

# Models of Classroom Management as Applied to the Secondary Classroom

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**D**ifficulty managing behavior in the classroom is frequently cited as a source of frustration for teachers and a common reason why new teachers leave the profession (Ingersoll 2001, 2003). Concerted attention to issues of classroom management is important to the health of education; attention to these issues at the middle and secondary education level are especially important, given that many of the strategies and methods of managing behavior in the elementary school years are perceived to become less effective with older populations of students.

A cohesive and thoughtfully constructed personal philosophy of classroom management can provide the foundation from which teachers make classroom management decisions and respond to instances of student misbehavior. In this article, we describe the major tenets of three well-established models of classroom management: Assertive Discipline, Logical Consequences, and Teacher Effectiveness Training. In addition to the description, an example of applying each model to a behavior management situation in a secondary classroom is supplied.

## **Classroom Management Models**

### *Assertive Discipline*

The Assertive Discipline classroom management model was initially developed by Lee Canter in the 1970s and then expanded based on Marlene Canter's work with children with behavioral problems (Canter 1979). Although this approach is often characterized as focusing primarily on rewards and punishments, the Canters actually place great emphasis on "catching students being good" and then providing appropriate

feedback and reinforcement (Canter and Canter 2001). This approach was developed to train teachers specifically to manage behavior in a classroom setting and is based on the idea that teachers have a right to teach in a well-managed classroom and students have the right to learn in a controlled environment.

The premise of Assertive Discipline is that teachers should establish a systematic discipline plan prior to the start of the school year and then communicate expectations and consequences to the students immediately. Having a preconceived, systematic plan permits a teacher to be consistent with behavioral expectations and to apply praises and consequences to all students in a fair and reliable manner. The four main components of the Assertive Discipline model include the teacher establishing: (1) a set of consistent, firm, and fair rules; (2) a predetermined set of positive consequences for adhering to the rules; (3) a prearranged set of negative consequences to be applied when rules are not followed; and (4) a plan to implement the model with students (Canter and Canter 2001). The Canters hold that an effective behavior management program is fueled by informed student choices. Students are aware of teacher expectations and what will occur when they choose to meet those expectations and, conversely, what will occur when they choose not to adhere to the established classroom rules (Canter 1989).

### **In the Classroom**

The Assertive Discipline model can be applied to any classroom situation with any grade level of students. In utilizing this approach, teachers must determine the expectations and consequences that are appropriate for the subject area and age of the students they serve. For

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example, there are specific expectations that apply to particular subject areas; this would be the case with a high school science class. In this situation, the teacher could utilize the Assertive Discipline model to establish expectations for lab procedures (such as: safety glasses must be worn when using the Bunsen burner; procedures must be followed to utilize scalpels during dissection; care for the microscope and slides must be considered).

Regardless of age or expectation, students require positive feedback on whether expectations are being met or consequences need to be applied. Teachers must develop consequences that are appropriate based on the classroom situation and age of the students. For example, although missing five minutes of recess can easily be applied to students in an elementary setting, teachers of middle and high school age students must find consequences that are applicable to their setting, such as serving a five-minute detention after school or assisting with cleaning the lab during lunch.

#### *Logical Consequences*

A second popular model of classroom management is articulated by Rudolf Dreikurs (1968). This model is based on earlier work by German psychiatrist Alfred Adler, and relies on the notion that students' misbehavior is an outgrowth of their unmet needs. One of the underlying assumptions of the model is that all students desire and need social recognition. When this need is not fulfilled, students exhibit a hierarchy of misbehaviors based on what Dreikurs refers to as "mistaken goals" (Dreikurs, Grunwald, and Pepper 1998, 13). Dreikurs holds that when a student's need for recognition is unmet, that student will first display attention-seeking behaviors. If those behaviors do not result in the desired recognition, the student will attempt to engage teachers in power struggles. If this bid for power still leaves the student without the desired recognition, the student may focus on issues of fairness and attempts to exact revenge. If this behavior is unsuccessful, the student may finally resort to "displays of inadequacy" (Dreikurs, Grunwald, and Pepper 1998, 24–25) where he or she appears to simply give up and disengage.

Where the Assertive Discipline model of classroom management emphasizes the importance of teacher-imposed structure in the classroom, the Dreikurs model emphasizes the importance of assisting students in meeting their innate need to gain recognition and acceptance. Even when a teacher strives to establish a classroom where all students feel recognized and accepted, it is likely that some misbehavior will occur. In those cases, Dreikurs advocates for the application of logical consequences (Dreikurs and Grey 1968), which are consequences that have a clear and logical connection to the misbehavior and have

been discussed and agreed upon with the student before applied. An example of a logical consequence for a student who disrupts others during class might be that the student will be isolated from the group until he or she agrees to rejoin the group without disruption. A logical consequence is different from a natural consequence in that natural consequences occur without teacher planning or discussion with the student. Although logical consequences should be clearly related to the misbehavior, they also require active planning and conscious application.

Although the use of logical consequences to respond to misbehavior is an important element of Dreikurs' model, the real strength of the model lies in its emphasis on preventing misbehavior. Although this emphasis on prevention is a common thread among all the models described here, Dreikurs' model is unique in that prevention is based on developing positive relationships with students so that they can feel accepted.

