Time to Tach! The Source for Classroom Management*. The Center for Teacher Effectiveness (CTE).
- Evertson, C. M., Emmer, E.T., Sanford, J. P. & Worsham, M.E. (1984). *Classroom management for secondary teachers*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Gable, R., Hester, P., Rock, M. & Hughes, K. (2009). *Intervention in School and Clinic, 44*(4), 195-205. DOI: 10.1177/1053451208328831
- Gable, R. (2009). Forty years later: The value of praise, ignoring, and rules for preschoolers at risk for behavioral disorders, *Education and Treatment of Children, 32*(4), 513-535.
- Good, T. & Brophy, J. (1995). *Contemporary educational psychology* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Gump, P. (1987). School and classroom environments. In Altman, I, and Wohlwill, J. F. (Eds.). *Handbook of environmental psychology*. New York: Plenum Press, 131-174.
- Kaplan, A., Gheen, M. & Midgley, C. (2002). Classroom Goal Structure and Student Disruptive Behavior, *British Journal of Education Psychology, 191*-211.
- Lackney, J. A. (1996). *Quality in school environments: A multiple case study of environmental quality assessment in five elementary schools in the Baltimore City Public Schools form an action research perspective*. School of Architecture and Urban Planning. University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, UMI Dissertation Services No. 9717142.
- Lopes, J., Monteiro, I. & Sil, V. (2004). Teachers' perceptions about teaching problem students in regular classrooms. *Education and Treatment of Children, 27*(4), 394-419.
- Loughlin, C. E. & Suina, J. H. (1982). *The learning environment: An instructional strategy*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Marzano, R. J. (2003). *What works in schools. Translating research into action*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 88-89.
- Miller, A., Ferguson, E., & Simpson, R. (1998). The perceived effectiveness of rewards and sanctions in primary schools: Adding in the parental perspective. *Educational Psychology, 18*(1), 55-64.
- Redl, F. & Wineman D. (1951). *Children Who Hate: The disorganization and breakdown of behavior control*. Chicago: Free Press of Glenco.
- Rowe, M. B. (1972). *Wait-time and rewards as instructional variables, their influence in language, logic, and fate control. Paper presented at the National Association for Research in Science Teaching*, Chicago, IL, ED 061 103.
- Ryan, J., Peterson, R. & Rozalski, M. (2007). State policies concerning the use of seclusion timeout in school. *Education and Treatment of Children, 30*(3), 215-239.
- Schneekloth, L. & Shibley, R. (1995). *Placemaking: The design and management of places*. New York: North Pine Press.
- Skinner, B.F. (1953). *Science of human behavior*. New York: Macmillan.
- Stage, S. A. & Quiroz, D. R. (1997). A meta-analysis of interventions to decrease disruptive classroom behavior in public education settings. *School Psychology Review, 26* (3), 333-368.
- Stormont, M., Rodriguez, B. & Reinke, W. (2016). Teaching students with behavioral problems to take a break. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 51*(5) 301–306
- Williams, C. (2009). Combating teacher burnout: What we can do to keep the best and brightest teachers in the classroom? *T.H.E. Journal* (38). 10-11.
- Wubbels, T., Brekelmans, M., Van Tartwijk, J., & Admiraal, W. (1999). Interpersonal relationships between teachers and students in the classroom. *New directions for teaching practice and research, 151*-170.