

Models of Classroom Discipline

An Overview

BY WILLIAM H. GREEN AND PREMA GAIKWAD

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Classroom discipline is a major education concern for both teachers and parents. According to the 1991 Gallup Poll,¹ the public ranked discipline as the second most important problem for schools. (Incidentally, in previous Gallup Polls over the past two decades the public has consistently perceived lack of discipline as a major problem in schools.)

In Adventist schools, elementary and junior academy teachers view discipline as one of their seven most important problems, according to studies by Brantley.² The Valuegenesis report indicates that a considerable number of students (44 percent of eighth graders) reported feeling put down by teachers.³

Research studies show that discipline is related to classroom instruction.⁴ Aware of this point, teachers often search for effective models of instruction and discipline. There are a wide range of both instructional and discipline models available to them. In this article, however, we will deal with discipline models. We will present an overview of several discipline models and briefly discuss their perspectives. Some of these models are well-packaged, and relatively easy to learn and implement with training and follow-up support.

Like instructional strategies, discipline models may be grouped into certain categories. The term *model* will be used to mean a system of instruction based upon theory, or how scholars (usually psychological practitioners) think about discipline. Each model promotes specific behavioral outcomes in students.

An overview of various discipline models should help teachers to select and use the models that match their own philosophy and that produce the outcomes they desire. Discipline strategies and models can be classified as follows: environmental, personal, behavioral, and social.

Environmental

This model holds that behavior can be partially explained by analyzing the variables in the classroom setting.⁵ These variables include the following:

- Physical arrangements
- Social contingencies (for example, how students are grouped for instruction)
- Level of structure and classroom stimulus conditions (color of walls and floors, amount of noise, etc.).

Research reveals that the setting in which a person functions can directly influence his or her performance and that human behavior becomes erratic if the environment lacks consistency.⁶ Thus this category promotes strategies that facilitate the development of a structured learning environment.

Advocates of this category of models include Doyle, Osborn and Osborn, and Wolf.⁷ Literature on physical⁸ and behavioral⁹ ecology reveals the influence of environmental variables on student and teacher behavior. It is important to note that the standards, expectations, and tolerance levels that teachers hold for their students' behavior are important variables in determining classroom ecology. For example, Jacob Kounin's model emphasizes setting up an environment that will encourage appropriate student behavior.¹⁰

Personal

The personal category emphasizes recognition of the feelings and values of others in order to promote personal growth and self-development. Inherent in this approach is a respect for self and others, an emphasis on emotional needs, a trusting environment, and the examination of personal values.¹¹

Fagan and Long¹² state that the appreciation of feelings is fundamental to this approach. The discipline strategies in this category depend upon (1) de-empha-

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sizing authoritarianism, (2) making personal evaluations about human behavior that are realistic and positive, not reactive or destructive, (3) selecting positive courses of action that are appropriate for oneself and others, and (4) reinforcing the commitment to behaviors (by both teachers and students) that employ emotions constructively.

Ginott, Dreikurs, and Jones¹³ offer models that fit into this category. Ginott, for example, emphasizes giving what he calls sane messages to help students grow individually. He offers a list of behaviors that he calls worst teacher behaviors. We include them here for self-examination. Teachers are at their worst, Ginott believes, when they:

1. Are caustic and sarcastic.
2. Attack students' characters.
3. Demand, rather than invite, cooperation.
4. Deny students' feelings.
5. Label students as lazy, stupid, and so forth.

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6. Give long and unnecessary lectures.
7. Lose their tempers and self-control.
8. Use praise to manipulate students.
9. Are poor models of humane behavior.¹⁴

Dreikurs' model starts with these assumptions: (1) Students are responsible for their own actions; (2) All students will seek recognition; and (3) Most misbehavior stems from attempts to get recognition. He suggests ways for teachers to identify and deal with these "mistaken goals."¹⁵

The main focus of Jones' model is helping students develop and apply self-control. One of his most important contributions may be in helping teachers learn to effectively use body language to shape desired student behavior. Jones maintains that good discipline depends mostly—90 percent, he says—on effective body language. He explains these behaviors and tells how to learn them.¹⁶ Effective body language involves eye contact, physical proximity, body carriage, facial expression, and gestures.

Few physical acts are more effective for giving students the impression that the teacher is in control than eye contact. The skilled teacher's eyes continually scan the classroom and lock onto the eyes of students to deter misbehavior. Students

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quickly become aware that the teacher is looking directly at them and continually taking note of their behavior. However, making eye contact does not seem to be natural behavior for teachers, especially inexperienced ones. It needs to be taught.

