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- relatedness—the need to feel connected or involved with others

Note that these needs are all psychological, not physical; hunger and sex, for example, are not on the list. They are also about personal growth or development, not about deficits that a person tries to reduce or eliminate. Unlike food (in behaviorism) or safety (in Maslow's hierarchy), you can never get enough of autonomy, competence, or relatedness. You (and your students) will seek to enhance these continually throughout life.

The key idea of self-determination theory is that when persons (such as you or one of your students) feel that these basic needs are reasonably well met, they tend to perceive their actions and choices to be intrinsically motivated or “self-determined”. In that case they can turn their attention to a variety of activities that they find attractive or important, but that do not relate directly to their basic needs. Among your students, for example, some individuals might read books that you have suggested, and others might listen attentively when you explain key concepts from the unit that you happen to be teaching. If one or more basic needs are not met well, however, people will tend to feel coerced by outside pressures or external incentives. They may become preoccupied, in fact, with satisfying whatever need has not been met and thus exclude or avoid activities that might otherwise be interesting, educational, or important. If the persons are students, their learning will suffer.

Self-determination and intrinsic motivation

In proposing the importance of needs, then, self-determination theory is asserting the importance of intrinsic motivation, an idea that has come up before in this book (see especially Chapter 1, about learning theory), and that will come again later (see especially Chapter 9, about planning instruction). The self-determination version of intrinsic motivation, however, emphasizes a person's perception of freedom, rather than the presence or absence of “real” constraints on action. Self-determination means a person feels free, even if the person is also operating within certain external constraints. In principle, a student can experience self-determination even if the student must, for example, live within externally imposed rules of appropriate classroom behavior. To achieve a feeling of self-determination, however, the student's basic needs must be met—needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In motivating students, then, the bottom line is that teachers have an interest in helping students to meet their basic needs, and in not letting school rules or the teachers' own leadership styles interfere with or block satisfaction of students' basic needs.

“Pure” self-determination may be the ideal for most teachers and students, of course, but the reality is usually different. For a variety of reasons, teachers in most classrooms cannot be expected to meet all students' basic needs at all times. One reason is the sheer number of students, which makes it impossible to attend to every student perfectly at all times. Another reason is teachers' responsibility for a curriculum, which can require creating expectations for students' activities that sometimes conflict with students' autonomy or makes them feel (temporarily) less than fully competent. Still another reason is students' personal histories, ranging from divorce to poverty, which may create needs in some individuals which are beyond the power of teachers to remedy.

The result from students' point of view is usually only a partial perception of self-determination, and therefore a simultaneous mix of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Self-determination theory recognizes this reality by suggesting that the “intrinsic-ness” of motivation is really a matter of degree, extending from highly extrinsic, through various mixtures of intrinsic and extrinsic, to highly *intrinsic* (Koestner & Losier, 2004). At the extrinsic end of the scale is learning that is regulated primarily by external rewards and constraints, whereas at the intrinsic

end is learning regulated primarily by learners themselves. Table 16 summarizes and gives examples of the various levels and their effects on motivation. By assuming that motivation is often a mix of the intrinsic and extrinsic, the job of the teacher becomes more realistic; the job is not to expect purely intrinsic motivation from students all the time, but simply to arrange and encourage motivations that are as intrinsic as possible. To do this, the teacher needs to support students' basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Table 16: Combinations of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

Source of regulation of action	Description	Example
"Pure" extrinsic motivation	Person lacks the intention to take any action, regardless of pressures or incentives	Student completes <i>no</i> work even when pressured or when incentives are offered
Very external to person	Actions regulated only by outside pressures and incentives, and controls	Student completes assignment <i>only</i> if reminded explicitly of the incentive of grades and/or negative consequences of failing
Somewhat external	Specific actions regulated internally, but without reflection or connection to personal needs	Student completes assignment independently, but only because of fear of shaming self or because of guilt about consequences of not completing assignment
Somewhat internal	Actions recognized by individual as important or as valuable as a means to a more valued goal	Student generally completes school work independently, but only because of its value in gaining admission to college
Very internal	Actions adopted by individual as integral to self-concept and to person's major personal values	Student generally completes school work independently, because being well educated is part of the student's concept of himself
"Pure" intrinsic regulation	Actions practiced solely because they are enjoyable and valued for their own sake	Student enjoys every topic, concept, and assignment that every teacher ever assigns, and completes school work solely because of his enjoyment

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Using self-determination theory in the classroom

What are some teaching strategies for supporting students' needs? Educational researchers have studied this question from a variety of directions, and their resulting recommendations converge and overlap in a number of ways. For convenience, the recommendations can be grouped according to the basic need that they address, beginning with the need for autonomy.

