

**DISCIPLINE**  
**in the**  
**CLASSROOM**  
**Solving the Teaching Puzzle**

**Robert G. Howell, Jr., M.S. / Patricia L. Howell, M.S.**

# **Discipline in the Classroom: Solving the Teaching Puzzle**

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# Preface

A basic goal of all teachers is to meet their students' educational needs by imparting a body of knowledge that is deemed useful and necessary by teacher, school board, and school district staffs. This seemingly simple goal is achieved only after an incredible amount of effort on the part of teachers, administrators, ancillary personnel, such as psychologists, counselors, speech therapists, nurses, and secretarial and custodial staffs. Despite long years of training and a burning desire to help children learn, many teachers find themselves facing disciplinary situations each day that interfere with both their teaching and their students' learning. Learning to deal effectively with students' acting out, forgetfulness, carelessness, lack of interest or participation in classroom assignments is generally a long process of trial and error on the teacher's part. Eventually, the teacher learns how to handle most problems. However, the amount of time and effort that goes into this process drains much of the teacher's energy and enthusiasm.

Most teachers feel that they must spend too much of their precious teaching time dealing with disruptive classroom elements. In some classrooms such dealings may reach epidemic proportion and dominate the curriculum. Many teachers, both new and veteran, will at one time or another find themselves in a teaching crisis—a class that is out of control. Knowing what to do when this occurs, or better yet, knowing how to prevent it from occurring is the focus of this book. Many educators seem to feel that correct handling of disciplinary problems results only from years of teaching experience. We, on the other hand, feel that teachers can use this text to structure the educational environment in their classroom to avoid many classroom disciplinary problems and to handle the remaining problems more easily.

The basic orientation of the authors is that discipline and the in-

structional program cannot be separated. To make this statement, we must specify which definitions of “discipline” we are using. We are not talking of the limited sense of discipline that is “the treatment that corrects or punishes.”<sup>1</sup> This, unfortunately, is what many people think of when they hear the word. Rather, we speak of discipline as “the training that develops self-control, character, or orderliness and efficiency,”<sup>2</sup> and we believe that no body of curriculum can be taught without considering these aspects of the students’ behavioral makeup. This training combined with a third meaning of discipline, that is, a branch of knowledge or learning, is the heart of the teaching process.

We believe that it is impossible to teach effectively without considering classroom discipline carefully. Good classroom discipline is more than having the students obey you. It is the total process of teaching children to participate voluntarily and fully in your classroom educational activities. Your discipline strategies should do more than squelch inappropriate behavior. They should constantly reinforce the desirable behavior that is basic to the development of the total classroom instructional program. For example:

- Getting all of your students participating willingly in all classroom activities.
- Getting your students to pay attention to your directions—to do what you ask the first time you ask it.
- Getting your students to complete assignments.
- Getting your students to come to class prepared—bringing appropriate or necessary materials, books, etc.
- Getting your students to pay more attention to you and the lessons than to the antics of the classroom clown, to the acting out of disruptive students, to the hottest gossip on campus, or to their own daydreams.
- Getting your students to cooperate with you—to do perhaps unpleasant (or at least un-fun) activities without power struggling and arguing every inch of the way.

Are these concerns of yours? Most likely they are—if you are either presently teaching or student teaching. If you worry about your own effectiveness in handling student behavior and school-related problems, read on. This text will provide you with solutions for some problems and understanding at least of the underlying elements of others, as we help you to become a more effective teacher.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph H. Freend and David Guralnik, eds., *Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language, College Edition* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1959), p. 416.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

This text is a practical guide for all teachers. Although many techniques contained herein may be valuable at the high school level, we have chosen primarily to direct our comments to teachers of elementary and junior high school classes. Here the need for effective discipline programs is the strongest, in the years when patterns of school behavior are being developed and before the biggest benefit of the aging process, maturity, begins to appear and make a real difference in student performance. This text will serve teacher needs whether they are beginners or seasoned veterans, or whether they are working in regular or special education programs. It is aimed at both working professionals and students or practice teachers who have learned how to teach the three R's of reading, writing, and 'rithmetic, but who now need to deal with the three C's of coping with student misbehavior, conquering school anxieties, and constructing vitally necessary positive programs of classroom discipline.

