

# Developing the Skills of Humanistic Discipline

When they have mastered skills at two earlier stages—pedagogy and management—teachers are ready to treat students humanistically.

THOMAS R. MCDANIEL

Advice to teachers about classroom management and discipline abounds. Canter<sup>1</sup> tells us to be assertive; Skinner<sup>2</sup> insists that we catch children being good and reinforce them; Glasser<sup>3</sup> recommends ten steps to good discipline via reality therapy; Dreikurs<sup>4</sup> suggests logical consequences. One recent article even argues that teachers should be more effective authoritarians.<sup>5</sup> Preventive discipline,<sup>6</sup> developmental discipline,<sup>7</sup> three-dimensional discipline<sup>8</sup>—what's a teacher to do?

My experience in working with student teachers and veteran teachers—in workshops, graduate and undergraduate courses, inservice training, and school-wide discipline projects—has led me to certain conclusions about the discipline dilemma in public schools:

*Conclusion 1: Teacher training should emphasize discipline skills.* Most teachers enter the profession, and persevere in it, with little or no training in school discipline techniques. This is indeed strange when discipline problems are so frequently cited as the greatest dilemma facing public schools. Public criticism of schools and the debilitating effects of teacher burnout are closely linked to the problems of student behavior. Few states mention behavior management in certification regulations, except perhaps for special educators. Few colleges or universities require (or even provide) courses in classroom discipline for regular classroom teachers. What is provided in psychology or methods courses tends to be either theoretical and academic (such as study of reinforcement principles), or

folk wisdom (such as advice to be firm but gentle, friendly but aloof—and not to smile until Christmas). Very rarely, I regret to say, do we provide teachers with actual competency-based discipline skills. Training for teachers should emphasize such skills.

*Conclusion 2: Teacher education should emphasize the dynamics of misbehavior in the contemporary school.* Students are increasingly difficult to manage. Why this is so is open to debate; that it is so is attested to me by teachers everywhere I go. The causes of misbehavior are complex, but we can speculate on some of the contributing conditions. For example, in its present integrated and mainstreamed status, our school population is more diverse than ever before. The number of students from single-parent homes is on the rise now that almost every other marriage ends in divorce; the number of students with emotional problems and learning problems is increasing; and the impact of drugs, alcohol, and television on student behavior is only now getting the serious study it deserves.

*Conclusion 3: Teacher preparation should emphasize the coherent relationship of discipline theories and practices.*<sup>9</sup> The plethora of discipline models confuses and confounds the practicing teacher. A few years ago, teachers were told almost nothing about

professional approaches to classroom management; today the oversupply of apparently conflicting theories and techniques can result in a different difficulty for teachers: sensory overload. Where does a teacher begin in the process of making sense out of discipline strategies? What comes first—rules or relationships? Praise or punishment? Negative reinforcement or negotiation? There is no single solution to so complex and variable a problem as school discipline.

*Conclusion 4: Discipline techniques should be viewed as the tools with which the teacher-as-artist works in the classroom.* The teacher is more important in good discipline than the particular approaches used in the classroom. For better or worse, teaching is still an art—an art informed by scientific studies of teaching and human behavior, but an art nonetheless. Just as no sex manual can prescribe the formula for "love," so no behavior management program can prescribe the formula for "discipline." Good classroom discipline is in part an elusive quality of community and communication that grows out of the people—students and teachers—who happen to be together in that given time and place. That a teacher has faith in certain techniques, believes in the students, and expects certain behavior is surely as important to good discipline as the techniques themselves.

These conclusions can serve as basic premises in the development of an integrated approach to classroom discipline that is skill based, coherent, and humanistic. It seems to me that teachers

Thomas R. McDaniel is Head of the Division of Education, Converse College, Spartanburg, South Carolina.

**Figure 1. Stages of Discipline Development for Professional Teachers**

**Level 1. Instructional Stage**

**Premise:** Effective discipline begins with a teacher's knowledge of subject matter, curriculum, and methods of instruction and evaluation.

- Attitudes:**
1. Schools exist to promote learning—primarily the knowledge, skills, and values embodied in the formal curriculum.
  2. Teachers are responsible for organizing and presenting knowledge, skills, and values and for facilitating learning.
  3. Students can learn and behave in ways that help them become capable and responsible adults.