Supporting autonomy in learners

A major part of supporting autonomy is to give students *choices* wherever possible (Ryan & Lynch, 2003). The choices that encourage the greatest feelings of self-control, obviously, are ones that are about relatively major issues or that have relatively significant consequences for students, such as whom to choose as partners for a major group project. But choices also encourage some feeling of self-control even when they are about relatively minor issues, such as how to organize your desk or what kind of folder to use for storing your papers at school. It is important, furthermore, to offer choices to *all* students, including students needing explicit directions in order to work successfully; avoid reserving choices for only the best students or giving up offering choices altogether to students who fall behind or who need extra help. All students will feel more self-determined and therefore more motivated if they have choices of some sort.

Teachers can also support students' autonomy more directly by minimizing external rewards (like grades) and comparisons among students' performance, and by orienting and responding themselves to students' expressed goals and interests. In teaching elementary students about climate change, for example, you can support autonomy by exploring which aspects of this topic have *already* come to students' attention and aroused their concern. The point of the discussion would not be to find out "who knows the most" about this topic, but to build and enhance students' intrinsic motivations as much as possible. In reality, of course, it may not be possible to succeed at this goal fully—some students may simply have no interest in the topic, for example, or you may be constrained by time or resources from individualizing certain activities fully. But any degree of attention to students' individuality, as well as any degree of choice, will support students' autonomy.

Supporting the need for competence

The most obvious way to make students feel competent is by selecting activities which are challenging but nonetheless achievable with reasonable effort and assistance (Elliott, McGregor, & Thrash, 2004). Although few teachers would disagree with this idea, there are times when it is hard to put into practice, such as when you first meet a class at the start of a school year and therefore are unfamiliar with their backgrounds and interests. But there are some strategies that are generally effective even if you are not yet in a position to know the students well. One is to emphasize activities that require active response from students. Sometimes this simply means selecting projects, experiments, discussions and the like that require students to do more than simply listen. Other times it means expecting active responses in all interactions with students, such as by asking questions that call for "divergent" (multiple or elaborated) answers. In a social studies class, for example, try asking "What are some ways we could find out more about our community?" instead of "Tell me the three best ways to find out about our community." The first question invites more divergent, elaborate answers than the second.

Another generally effective way to support competence is to respond and give feedback as immediately as possible. Tests and term papers help subsequent learning more if returned, with comments, sooner rather than

later. Discussions teach more if you include your own ideas in them, while still encouraging students' input. Small group and independent activities are more effective if you provide a convenient way for students to consult authoritative sources for guidance when needed, whether the source is you personally, a teaching assistant, a specially selected reading, or even a computer program. In addition, you can sometimes devise tasks that create a feeling of competence because they have a "natural" solution or ending point. Assembling a jigsaw puzzle of the community, for example, has this quality, and so does *creating* a jigsaw puzzle of the community if the students need a greater challenge.

Supporting the need to relate to others

The main way of support students' need to relate to others is to arrange activities in which students work together in ways that are mutually supportive, that recognize students' diversity, and minimize competition among individuals. We will have more to say about this strategy in Chapter 8 ("Instructional strategies"), where we describe several varieties of cooperative learning, as well as some of their pitfalls to be avoided. For now, simply note that having students work together can happen in many ways. You can, for example, deliberately arrange projects that require a variety of talents; some educators call such activities "rich group work" (Cohen, 1994; Cohen, Brody, & Sapon-Shevin, 2004). In studying in small groups about medieval society, for example, one student can contribute his drawing skills, another can contribute his writing skills, and still another can contribute his dramatic skills. The result can be a multi-faceted presentation—written, visual, and oral. The groups needed for rich group work provide for students' relationships with each other, whether they contain six individuals or only two.

There are other ways to encourage relationships among students. In the jigsaw classroom (Aronson & Patnoe, 1997), for example, students work together in two phases. In the first phase, groups of "experts" work together to find information on a specialized topic. In a second phase the expert groups split up and reform into "generalist" groups containing one representative from each former expert group. In studying the animals of Africa, for example, each expert group might find information about a different particular category of animal or plant; one group might focus on mammal, another on bird, a third on reptiles, and so on. In the second phase of the jigsaw, the generalist groups would pool information from the experts to get a more well-rounded view of the topic. The generalist groups would each have an expert about mammals, for example, but also an expert about birds and about reptiles.