Briefly stated, the goals of this text are twofold.

1. To determine the basis of teacher tensions and anxieties and show how these can be overcome to improve the instructional program.
2. To evaluate the teaching process to determine how the components of school physical environment, classroom interpersonal dynamics, curriculum, student behavior, student-teacher communication and the interpersonal relationships of the teacher to the parents, teachers, and school administrators can affect discipline and be used to improve it.

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# Introduction

What will this book do for you? Will this text simply be another shelf clutterer, good in theory, but weak in practice? We certainly hope not. We've designed a book that we feel will acquaint teachers with the skills and techniques that are needed to deal successfully with disciplinary problems and thus will be able to reduce teacher anxiety while improving learning. We recognize that many different tools, techniques and levels of communication, will be needed to teach the diverse groups seen by all types of teachers. However, in every successful teaching situation, a universal characteristic of strong classroom discipline can be found. Learning is facilitated and student behavior may be changed to become desirable when the teacher is in control. We feel the teacher must practice preventive teaching—an aware, knowledge-based type of teaching that will allow the teacher to be in command of all instructional/disciplinary situations regardless of his or her own anxiety levels. Preventive teaching, like preventive medicine, tries to stop undesired things from happening. As disease hampers the physical development of the individual, so does disruptive student behavior and poorly used facilities or personnel hamper the educational development of the individual. It makes as little sense to wait until the disease strikes before inoculating as it does to wait until you have a student outbreak of disruptive behavior before trying to decide what should be done. Anticipative action is the vaccine that teachers must use to prevent problems in their classrooms. The practice of such actions will be defined in greater detail and in terms of actual teacher behavior in structuring sound instructional programs in the ensuing chapters.

The importance of anticipative action will appear repeatedly as we discuss how a teacher's management of variables affecting discipline in the classroom can lessen teaching anxieties while improving the total instructional program. To teach effectively, teachers cannot and should not allow themselves to drift through instructional activities at the mercy of their surroundings and circumstances. For this reason, we have devoted a



complete chapter to the inspection of the effects of each of the following variables upon the instructional/disciplinary program:

1. School physical environments
2. Classroom interpersonal dynamics
3. Curriculum management
4. Student misbehavior and the motivation of appropriate classroom behavior
5. Student-teacher communication, both verbal and nonverbal
6. Interpersonal relationships between the teacher and parents, fellow teachers, and the school administration and nonteaching staffs.

We hope that our discussions in these areas will make you more aware of the importance of the effects of these variables upon your day-by-day dealings with students and your total teaching style in general. Once these elements are clearly understood and you take the time to assess their effects upon your teaching situation, you will have laid the foundation for a sound disciplinary structure in your classroom. Such assessments and your subsequent anticipative action based upon those assessments are the habit of successful teachers.

Up to this point, we have been sharing our philosophy of what constitutes successful teaching and disciplinary programs. As we have stated in the preface, we do not feel that the two (teaching and discipline) can be separated. Our reasoning for this is that you cannot teach unless you get your students' attention and retain that attention throughout the entire learning activity. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that while you may teach without your students' attention, they will not necessarily learn without it. Your students' attention will be greatly determined by your management of the six educational variables that we listed earlier. As an introduction to this text, a brief definition of each of the aforementioned variables and a description of how they will be dealt with in the following chapters may be helpful to you at this time.

Student behavior or misbehavior does not occur isolated from all that happens around it. It is contingent upon a multitude of factors, not the least being the physical environment—the classroom where the learning is to take place. Educational programs must be designed with a careful consideration of environmental confines and extraneous variables if they are to be successful and avoid disciplinary problems. We will enumerate these variables as well as provide strategies for dealing with the “unchangeables” of classroom settings. Also to be considered will be the importance of teachers' familiarizing themselves with the procedures, personalities, and attitudes of the total school environment.

