

Classroom Management: Five Approaches to Student Behavior

By

Lawrence P. Creedon

Second of two monographs devoted to classroom management.

In his book Classroom Management [1999] Robert Tauber summarizes five approaches to student behavior ranging from a behaviorist to a humanist orientation. A brief, selective synopsis of each of Tauber's five is cited here. Reader caution must be exercised here, as separate book length volumes have been devoted to each. In contrast, this brief synopsis numbers approximately 3500 words.

1. *A Place for Discipline* – Dr. James Dobson [born 1936] <http://www.family.org/>

Dr. Dobson is a well known conservative and spokesperson for the religious right in American politics and its influence in public education. He is an outspoken critic of what he terms as "permissive parents," and says it is a result of the influence of John Dewey based pragmatism. Dobson is the founder of the conservative organization Focus on the Family. The organization employs over 1300 people. Focus on the Family has its own syndicated radio network. His book Dare to Discipline [1970] and The New Dare to Discipline [1992], as of the publication of Tauber [1999], had sold more than 3 million copies. Dobson has a doctorate in child development and has served as a clinical professor of pediatrics.

Dr. Dobson is an advocate of punishment in child-rearing. He points to a "strong" Biblical foundation as the justification for his views such as Solomon's admonition "Spare the rod and spoil the child." He cites Proverbs, to wit:

- ♦ "Withhold not correction from the child - for it thou beatest him with a rod, you will save his life from Hell." [23: 13-14].
- ♦ "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he loves him is diligent to discipline him." [23: 24].

Children, Dobson believes, do not have an innate desire to learn. Therefore, at times, punishment is in order if they resist learning what is determined by those in authority they need to learn. He advocates that some strong willed children need to be "spanked" and that spanking is neither optional nor old-fashioned. He scorns scientific inquiry related to child-rearing.

By no means is Dobson alone in his beliefs. A cadre of others echo and promote in their own spheres of influence the same or similar views. While a school or school system may not identify with Dobson's views, individual teachers may personally subscribe to his beliefs. Individual teachers will gravitate to their core beliefs about the basic nature of humankind and those beliefs will influence their approach to classroom management and discipline.

2. *Assertive Discipline* - Lee and Marlene Canter [born 1947, 1948 respectively].

Lee and Marlene Canter are a husband and wife team. Together they have written over 40 books and numerous video programs. They assert that their Assertive Discipline approach has been shared with over one million people.

They promote the concept of praise as the most significant factor in getting children to respond positively. A mantra of Assertive Discipline is that: *Teachers have the right to teach, and students have the right to learn.* The basic features of Assertive Discipline are coercion, control and reward. The teacher is clearly in control, is in a "take charge" position and is empowered to act accordingly. Another feature of Assertive Discipline is that of praising students. The slogan of "Catch students doing something and reward that action" is associated with the Canthers.

The Canthers claim that their approach is research based. However, critics challenge that assertion.

To the Canthers, teachers fall into three categories:

1. *Assertive* - Assertive teachers get their needs met first, and then go on to act in the best interests of their students. Teachers make their expectations known to students in a calm and businesslike manner, and then go on to address the interests of students in a similar way. The language of Assertive Discipline speaks of developing expectations for learners; however, critics say the expectations are more akin to demands.

2. *Hostile* - Hostile teachers get their needs met first, but do not go on to act in the best interests of their students. Sarcasm and threats might characterize the behavior of the teacher toward students.
3. *Non-assertive* - Teachers do not get their needs met and do not go on to act in the best interests of their students. They might be passive, often inconsistent, and reluctant to place behavior demands on students.

In an Assertive Discipline approach discipline comes first. First the teacher must establish who is in charge and in control, and then instruction can follow. The teacher is the "sage on stage" and not "the guide on the side."

In dealing directly with a student or a group of students "I messaging" is encouraged. In "I messages" the communicator (the teacher) informs those he/she is communication with how their behavior or action has made the teacher feel. Projections can then be made as to how that feeling can manifest in behavior by the teacher and the student. This is in contrast to a more traditional approach where the teacher might ask a student why they are acting in a certain way thus inviting the student to respond and possibly create the conditions for a confrontation between teacher and student.

Praise, prompt and leave are three teacher behaviors associated Assertive Discipline:

Praise the learner

Prompt the learner on what to do next

Leave and allow the learner to "get to work."