Jones has noted that most misbehavior occurs some distance from the teacher.¹⁷ Often physical proximity solves minor problems. Teachers need to be able to get close to potential misbehavers. If they establish eye contact, they may not need to reprimand. Students will usually return immediately to proper behavior.

The teacher's body posture and carriage can convey a message of authority. By reading body language, many students can tell whether a teacher is ill, tired, disinterested, or intimidated. Good posture, confident carriage, and vigorous movement suggest strong leadership. Lethargic movements suggest resignation or fearfulness.

Facial expression, like body posture, can tell students a lot. Facial expressions can show enthusiasm, seriousness, enjoyment, resignation, annoyance, or other emotions. Through winks, smiles, and

Teachers face the dilemma of choosing a discipline strategy that best suits their personality and philosophy as well as the needs of their students.

nods of the head, teachers can show that they genuinely like students and that they have a sense of humor, traits students have reported¹⁸ that they appreciate in their teachers.

Experienced teachers often use gestures to convey messages. Hand signals for stopping (palm out), quiet (finger to lips), continuing (palm up flexing fingers), and approval (thumbs up) are a few examples. These gestures communicate effectively and do not interrupt the verbal flow in the classroom nor do they belittle, antagonize,

or invite verbal counterattacks from students.

Behavioral

The models in this category emphasize two general processes. The first, operant conditioning, emphasizes the role of reinforcement (particularly reward and punishment). The second, counter conditioning, emphasizes ways to substitute an adaptive for a maladaptive response—for example, squeezing a small rock in a pocket to stop nail biting.

Generally, behavioral models first diagnose a problem and then use specific strategies to change behavior. Canter and Canter and Skinnerian models¹⁹ are examples of these. Canter and Canter, for example, emphasize the role of the teacher in regulating classroom behavior and controlling the environment. The teacher serves as the dispenser of reinforcement and punishment based on predetermined rules. Their model has the advantage of being well organized and packaged, making it relatively easy for teachers to use after some training.

Skinnerian or New Skinnerian models emphasize the idea that teachers can shape students' behavior along desired lines by using systematic application of reinforcement. Skinner himself never devised a school discipline model, but a number of others have done so by using his ideas.

These strategies set firm limits on individual behavior and seek to control individuals in socially constructive ways. They also provide options that can be used to redirect individual behaviors toward more positive modes. The strategies seek to reward for positive behavior instead of constantly emphasizing the negative.²⁰

Social

Children are not always able to understand the culture and values of the society in which they live. The social model of discipline strives to help people develop the skills they need to function in the larger society.

Supporters of this model include Coleman.²¹ His approach calls for (1) accepting human diversity, (2) recognizing the rights of individuals and groups, and (3) understanding the role of community

involvement in developing competent adults. This model concentrates on the need to establish constructive learning environments in homes, schools, religious organizations, and other institutions in order to prepare youth to assume adult roles. Its proponents claim that by developing people skills and understanding the functions of society, one can learn to work cooperatively with others.

Examples of socially based models include Redl and Wattenberg, and Glasser.²² Redl and Wattenberg point out what is obvious to most teachers—students behave differently in groups than they do individually. They help teachers learn how to deal with group behavior. Canter, for example, advocates dropping marbles in a jar when everyone in the class is behaving appropriately. When the jar is filled, the teacher allows an extra 10 minutes for recess, schedules a popcorn party or some other group activity. Glasser, particularly in his latest works (*Control Theory in the Classroom* and *Quality Schools*),²³ emphasizes that students, like other human beings, want to belong to a group. He advocates cooperative learning techniques to satisfy this need.

Conclusion

This article has discussed four categories of discipline models from which teachers can build a repertoire of strategies for classroom control. Teachers may need to carefully select ideas from more than one category. However, whatever they choose should fit their needs as well as the needs of their students.

Both public school and church school constituencies are expressing concern about classroom discipline. As a result, teachers need to develop even more powerful ways to help children learn how to behave. However, teachers are not left to invent totally new strategies to accomplish this task. Knowing that research has substantiated the effectiveness of a number of practical strategies should help teachers feel more confident of achieving success in classroom management and discipline. ☞

Dr. William H. Green is Professor of Teacher Education and Chair of the Department of Teaching and Learn-

ing in the School of Education at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. Dr. Green also served as Coordinator for this special issue on Discipline. The editors express special thanks for his unflagging dedication and the many handwritten faxes he sent explaining and evaluating materials during the issue's preparation, which occurred while he was teaching and traveling in Michigan, England, and India.

Dr. Prema Gaiwad is Assistant Professor of Education and Director of the Reading Center at Spicer College, Pune, India. She recently completed a doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction at Andrews University.

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