As a teacher, you can add to these organizational strategies by encouraging the development of your own relationships with class members. Your goal, as teacher, is to demonstrate caring and interest in your students not just as students, but as people. The goal also involves behaving as if good relationships between and among class members are not only possible, but ready to develop and perhaps even already developing. A simple tactic, for example, is to speak of "we" and "us" as much as possible, rather than speaking of "you students". Another tactic is to present cooperative activities and assignments without apology, as if they are in the best interests not just of students, but of "us all" in the classroom, yourself included.

Keeping self-determination in perspective

In certain ways self-determination theory provides a sensible way to think about students' intrinsic motivation and therefore to think about how to get them to manage their own learning. A particular strength of the theory is that it recognizes *degrees* of self-determination and bases many ideas on this reality. Most people recognize

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combinations of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation guiding particular activities in their own lives. We might enjoy teaching, for example, but also do this job partly to receive a paycheck. To its credit, self-determination theory also relies on a list of basic human needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—that relate comfortably with some of the larger purposes of education.

Although these are positive features for understanding and influencing students' classroom motivation, some educators and psychologists nonetheless have lingering questions about the limitations of self-determination theory. One is whether merely providing choices actually improves students' learning, or simply improves their *satisfaction* with learning. There is evidence supporting both possibilities (Flowerday & Schraw, 2003; Deci & Ryan, 2003), and it is likely that there are teachers whose classroom experience supports both possibilities as well. Another question is whether it is possible to *overdo* attention to students' needs—and again there is evidence for both favoring and contradicting this possibility. Too many choices can actually make anyone (not just a student) frustrated and dissatisfied with a choice the person actually *does* make (Schwartz, 2004). Furthermore, differentiating activities to students' competence levels may be impractical if students are functioning at extremely diverse levels within a single class, as sometimes happens. Differentiating may be inappropriate, too, if it holds a teacher back from covering key curriculum objectives which students need and which at least some students are able to learn. These are serious concerns, though in our opinion *not* serious enough to give up offering choices to students or to stop differentiating instruction altogether. In Chapter 7 ("Classroom management and the learning environment"), therefore, we explain the practical basis for this opinion, by describing workable ways for offering choices and recognizing students' diversity.

Expectancy x value: effects on students' motivation

As we have explained in this chapter, motivation is affected by several factors, including reinforcement for behavior, but especially also students' goals, interests, and sense of self-efficacy and self-determination. The factors combine to create two general sources of motivation: students' expectation of success and the value that students place on a goal. Viewing motivation in this way is often called the expectancy-value model of motivation (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002; Wigfield, Tonk, & Eccles, 2004), and sometimes written with a multiplicative formula: expectancy x value = motivation. The relationship between expectation and value is "multiplicative" rather than additive because in order to be motivated, it is necessary for a person to have at least a modest expectation of success and to assign a task at least some positive value. If you have high expectations of success but do not value a task at all (mentally assign it a "0" value), then you will not feel motivated at all. Likewise, if you value a task highly but have no expectation of success about completing it (assign it a "0" expectancy), then you also will not feel motivated at all.

Expectancies are the result of various factors, but particularly the goals held by a student, and the student's self-efficacy, which we discussed earlier in this chapter. A student with mastery goals and strong self-efficacy for a task, for example, is likely to hold high expectations for success—almost by definition. Values are also the result of various factors, but especially students' interests and feelings of self-determination. A student who has a lasting personal interest in a task or topic and is allowed to choose it freely is especially likely to value the task—and therefore to feel motivated.

Ideally both expectancies and values are high in students on any key learning task. The reality, however, is that students sometimes do not expect success, nor do they necessarily value it when success is possible. How can a

teacher respond to low expectations and low valuing? We have offered a number of suggestions to meet this challenge throughout this chapter. In brief, raising low expectations depends on adjusting task difficulty so that success becomes a reasonable prospect: a teacher must make tasks neither too hard nor too easy. Reaching this general goal depends in turn on thoughtful, appropriate planning—selecting reasonable objectives, adjusting them on the basis of experience, finding supportive materials, and providing students with help when needed.