3. Social Discipline - Rudolf Dreikurs [1897-1972]

Rudolf Dreikurs is the person most associated with Social Discipline. Dreikurs' theory is rooted in his optimistic view of the basic nature of humankind and his belief that people are capable of changing and that human problems are interpersonal and socially embedded. Dreikurs reflects the individual psychology of Alfred Adler (1870-1937). *[In his psychological theory known as Individual Psychology Adler focused on the whole person as a functioning entity reacting to the environment, rather than as a summation of instincts and drives. To Adler coming to know rested on doubting the conventional wisdom. Adler's classic book on Understanding Human Nature was used as a high school text for decades].* Both Dreikurs and Adler were born and raised in Vienna, Austria at approximately the same time. Dreikurs emphasized the values of respect, cooperation, and self-discipline. These are consistent with a contemporary approach to constructivism.

Dreikurs believed that children are social beings and have a need to know that they belong. They need interaction with other human beings and have a need to be recognized. If unable to achieve these personal goals/needs children will tend to engage in antisocial behavior and will act out in order to gain recognition.

Dreikurs cited four reasons, or goals, in the thinking of the transgressor, for misbehavior:

1. To gain attention
2. A struggle to gain and maintain power
3. For revenge
4. To submerge and mask a feeling of inadequacy.

The mantra that seems to apply is:

If you can't be the best at being the best, be the best at being the worst.

In the Dreikurs concept of Social Discipline there are three types of response to misbehavior:

1. *Natural* - Consequences of an action not imposed by anyone. They flow naturally from the behavior. For example, if the student does not study for a test then the natural result of failure or poor performance results.
2. *Logical* - Consequences supplied by someone else such as the teacher. However, consequences must be logical and appropriate versus hasty, rendered in anger, arbitrary, and punitive. Logical consequences ought to be related to the issue, respectful toward the person affected and reasonable.
3. *Contrived* - Invented or contrived by the person in authority. Little or no logical connection between the misbehavior and the consequence. Punishment is the intent.

In contrast to the notion of praise as asserted by Lee and Marlene Canter, Dreikurs advocated encouragement. In Social Discipline, encouragement is an important part of child rearing. Lack of it is a major cause of misbehavior. Lack of encouragement and the resulting discouragement is the most important obstacle to learning. To Dreikurs encouragement not praise held the potential for motivating students, and for building individual self-esteem, self-confidence and self-discipline. Advocates of Social Discipline assert that research does show negative long term affects of praise, but not of encouragement. In a Social Discipline approach not all persons and actions are praiseworthy.

4. Reality Therapy - William Glasser [born 1925] <http://www.wglasser.com/>

William Glasser is the founder of the Institute of Reality Therapy now known as the William Glasser Institute. The basic premise of reality therapy is that it is most important for a person to confront inappropriate behavior by dealing with the present rather than the past. Glasser's views codified for application in schools took shape in his book Schools Without Failure [1969]. In the 1990s Glasser and W. Edwards Deming, the guru of Total Quality Management, began working together in the common interest of schools. [See Creedon monographs on Total Quality Management www.larrycreedon.info]. To Glasser there was no point in focusing on the past since it can't be changed; therefore, the focus should be on the present, or as he stated it: "The reality of the human condition."

Glasser identified five elements of the reality therapy as it related to schools.

1. School ought to be a good and fair place. It ought to begin with rule formation and students ought to be involved in determining the rules. School ought to be a good place to be. This notion s developed further by Ted Sizer in his book: School - A Place of Learning , A Place of Joy (1973). In such a good and fair place where the needs of students are being met, discipline problems will be kept to a minimum. Glasser defined a good school as a place where:
 - ♦People are courteous, especially the adults
 - ♦Laughter springs forth from genuine joy brought about by involvement with caring people engaged in relevant work
 - ♦Communication is practiced and not just preached. People talk with, not at, one another.
 - ♦Reasonable rules are beneficial to both individuals and the group
 - ♦Administrators actively support and participate in an approach to discipline that teaches self-responsibility.
2. Forming rules - Reasonable rules do not just happen they come about as the result of reasonable people reasoning. Glasser asserted that reasonable rules must be firmly enforced, but not as punishment. Such an action as separation of someone misbehaving from a program for misbehavior would be reasonable.
3. Reasonable rules are those in which a cause-and-effect relationship is evident. According to Glass if a cause-and-effect relationship cannot be shown, then the question arises as to whether or not the rule was necessary in the first place.
4. Students are involved in forming the rules.
5. Students are rationale beings and they choose their behaviors.