- Skills:**
1. Organizing unit and daily plans for clarity, logical learning, and student success
  2. Motivating students by a variety of techniques: advance organizers, set induction, and so on
  3. Designing a range of learning experiences and teaching methods: learning centers, small- and large-group instruction, audiovisuals, games, and so on
  4. Providing evaluation and feedback in ways that provide success and monitor progress

- Language Competencies:**
1. Clear written and oral expression to ensure clear communication
  2. Precise behavioral objectives
  3. Unambiguous evaluation instruments

**Level 2. Behavioral Management Stage**

**Premise:** Effective discipline requires a teacher to provide both control and support of student actions.

- Attitudes:**
1. Schools are repositories of cultural values of behavior and have a special responsibility to help children learn those values.
  2. Teachers should work with students to develop rules for behavior and teach these rules by consistent enforcement.
  3. Students should be reinforced (verbally and nonverbally) for appropriate behavior.

- Skills:**
1. Rule setting and teaching of rules (examples, demonstration, practice, testing)
  2. Setting limits verbally and nonverbally in classroom encounters
  3. Enforcing rules by action, not anger or threats, and with logical consequences
  4. Using praise, rewards, touch, gestures, cues, and modeling to reinforce

- Language Competencies:**
1. Clear, specific, assertive commands ("I need you to . . .") with proper gestures, eye contact, proximity, tone of voice
  2. Soft reprimand and "broken record" technique
  3. Praising ("I like the way . . ."), cueing, ignoring

**Level 3. Humanistic Stage**

**Premise:** Effective discipline depends ultimately on students developing self-discipline, internal controls for behavior, and mature decision-making processes.

- Attitudes:**
1. Schools exist to help students grow into responsible, wise adults.
  2. Teachers need to respect the worth of students as individuals with rights, needs, and feelings.
  3. Students should have opportunities to assume increasing responsibility for their own actions.

- Skills:**
1. Establishing participatory rule-setting and problem-solving sessions
  2. Counseling techniques
  3. Contract negotiation
  4. Making solution-oriented plans with students who break rules

- Language Competencies:**
1. Stating problems clearly and brainstorming solutions
  2. Reflecting feelings, active listening, congruent communication
  3. Glasser's response-set to a rule breaker ("What are you doing? Is it helping you? What should you be doing? Can you make a plan?")

usually move through several developmental stages or levels of professional growth, as shown in Figure 1. While there may be some overlap, each stage includes a central complex of premises, attitudes, skills, and language competencies that a teacher must master as a sound basis for the next stage. In this sense, then, classroom management and discipline are developmental dimensions of professional competence.

**Stages of Discipline Development**

First, I think teachers, especially beginning teachers, need to master the skills of classroom instruction. This includes knowing the subject matter and how to sequence it and present it; knowing how to move from concepts to objectives to methods of instruction; and knowing how to provide motivation, pacing, variety, and active involvement. Good teaching promotes good discipline. Moreover, in the absence of effective instruction, classroom management is an empty exercise, a means to no defensible end. Therefore, the basis of effective discipline is the instructional program.

Some teachers teach so well that they have relatively few behavior problems. But good instruction itself is not sufficient for today's teacher. At a second developmental level in the teacher's professional self are the skills of behavior management. At this point the teacher goes beyond instruction to deal directly with management. The objective in this stage should be to understand what is required in the way of rules, consequences, rewards, and classroom structure to ensure clarity, order, and security. How should rules be arrived at, phrased, and enforced? What rewards (reinforcers) are allowable, reasonable, and effective? Why is a teacher's use of action rather than threats essential in establishing control? At this level the assertive discipline model is particularly useful because of its focus on how to communicate teacher needs to students and how to support and reinforce acceptable student behavior.

Once teachers have mastered the pedagogical skills (level one) and the control skills (level two), they are then ready to move to level three: humanistic skills. I realize that some educators will recoil at wedding the words "humanistic" and "skills"—the latter term seems so technical. But I am convinced that such



skills do exist and can be learned, just as reinforcement principles and assertiveness principles can be learned and practiced as discrete skills. The teacher-artist will need to integrate all such skills into a personal and professional repertoire, much as the master pianist integrates the various scales into a musical repertoire.