Raising the value of academic tasks is equally important, but the general strategies for doing so are different than for raising expectations. Increasing value requires linking the task to students' personal interests and prior knowledge, showing the utility of the task to students' future goals, and showing that the task is valuable to other people whom students' respect. Some of these strategies were discussed earlier in this chapter, but others (e.g. linking new learning with prior knowledge) are discussed in Chapter 2, which is called "The learning process".

TARGET: a model for integrating ideas about motivation

A model of motivation that integrates many ideas about motivation, including those in this chapter, has been developed by Carole Ames (1990, 1992). The acronym or abbreviated name for the program is TARGET, which stands for six elements of effective motivation:

- **T**ask
- **A**uthority
- **R**ecognition
- **G**rouping
- **E**valuating
- **T**ime

Each of the elements contributes to students' motivation either directly or indirectly.

Task

As explained earlier, students experience tasks in terms of their value, their expectation of success, and their authenticity. The value of a task is assessed by its importance, interest to the student, usefulness or utility, and the cost in terms of effort and time to achieve it. Expectation of success is assessed by a student's perception of the difficulty of a task. Generally a middling level of difficulty is optimal for students; too easy, and the task seems trivial (not valuable or meaningful), and too hard, and the task seems unlikely to succeed and in this sense useless. Authenticity refers to how much a task relates to real-life experiences of students; the more it does so, the more it can build on students' interests and goals, and the more meaningful and motivating it becomes.

Autonomy

Motivation is enhanced if students feel a degree of autonomy or responsibility for a learning task. Autonomy strengthens self-efficacy and self-determination—two valued and motivating attitudes described earlier in this chapter. Where possible, teachers can enhance autonomy by offering students' choices about assignments and by encouraging them to take initiative about their own learning.

Recognition

Teachers can support students' motivation by recognizing their achievements appropriately. Much depends, however, on how this is done; as discussed earlier, praise sometimes undermines performance. It is not especially effective if praise is very general and lacking in detailed reasons for the praise; or if praise is for qualities which a

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student cannot influence (like intelligence instead of effort); or if praise is offered so widely that it loses meaning or even becomes a signal that performance has been substandard. Many of these paradoxical effects are described by self-determination and self-efficacy theory (and were explained earlier in this chapter).

Grouping

Motivation is affected by how students are grouped together for their work—a topic discussed in more detail in Chapter 8 (“Instructional Strategies”). There are many ways to group students, but they tend to fall into three types: cooperative, competitive, and individualistic (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). In cooperative learning, a set of students work together to achieve a common goal (for example, producing a group presentation for the class); often they receive a final grade, or part of a final grade, in common. In competitive learning, students work individually, and their grades reflect comparisons among the students (for example, their performances are ranked relative to each other, or they are “graded on a curve”). In individualistic learning, students work by themselves, but their grades are unrelated to the performance of classmates. Research that compares these three forms of grouping tends to favor cooperative learning groups, which apparently supports students' need for belonging—an idea important in self-determination theory discussed earlier in this chapter.

Evaluation

Grouping structures obviously affect how students' efforts are evaluated. A focus on comparing students, as happens with competitive structures, can distract students from thinking about the material to be learned, and to focus instead on how they appear to external authorities; the question shifts from “What am I learning?” to “What will the teacher think about my performance?” A focus on cooperative learning, on the other hand, can have double-edged effects: students are encouraged to help their group mates, but may also be tempted to rely excessively on others' efforts or alternatively to ignore each other's contributions and overspecialize their own contributions. Some compromise between cooperative and individualistic structures seems to create optimal motivation for learning (Slavin, 1995).

Time

As every teacher knows, students vary in the amount of time needed to learn almost any material or task. Accommodating the differences can be challenging, but also important for maximizing students' motivation. School days are often filled with interruptions and fixed intervals of time devoted to non-academic activities—facts that make it difficult to be flexible about granting individuals different amounts of time to complete academic tasks. Nonetheless a degree of flexibility is usually possible: larger blocks of time can sometimes be created for important activities (for example, writing an essay), and sometimes enrichment activities can be arranged for some students while others receive extra attention from the teacher on core or basic tasks. More about such strategies is discussed in Chapter 8 (“Instructional Strategies”).