The steps of Reality Therapy are:

1. Student involvement
2. Identify the problem behavior. Do not focus on the *why* of the behavior, but rather on: *What are you doing?*
3. In making value judgments about the behavior there must be a cause-and-effect relationship
4. Develop a plan of action for a new behavior. Let students assume the primary responsibility for their misbehavior and for developing a plan to change that behavior.
5. Get a commitment from those affected for working toward the implementation of the new plan of behavior.
6. Accept no excuses
7. Don't punish
8. Never give up - be persistent.

Glasser ultimately labeled his approach as Choice Therapy. Choice Therapy is founded on two assumptions:

1. All of behavior is our best attempt to satisfy one or more of the five basic needs [See Abraham Maslow's Needs Theory. Maslow's Needs Theory is related to Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology which in turn is related to Rudolph Dreikurs theory of Social Discipline].

2. All we can do is behave. This is in contrast to the stimulus/response theory of Behaviorism. Choice theory asserts that all of our behavior is internally motivated.

In Choice Theory learning is promoted as the basic tool for meeting all of an individual's basic human needs as understood by Maslow. Knowledge is viewed as power, but not power over people. Rather power that allows successful learners to have more freedom and more choices than unsuccessful learners. *Fun* is viewed as what is taking place when the learner successfully learns something. I interpret that to mean that learning comes about as a result of *the simultaneous and mutual interaction between the learner and the environment*. The acronym is SMILE and true to form the learner smiles when learning takes place.

In Glasser's work with Total Quality Management guru W. Edwards Deming, the quest was to develop a template for quality schools without resorting to coercion. Such an action is in sharp contrast to what critics assert about the US federal No Child Left Behind legislation.

5. Teacher Effectiveness Training – Thomas Gordon [born 1918]. <http://www.gordontraining.com/>

Thomas Gordon is the founder of the Teacher Effectiveness Institute commonly known as TET – Teacher Effectiveness Training. TET programs are offered in over 30 countries worldwide. Gordon was greatly influenced by the work of Carl Rogers

TET is best understood as a model for effective communications between persons and in this case between teacher and student. Tauber makes the point that it translates ideology into practical skills. The ideology has to do with the recognized worth of every individual. The practical skills relate to effective classroom management, dialogue and discipline.

The focus of TET is on acceptable behavior. Acceptable behavior is that which does not interfere with the legitimate interests and needs of another. It does not be assent to the behavior as no moral judgment is made. Resistance to interference does not result in assent to a given behavior. Unacceptable means that a behavior interferes with another meeting his or her needs. As acceptable does not mean assent, unacceptable does not condemnation or a negative judgment. Acceptable and unacceptable behaviors are fluid, and relative in the light of conditions and circumstances.

TET is concerned with equality. However, equality does mean a one-size-fits-all approach. Equality has more to do with the needs of each individual being met in a manner that does not interfere with needs of others. **[A hasty but false conclusion could be drawn that this understanding of equality echoes the communist mantra of: To each in accordance with his needs.]**

As understood by Gordon, teachers can be more accepting of the behavior of one student versus another. Gordon contents that is unrealistic to expect teachers to be equally accepting of all students. Factors that influence acceptance include dress, behavior, role in class, personal hygiene, etc.

In TET programs teachers learn effective responding skills and role play how and when to apply them. If the behavior is acceptable, then no responding skill is required. If it is unacceptable effective responding skills are necessary. The teacher does not solve the problem for the “owner,” but rather functions as a facilitator as the “owner” of the problem solves it.

TET focuses on what it identifies as Roadblocks to Communication. Roadblocks can emerge when a person with a problem seeks the advice of a colleague and rather than getting help with the problem the person seeking advice is subjected to input that aggravates the problem. Gordon cites 12 major roadblocks to effective communication. They are

1. Ordering, directing
2. Admonishing, threatening
3. Moralizing, preaching
4. Advising, giving solutions
5. Lecturing, giving logical arguments
6. Judging, criticizing
7. Praising, agreeing, 'me-tooing'
8. Ridiculing, shaming
9. Analyzing, diagnosing
10. Sympathizing, consoling
11. Probing, questioning, interrogating
12. Withdrawing, humoring

In TET there are alternatives to Roadblocking. Gordon identifies at least six. They are:

1. Attentive silence
2. Active listening .
3. Noncommittal responses
4. Decoding the feelings oriented message behind the words spoken.
5. I-Messaging (Not identical with that of the Canters).
6. Straightforward, conversational “Door Openers.”