The humanistic approach to discipline is, perhaps, most appropriate in the secondary grades, when students have reached a higher level of maturity. But elementary students can start developing the skills of self-discipline and participatory democracy. An elementary teacher who has progressed through level three can involve children in rule setting, problem solving, and contracts. The teacher (at whatever grade level) who works at building community and communication in the classroom, treats students with respect, and expects responsible and reasoned behavior is on the road to level three. But it takes more than a humanistic attitude to achieve humanistic discipline; it takes specific skills and language competencies to implement this advanced level of discipline.

At this level, teachers need to master rather complex and sophisticated techniques of humanistic discipline. Problem-solving sessions, for example, require the teacher to serve as a mediator rather than an authoritarian. It is easier simply to decree "this is the way it has to be," but the teacher who uses humanistic discipline realizes that students who are solving problems are learning to analyze needs, brainstorm solutions to shared problems, and reach consensus on solutions with classmates and teacher. The six-step teacher Effectiveness Training process outlined by Thomas Gordon is particularly useful here. This process requires the class to:

1. Define the problem.
2. Generate possible solutions.
3. Evaluate the solutions.
4. Decide which solution is best.
5. Determine how to implement the solution.
6. Evaluate how well the solution solved the problem.<sup>10</sup>

Teachers who have mastered humanistic discipline know that the time spent in this process pays rich dividends, not only in better discipline but in more responsible and cooperative students.

The language competence of humanistic teachers is especially important in establishing good discipline. Ginott, for example, declares that "teachers who want to improve relations with children need to unlearn their habitual language of rejection and acquire a new language of acceptance."<sup>11</sup> This new language addresses situations rather than personalities, describes rather than evaluates, uses "I messages" rather than "you messages," avoids commands while inviting cooperation, reflects feelings, and does not label. It is sane, congruent, and brief. "A wise teacher," say Ginott, "talks to children the way he does to visitors at his home."<sup>12</sup>

The reality therapy approach, while somewhat authoritarian in several respects, also depends on language competencies designed to promote students' decision-making abilities. William Glasser, who developed this approach, argues that students are rational beings who must be given opportunities to make choices, decisions, and commitments. Consequently, a teacher needs to confront students in direct and personal ways to encourage responsible self-analysis and decision making. Never, says Glasser, ask misbehaving stu-

dents why they did something because that focuses on the past and on submerging motives. Ask instead, "What did you do?" in a kind, nonthreatening, nonpunitive way. This question encourages students to confront the reality of their present behavior and requires them to analyze their decisions. Once students have verbalized what they did, Glasser recommends asking, "Did this help you or others?" This question asks students to evaluate their behavior and judge its appropriateness and worth. Finally, the teacher is asking the student to decide on an alternative behavior, a solution to a problem. This solution can become the basis for a plan, a commitment, even a contract that the teacher will help monitor in future situations.

Gordon, Ginott, and Glasser stress the importance of personal relationships, democratic communities, and helpful language; they emphasize the importance of responsible decision making and self-worth to students who are developing into autonomous adults. They—as do other humanistic educators—want to see punishment replaced by positive, solution-oriented classroom practices that involve students and teachers in counseling and negotiation processes and meaningful dialogue. All of these interactions require teachers to master a host of techniques, skills, and language patterns that are far from "natural," that indeed require a great deal of practice before the teacher becomes proficient in applying them in the classroom.

#### Final Thoughts

As teachers consider the problems of classroom management and discipline, they should remember that their effectiveness depends not on finding quick fixes or magic formulas. Rather, effective discipliners grow in their professional competence by developing their skills of instruction, management, and humanistic problem solving. Proficiency at each stage frees a teacher to concentrate on mastering the discipline competencies of the next stage. The teacher who arrives at stage three does not leave the other two stages behind but, instead, brings his or her instructional and management competencies into balance with the human relations skills of stage three.

It is near the conclusion of stage three in the teacher's development that disci-

**“Humanistic discipline pays rich dividends, not only in better discipline, but in more responsible, cooperative students.”**

pline starts to become a pedagogical art, an integration of instructional techniques, behavioral skills, and humanistic practices. Teachers at this point—as artists in discipline—are able to be not only skillful but creative and intuitive as they deal with the dynamics of classroom behavior. These are the professional conductors who orchestrate the tempo of student activities to ensure harmony; these are the weavers of the classroom tapestry who are sensitive to the tones and moods and textures of complex human interactions. Such teachers are rare, but they are beautiful to behold. Their techniques are not obvious, but the results are.