The bottom line about motivation: sustaining focus on learning

Sooner or later when you teach, there will be situations appropriate for each perspective about motivation described in this chapter. There will be times when focusing exclusively on students' appropriate behavior (or lack thereof) will be both necessary and sufficient evidence of motivation. But there will be other times when it is important to encourage students' beliefs that they can accomplish specific tasks, and still other times when

providing for students' underlying needs for competence or social connection is important. Think of these perspectives as alternatives to be used either singly or in combination when the time is right.

Because of your own values, attitudes, or beliefs, you may find one perspective more personally compatible than another. Even if you settle on favorite ways of motivating students, though, we encourage you to keep the other, less favored approaches in reserve anyway, and to experiment with them. We believe that an eclectic approach to motivation will enrich your teaching the most, and enrich your students' motivation and learning as well. If there is a single lesson from the concepts about motivation outlined in this chapter, it is this: academic motivation has no single source, and teachers motivate students the best when they assume motivation is complex. The next two chapters look at ways of realizing such "broad-mindedness" in practice, first when you prepare activities and classes and later when you actually teach them.

Chapter summary

Motivation—the energy or drive that gives behavior direction and focus—can be understood in a variety of ways, each of which has implications for teaching. One perspective on motivation comes from behaviorism, and equates underlying drives or motives with their outward, visible expression in behavior. Most others, however, come from cognitive theories of learning and development. Motives are affected by the kind of goals set by students—whether they are oriented to mastery, performance, failure-avoidance, or social contact. They are also affected by students' interests, both personal and situational. And they are affected by students' attributions about the causes of success and failure—whether they perceive the causes are due to ability, effort, task difficulty, or luck.

A major current perspective about motivation is based on self-efficacy theory, which focuses on a person's belief that he or she is capable of carrying out or mastering a task. High self-efficacy affects students' choice of tasks, their persistence at tasks, and their resilience in the face of failure. It helps to prevent learned helplessness, a perception of complete lack of control over mastery or success. Teachers can encourage high self-efficacy beliefs by providing students with experiences of mastery and opportunities to see others' experiences of mastery, by offering well-timed messages persuading them of their capacity for success, and by interpreting students' emotional reactions to success, failure and stress.

An extension of self-efficacy theory is self-determination theory, which is based on the idea that everyone has basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness to others. According to the theory, students will be motivated more intrinsically if these three needs are met as much as possible. A variety of strategies can assist teachers in doing so. As a practical matter, the strategies can encourage motivation that is more intrinsic to students, but usually not completely intrinsic.

On the Internet

<www.des.emory.edu/mfp/self-efficacy.html> This is a rather extensive site maintained about all aspects of self-efficacy theory. The site gives access to a number of published articles on the subject as well as to extensive "lecture" notes by Frank Pajares, who publishes and teaches about self-efficacy theory.

<www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT/faculty/index.html> This, too, is a rather extensive site, maintained at the University of Rochester by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, two psychologists who have published extensively about self-determination theory. The site is especially thorough in reviewing evidence *contrary* to the theory and in offering many of the actual research questionnaires which have been used to study self-determination.

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<www.indiana.edu/~reading/ieo/bibs/mot-gen.html> Here is a website that discusses many aspects of motivation in education. It is not limited to any one theory, perspective, or concept about this topic. Many of the references are to citations from the ERIC database (also available at <www.eric.ed.gov>), and there are links to bibliographies on additional topics about education.

Key terms

Albert Bandura	Mastery goals
Attributions of success or failure	Motivation
Autonomy, need for	Need for relatedness
Behaviorist perspective on motivation	Performance goals
Competence, need for	Personal interests
Failure-avoidant goals	Self-determination theory
Intrinsic motivation	Self-efficacy
Jigsaw classroom	Situational interests
Learned helplessness	TARGET

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This is an excerpt from a professional journal kept by one of us (Kelvin Seifert) when he was teaching kindergarten:

20xx-11-14: Today my student Carol sat in the circle, watching others while we all played Duck, Duck, Goose (in this game, one student is outside the circle, tags another student who then chases the first person around the circle). Carol's turn had already passed. Apparently she was bored, because she flopped on her back, smiling broadly, rolling around luxuriously on the floor in the path of the other runners. Several classmates noticed her, smiled or giggled, began flopping down as well. One chaser tripped over a "flopper".

"Sit up, Carol", said I, the ever-vigilant teacher. "You're in the way." But no result. I repeated this twice, firmly; then moved to pick her up.