Classroom interpersonal dynamics is a concept that is overlooked by many teachers when they are setting up educational programs. Although

peer group relations are dealt with constantly, few teachers attempt to objectively determine how the various student personalities affect each other and the teacher. For this reason, the discussion of sociograms, their construction and usage, will be included to provide teachers with a valuable tool for both preventing and squelching student misbehavior. Besides considering student personality dynamics, teachers who practice anticipative action should also consider the personality dynamics of all teaching and ancillary personnel before they are hired or assigned to a classroom. However, the necessity of using that personnel correctly to enhance the possibilities of learning and positive student behavior is extremely important and will be discussed.

Student behavior, as we have stated, is an outgrowth of many complex stimuli. Curriculum management, that is the decisions made by teachers and school districts of what to teach and how to teach, is a major determinant of student behavior. Although teachers may be told what to teach and what books to use to teach, they are not powerless to avoid classroom struggles if they take care to prepare lessons that meet student needs and interests. We will discuss how organization, time management, and flexibility in lesson planning can help save a "doomed lesson" and prevent negative student behavior. Another factor that will be considered is the importance of teachers' establishing relevant expectancies for student performance. Expecting too much from students can quickly lead to student disinvolvement and rebellion. Also, students who attempt projects far beyond their capabilities and fail are not likely to willingly take part in future activities. The student response, "No, I am not going to do it!" will be discussed and strategies outlined for dealing with this behavior before and after it occurs.

Once the subject matter of the educational program has been decided upon and lessons planned carefully to meet the needs of the students, the next important principles to consider are those of evaluating student misbehavior and providing motivation for improved behavior. We will discuss individual definitions and tolerances of misbehavior and provide techniques for observing, recognizing and recording such behavior. Such tools as the Premack Principle, contracting and point systems, will be discussed to show their merits in training your students to participate freely and fully in your classroom instructional program.

Teacher-student communication has a great effect upon the success of the total instructional/disciplinary program. Although teachers are generally aware of what they are saying, of the points they are trying to make, they are not always aware of the way they are saying it, or the effects of non-verbal messages upon their students' behavior. For this reason, a chapter will be devoted to a discussion of the modes of classroom communication and their effects upon student behavior. Techniques for improving the quality and clarity of communication will also be discussed.

Dealing with parents and faculty members can also affect the teacher's successful management of student behavior and discipline. Once

teachers determine that they need outside help in controlling student behavior, either with an individual or the entire group, they must be very careful in enlisting aid from outside sources such as parents, counselors, administrators, fellow teachers, and staff members. Guidelines for asking for such help will be discussed so that teachers will be able to avoid some common pitfalls. Positive conferences with parents can yield valuable results in the areas of student behavior within the classroom. For this reason, suggestions for establishing good rapport with parents and discussions of the makeup of positive parent-teacher conferences will be included.

A final category to be considered that generally affects the teacher's construction of a successful learning/discipline program is the need for achieving philosophical agreement between teacher, district and site administration policies for handling student discipline problems. All three of these groups want students to learn and behave properly, but may have greatly differing definitions of, or expectations for, proper student behavior. This disparity will be discussed. The subject of teacher rights, especially as they relate to student learning and behavior, will also be discussed.

This text has been designed to provide you with an understanding of the functioning of psychological, sociological, and emotional states present within the teaching situation *in general* and disciplinary situations *in particular*. We believe that lowering teacher anxieties in the classroom will increase the likelihood of teacher success and student learning. For this reason, we have devoted two chapters to teacher tension. The first chapter will discuss teacher anxiety—its sources, incidence, and effects. Techniques for discovering the source of your own classroom-produced anxieties and eliminating the negative effects of such anxieties will be illustrated and further discussed in Chapter 2.

### **Note to the Reader:**

To maximize your utilization of this text, we have included exercises at the end of each chapter entitled "Thinking it Through," which are intended to personalize the information contained therein. Also while you are reading through the chapters, we suggest that you make notes in the margins whenever you feel that a concept or situation relates to you or your classroom. Such notes and exercises will help to move the information out of the theoretical and into the real world of actual teacher-student behavior and problem solving. The more you can become actively involved while reading the chapters, the better you will be able to integrate the techniques of anticipatory action into your own teaching repertoire.