TET is interested in conflict resolution and proposes a six step approach that is compatible with the long established scientific method. It is:

1. Define the problem
2. Generate possible solutions
3. Evaluate solutions
4. Choose a solution
5. Implement the solution
6. Evaluate the solution

Conflict resolution programs have gained considerable support in secondary schools across the United States. The Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University, Virginia, USA is among the prominent organizations dealing with schools on this issue. The institute has been working with the Fairfax County Public Schools in this regard since 1988. In 2004 the school district referred 784 cases to conflict mediation culminating in a successful result and thus avoiding confrontation.

Successful conflict mediation depends on the parties involved being skilled in the process. In Fairfax County conflict resolution classes are offered as part of the regular curriculum. Topics considered include communication skills, the nature of conflict, ethics, and diversity. A 1999 evaluation of the process conducted by George Mason University showed that conflict resolution training reduced staff time dealing with conflicts, lessened the number of verbal and physical confrontations, and lowered the suspension rates. [*Washington Post*, September 14, 2005, letter-to-the-editor, Sara Cobb, Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University, Virginia, USA.]

An Action Plan

Some proponents of one approach versus another advocate that the whole program of a given system must be adopted. They assert that a cafeteria approach will not give the benefits of the program. I believe that assumption is subject to challenge. However, I do agree that a random potpourri approach will not be effective. Rather, a systemic approach needs to be taken and it needs to be rooted in the reality of a specific environment. Among the things that needs to be considered in developing a systemic approach call to mind the scholarship of such individuals as M.L. Bigge, Benjamin Bloom, and Jerome Bruner. A systemic approach implies a need for a specific comprehensive design for learning. [See the Credon monograph on a *Ten Component Design for Learning* www.larrycredon.info]

The development of a plan for action ought to begin with the entire faculty, staff, parents, student body, and other stake holders striving to reach a common understanding of what they consider to be the basic nature of humankind and of reality. Granted these are philosophical questions. And, some may conclude at the outset that they have little practical application. On the contrary, I consider questions such as these to be at the rooted of everything that follows. Belief about these matters provides the foundation upon which everything else is built. For the serious minded there is no shortcut.

Consensus on these points focuses the learning community toward a common purpose and identifiable goals. This is more philosophical in nature than the traditional and often innocuous regurgitation of values. Indeed values are important and need to be identified. However, there are prerequisites to a direct focus on values. Consideration must be given to the foundation upon which the values are based. A consideration of this question can certainly take a full school year or more of dialogue. Consensus built on understanding takes a long time. It is a never ending process.

Once exhaustive consideration has been given to considering the questions posed immediately above, alternative approaches to classroom management, behavior and discipline ought to be considered. A process vehicle for such a consideration is Benjamin Bloom’s Six Category Cognitive Taxonomy. [See the Credon monographs on Bloom www.larrycredon.info]. Each approach to classroom management and discipline ought to analyzed through the lens of Bloom’s taxonomy.

Jerome Bruner’s notion of the spiral curriculum with its provision for scaffolding and weaving is applicable to building a plan of action.

A place to begin is devoting an extensive amount of time and effort to seeking consensus on what the beliefs are locally about the basic human nature of human beings. In this case the “human beings” are the learners who are being served. A consideration of this question goes far beyond that proposed by question one of Creedon Four Questions (*What do we know about how our learners come to know and how do we implement what we know*)? In my experience seldom, if ever, is this question formally and openly considered in professional development programs. However, what goes on behind the classroom door is significantly influenced by what teachers believe about this metaphysical question. In his book Learning Theory for Teachers [1992], Morris Bigge addressed this question. The following Bigge chart succinctly summarizes five views related to the question: *What is the basic nature of humankind?* The phrase categorizing each has been inserted by me.

The Basic Nature of Humankind

Generic		Behavioral
Good	_____	Active
	<i>“I’m OK – You’re OK”</i>	
Bad	_____	Active
	<i>Fagin’s School – Oliver Twist</i>	
Neutral	_____	Active
	<i>“As the twig is bent so grows the tree”</i>	
Neutral	_____	Passive
	<i>Grass doesn’t grow on a busy street</i>	
Neutral	_____	Interactive
<i>SMILE: Simultaneous, Mutual Interaction between the Learner and Environment</i>		

The views held by teachers on this issue influences how they function in the classroom. It influences their views about classroom management and discipline. Before attempting to move ahead in developing a classroom management and discipline program educators need to strive to reach consensus on the question of: *What is the basic nature of humankind?* Certainly with the current public debate casting advocates of Darwin based human evolution against proponents of Intelligent Design the question is relevant.

Ipsi dixit
 Lawrence P Creedon
lpreedon@aol.com
www.larrycreedon.info

Arlington, VA
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