Instantly Carol ran to the far side of the gym, still smiling broadly. Then her best friend ran off with her. Now a whole new game was launched, or really two games: "Run-from-the-teacher" and "Enjoy-being-watched-by-everybody". A lot more exciting, unfortunately, than Duck, Duck, Goose!

An excerpt from Kelvin's same journal several years later, when he was teaching math in high school:

20xx-3-4: The same four students sat in the back again today, as usual. They seem to look in every direction except at me, even when I'm explaining material that they need to know. The way they smile and whisper to each other, it seems almost like they are "in love" with each other, though I can't be sure who loves whom the most.

Others—students not part of the foursome—seem to react variously. Some seem annoyed, turn the other way, avoid talking with the group, and so on. But others seem almost envious—as if they want to be part of the "in" group, too, and were impressed with the foursome's ability to get away with being inattentive and almost rude. Either way, I think a lot of other students are being distracted.

Twice during the period today, I happened to notice members of the group passing a note, and then giggling and looking at me. By the end, I had had enough of this sort of thing, so I kept them in briefly after class and asked one of them to read the note. They looked a bit embarrassed and hesitant, but eventually one of them opened the note and read it out loud. "Choose one", it said. "Mr Seifert looks (1) old _____, (2) stupid _____, or (3) clueless _____."

Kelvin's experiences in managing these very different classrooms taught him what every teacher knows or else quickly learns: management matters a lot. But his experiences also taught him that management is about *more* than correcting the misbehaviors of individuals, *more* than just discipline. **Classroom management** is also

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about orchestrating or coordinating entire sets or sequences of learning activities so that *everyone*, misbehaving or not, learns as easily and productively as possible. Educators sometimes therefore describe good management as the **creation of a positive learning environment**, because the term calls attention to the totality of activities and people in a classroom, as well as to their goals and expectations about learning (Jones & Jones, 2007). When one of us (Kelvin) was teaching, he used both terms almost interchangeably, though in speaking of *management* he more often was referring to individual students' behavior and learning, and in speaking of the *learning environment* he more often meant the overall "feel" of the class as a whole.

Why classroom management matters

Managing the learning environment is both a major responsibility and an on-going concern for all teachers, even those with years of experience (Good & Brophy, 2002). There are several reasons. In the first place, a lot goes on in classrooms simultaneously, even when students seem to be doing only one task in common. Twenty-five students may all seem to be working on a sheet of math problems. But look more closely: several may be stuck on a particular problem, each for different reasons. A few others have worked only the first problem or two and are now chatting quietly with each other instead of continuing. Still others have finished and are wondering what to do next. At any one moment each student needs something different—different information, different hints, different kinds of encouragement. Such diversity increases even more if the teacher deliberately assigns multiple activities to different groups or individuals (for example, if some students do a reading assignment while others do the math problems).

Another reason that managing the environment is challenging is because a teacher can not predict everything that will happen in a class. A well-planned lesson may fall flat on its face, or take less time than expected, and you find yourself improvising to fill class time. On the other hand an unplanned moment may become a wonderful, sustained exchange among students, and prompt you to drop previous plans and follow the flow of discussion. Interruptions happen continually: a fire drill, a drop-in visit from another teacher or the principal, a call on the intercom from the office. An activity may indeed turn out well, but also rather differently than you intended; you therefore have to decide how, if at all, to adjust the next day's lesson to allow for this surprise.

A third reason for the importance of management is that students form opinions and perceptions about your teaching that are inconsistent with your own. What you intend as encouragement for a shy student may seem to the student herself like "forced participation". An eager, outgoing classmate watching your effort to encourage the shy student, moreover, may not see you as *either* encouraging or coercing, but as overlooking or ignoring *other* students who already want to participate. The variety of perceptions can lead to surprises in students' responses—most often small ones, but occasionally major.

At the broadest, society-wide level, classroom management challenges teachers because public schooling is not voluntary, and students' presence in a classroom is therefore not a sign, in and of itself, that they wish to learn. Instead, students' presence is just a sign that an *opportunity* exists for teachers to motivate students to learn. Some students, of course, do enjoy learning and being in school, almost regardless of what teachers do! Others do enjoy school, but only because teachers have worked hard to make classroom life pleasant and interesting. Those students become motivated because you have successfully created a positive learning environment and have sustained it through skillful management.