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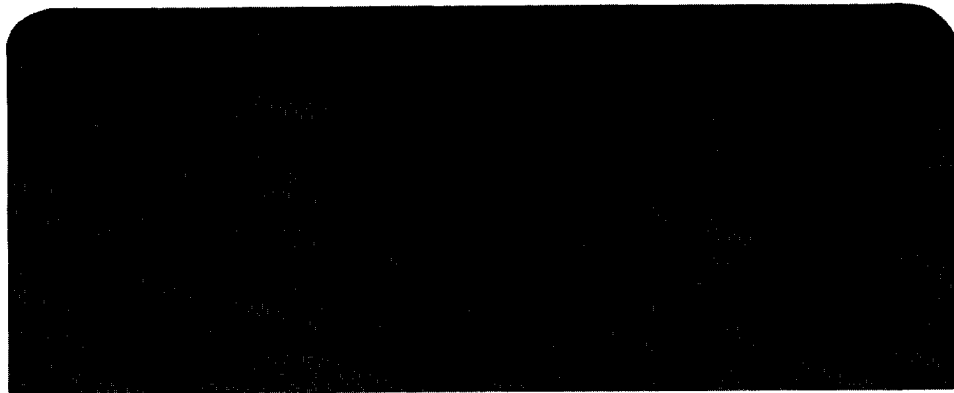
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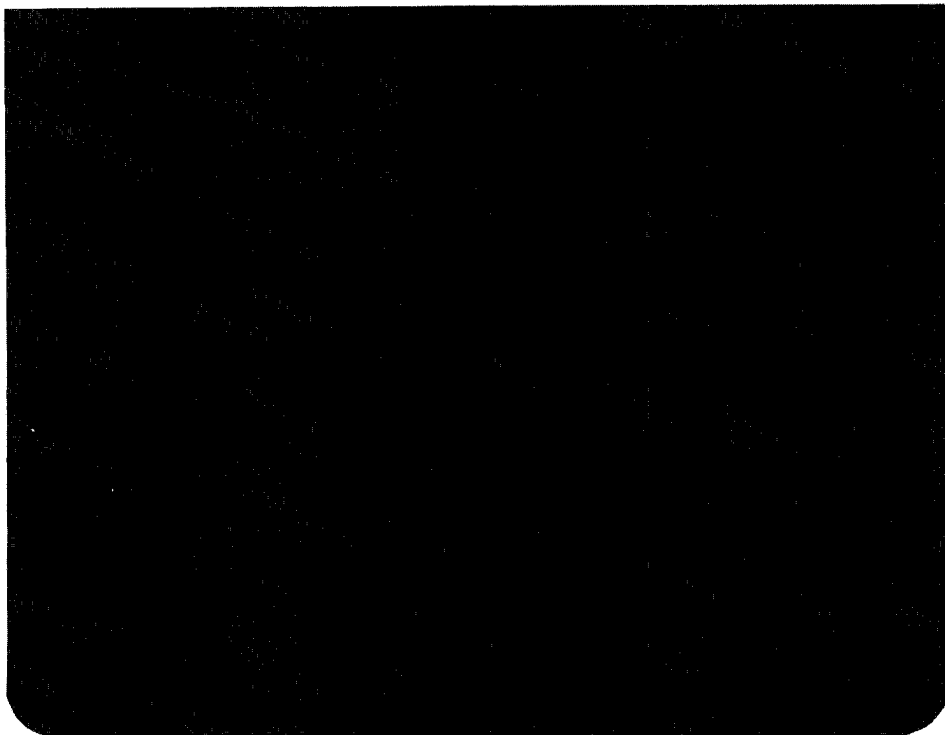
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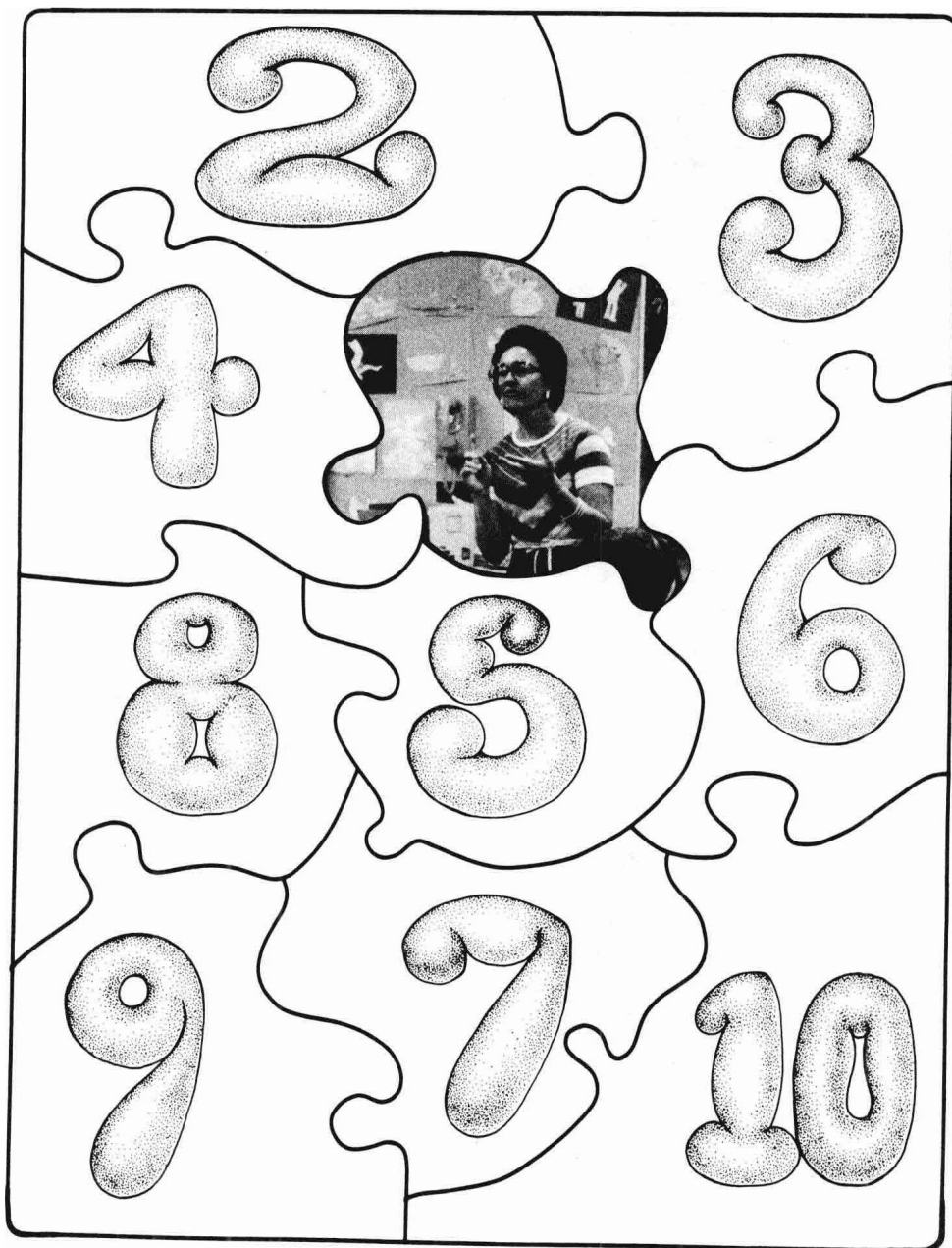
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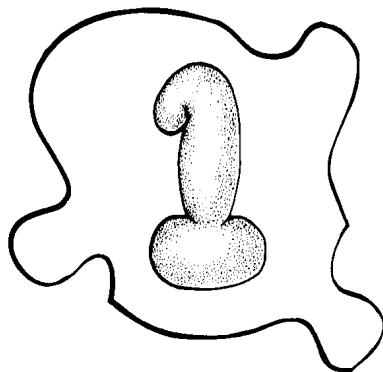


## **1 Anxiety and the Classroom Teacher**









When considering the emotional state of many teachers I see in the classroom, I've often thought that present day teachers also wear the scarlet letter that was worn by Nathaniel Hawthorne's Hester Prynne. The "A" no longer stands for adulteress however—now it stands for *anxiety* and has significance for all who see it and bear it.

Leo J. Schmidt, Ed.D.