#### **In the Classroom**

The principles espoused by Dreikurs can be applied in many middle and high school classroom situations. For example, during a high school English class, a student may be sitting at his desk listening to music while wearing headphones. If the teacher demands that the student remove the headphones and turn off the music, the student may respond by smiling at the teacher and refusing to follow directions. Additional demands by the teacher may result in continued defiance and increased silliness on the part of the student. In this case, the teacher has merely fueled the student's acting out to gain both attention (from peers as well as the teacher) and power.

According to Dreikurs, teachers should always avoid power struggles with students. A better approach would be for the teacher to ignore the headphones and try instead to work the student into some sort of leadership role, like helping the teacher take roll, proof-reading an answer key, or writing the day's homework assignment on the overhead. If the student's mistaken goal is to gain a sense of power, then teachers should look for productive ways to allow that student to feel powerful and consequently valued and recognized. Attempting to "put a student in his place" will only increase that student's feelings of neglect or inferiority and lead to increased acting out.

The distribution of logical consequences can also be applied to the example of the student listening to music on headphones. After class, the teacher could conference with the student about what an appropriate consequence for wearing headphones during class might be. One conceivable consequence would be for that student to make up the amount of class time he missed (by not being able to hear the teacher) during lunch time.

### *Teacher Effectiveness Training*

Teacher Effectiveness Training is a third well-established model of classroom management (Gordon 1977). Similar to the Logical Consequences model, Teacher Effectiveness Training evolved from the field of psychology. The author of the model, Thomas Gordon, conceptualizes effective management of a classroom as facilitating the shift of management responsibilities from teacher to students. Gordon emphasizes the importance of teaching students to regulate and manage their own behavior. In keeping with this, Gordon highlights the value of intrinsic motivators and encourages teachers to use "I-messages" (Edwards 2004, 149) when talking to students about problematic classroom behavior. I-messages focus on the speaker's feelings and perspectives (in this case, the teacher's), as opposed to focusing on what the student has done wrong or what the student should do differently.

Gordon's model of classroom management contrasts with the Canters' model in that the Canters conceptualize a well-run classroom as a reflection of the teacher's explicit articulation of rules and his or her consistency in applying rewards and consequences. Gordon's model de-emphasizes the teacher's role in classroom behavior management and instead promotes ways that the teacher can empower the students to self-regulate their behavior through modeling, and teaching students how to conceptualize and solve problems for themselves.

### **In the Classroom**

Because of its emphasis on self-regulation, the Teacher Effectiveness Training model is often considered most appropriate for use with secondary age students. For example, a high school math teacher faced with a student who frequently turns in assignments late could use I-messages to encourage student ownership of the problem that will hopefully result in a change in behavior. Instead of applying consequences for the infraction, the teacher could talk to the student privately about how it is difficult to accurately assess the student's progress and give her a fair grade when assignments are not turned in on time. If the student responds by talking about all the other work she has to do and the competing demands on her time, the teacher should then shift the discussion to one about strategies for time management and finding resources to support the student. According to Gordon's model, this approach has a higher likelihood of success than simply delivering consequences because it represents an attempt to help the student change his or her own behavior.

### **Conclusion**

The models of classroom management described here are just a few of the many documented approaches that

teachers can adopt or adapt for their own use. The models detailed above represent three points along a continuum in terms of the amount of teacher versus student control advocated. The Canters emphasize the role of the teacher; Dreikurs underscores the importance of meeting students' need for acceptance while also emphasizing the role of consequences in shaping behavior; Gordon highlights the importance of giving control of classroom behavior over to the students. Other theorists and researchers have advanced competing models that fall in various places along this continuum (see William Glasser, Fredric Jones, Linda Albert; appendix for Resource List).

We believe that a teacher's articulation of a philosophy of classroom management is just as important as the articulation of an overall teaching philosophy. One way to combat difficulties with classroom management is to have a framework in place that allows the teacher to address behavior problems in intentional ways. We also believe it is a common misconception that many classroom management models do not apply to or work well in secondary classroom settings. Another erroneous belief is that adolescents understand what constitutes appropriate school behavior and can exhibit these behaviors at will. This attitude can actually undermine teachers because they may feel it is unnecessary to explicitly articulate a classroom management model to older students. These false assumptions lead to unnecessary problems in the classroom and present an additional burden to students who have disabilities or difficulties that affect their social behavior. Although many other traditional and modern models exist, we have briefly described only three specific approaches to classroom management. The important point is for teachers to educate themselves about the various models and choose the one (or combination of ones) that mesh best with their teaching philosophies and personalities. Using a model as a foundation for classroom management decisions helps teachers make rational, informed decisions about behavior problems and decreases the possibility that they will make knee-jerk decisions that they may later regret. Hopefully, more attention to issues of classroom management in middle and secondary schools will provide some protection for schools and teachers against burnout and attrition related to student misbehavior.

*Key words: secondary education, assertive discipline, logical consequences, teacher effectiveness training*

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