Those of us who work with teachers and attempt to help them deal with discipline problems can chart the course of teacher progress by way of the three stages outlined here—so long as we do not become enslaved by stage-theory thinking. Even a beginning teacher can start mastering some humanistic discipline techniques. What is crucial is our concept of the teacher-as-artist whose skills are but tools to be integrated into the evolving professionalism of the true educator. □

<sup>1</sup>Lee and Marlene Carter, *Assertive Discipline* (Sea Beach, Calif.: Canter and Associates, 1976). See also the *Assertive Discipline Follow-up Guide* (Sea Beach, Calif.: Canter and Associates, 1981).

<sup>2</sup>B.F. Skinner, *The Technology of Teaching* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts,

1968). For a more direct application of behavioral principles to discipline, see John and Helen Krumboltz, *Changing Children's Behavior* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972); Charlotte Epstein, *Classroom Management and Teaching* (Reston, Va.: Reston Publishing Co., 1979); James Long and Virginia Faye, *Making It 'Til Friday* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Book Co., 1977).

<sup>3</sup>William Glasser, "10 Steps to Good Discipline," *Today's Education* 66 (November-December 1977): 61-63. See also Glasser's *Reality Therapy: A New Approach to Psychiatry* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) and *Schools Without Failure* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

<sup>4</sup>Rudolf Dreikurs and Pearl Cassel, *Discipline Without Tears* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1972). See also Dreikurs and Cassel, *Maintaining Sanity in the Classroom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

<sup>5</sup>Thomas R. McDaniel, "How to Be an Effective Authoritarian," *The Clearing House* 55 (February 1982): 245-247.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas R. McDaniel, "A Stitch in Time: Principles of Preventive Discipline," *American Secondary Education* 9 (June 1979): 52-57.

<sup>7</sup>Laurel N. Tanner, *Classroom Discipline For Effective Teaching and Learning* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1978).

<sup>8</sup>Richard Curwin and Allen Mendler, *The Discipline Book: A Complete Guide to School and Classroom Management* (Reston, Va.: Reston Publishing Co., 1980). See also their most recent treatment of "three-dimensional discipline" in *Taking Charge: A Practical Guide to Effective Discipline* (Reston, Va.: Reston Publishing Co., 1983).

<sup>9</sup>For a text that attempts to provide a coherent synthesis of discipline theory and practice, see Charles Wolfgang and Carl Glickman, *Solving Discipline Problems: Alternative Strategies for Classroom Teachers* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1980).

<sup>10</sup>Thomas Gordon, *Teacher Effectiveness Training* (New York: Peter H. Wyden, 1974), p. 228.

<sup>11</sup>Haim Ginott, *Teacher and Child* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. 81. For an interesting discussion of the different approaches to language in the strategies of Canter, Gordon, Glasser, and Ginott, see Joan Duff Kise, "Language Usage as a Means of Maintaining Classroom Discipline," *The Clearing House* 56 (September 1982): 12-16.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 101.

## Wanted: Articles

... by educators from elementary-secondary school systems. Brief articles describing specific programs or practices are especially needed. For example:

Topic	Deadline
<b>Policies.</b> Examples of how local policies have been used to raise standards or improve instruction.	June 1
<b>Teacher Career Development.</b> Local actions affecting salaries, working conditions, motivation, or professional growth of teachers.	August 1
<b>Language and Communication.</b> Programs to develop language skills, especially those in which students participate in "real" activities, and those involving teachers beyond the English department.	October 1
<b>School Improvement.</b> Examples of successful school improvement programs, including evidence of results.	November 1
<b>Testing.</b> Local uses of tests and scores that go beyond conventional practices.	January 1

Short articles (three to six pages double spaced) are often more desirable than longer ones. For good examples, look through recent issues or write for suggestions. Send as early as possible to Ron Brandt, Executive Editor, ASCD, 225 N. Washington St., Alexandria, VA 22314. (Note: We receive many more manuscripts than we can publish. We welcome the opportunity to consider your article even though it may not be accepted.)

Copyright © 1984 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.