Fortunately it is possible to earn this sort of commitment from many students, and this chapter describes ways of doing so. We begin with ways of *preventing* management problems from happening by increasing students' focus on learning. The methods include ideas about arranging classroom space, about establishing procedures, routines, and rules, and about communicating the importance of learning to students and parents. After these prevention oriented discussions, we look at ways of *refocusing* students when and if their minds or actions stray from the tasks at hand. As you probably know from being a student, bringing students back on task can happen in many ways, and the ways vary widely in the energy and persistence required of the teacher. We try to indicate some of these variations, but because of space limitations and because of the richness of classroom life, we cannot describe them all.

Preventing management problems by focusing students on learning

The easiest management problems to solve are ones that do not happen in the first place! Even before the school year begins, you can minimize behavior problems by arranging classroom furniture and materials in ways that encourage a focus on learning as much as possible. Later, once school begins, you can establish procedures and rules that support a focus on learning even more.

Arranging classroom space

Viewed broadly, classrooms may seem to be arranged in similar ways, but there are actually important alternative arrangements to consider. Variations exist because of grade level, the subjects taught, the teacher's philosophy of education, and of course the size of the room and the furniture available. Whatever the arrangement that you choose, it should help students to focus on learning tasks as much as possible and minimize the chances of distractions. Beyond these basic principles, however, the "best" arrangement depends on what your students need and on the kind of teaching that you prefer and feel able to provide (Boyner, 2003; Nations & Boyett, 2002). The next sections describe some of the options. In considering them (and before moving too much furniture around your room!), you might want to try experimenting with spatial arrangements "virtually" by using one of the computer programs available on the Internet (see: http://teacher.scholastic.com/tools/class_setup/).

Displays and wall space

All classrooms have walls, of course, and how you fill them can affect the mood or feeling of a classroom. Ample displays make a room interesting and can be used to reinforce curriculum goals and display (and hence publicly recognize) students' work. But too many displays can also make a room seem "busy" or distracting as well as physically smaller. They can also be more work to maintain. If you are starting a new school year, then, a good strategy is to decorate some of the wall or bulletin board space, but not to fill it all immediately. Leaving some space open leaves flexibility to respond to ideas and curriculum needs that emerge after the year is underway. The same advice applies especially for displays that are high maintenance, such as aquariums, pets, and plants. These can serve wonderfully as learning aids, but do not have to be in place on the first day of school. Not only the students, but also you yourself, may already have enough to cope with at that time.

Computers in the classroom

If you are like the majority of teachers, you will have only one computer in your room, or at most just a few, and their placement may be pre-determined by the location of power and cable outlets. If so, you need to think about computer placement early in the process of setting up a room. Once the location of computers is set, locations for

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desks, high-usage shelves, and other moveable items can be chosen more sensibly—in general, as already mentioned, so as to minimize distractions to students and to avoid unnecessary traffic congestion.

Visibility of and interactions with students

Learning is facilitated if the furniture and space allow you to see all students and to interact with them from a comfortable distance. Usually this means that the main, central part of the room—where desks and tables are usually located—needs to be as open and as spacious as possible. While this idea may seem obvious, enacting it can be challenging in practice if the room itself is small or shaped unusually. In classrooms with young students (kindergarten), furthermore, open spaces tend to allow, if not invite, physical movement of children—a feature that you may consider either constructive or annoying, depending on your educational goals and the actual level of activity that occurs.

Spatial arrangements unique to grade levels or subjects

The best room arrangement sometimes depends on the grade level or subject area of the class. If you teach in elementary school, for example, you may need to think especially about where students can keep their daily belongings, such as coats and lunches. In some schools, these can be kept outside the classroom—but not necessarily. Some subjects and grade levels, furthermore, lend themselves especially well to small group interaction, in which case you might prefer not to seat students in rows, but instead around small-group tables or work areas. The latter arrangement is sometimes preferred by elementary teachers, but is also useful in high schools wherever students need lots of counter space, as in some shops or art courses, or where they need to interact, as in English as a Second Language courses (McCafferty, Jacobs, & Iddings, 2006). The key issue in deciding between tables and rows, however, is not grade level or subject as such, but the amount of small group interaction you want to encourage, compared to the amount of whole-group instruction. As a rule, tables make working with peers easier, and rows make listening to the teacher more likely and group work slightly more awkward physically.

Ironically, some teachers also experience challenges about room arrangement because they do not actually have a classroom of their own, because they must move each day among other teachers' rooms. "Floating" is especially likely for specialized teachers (e.g. music teachers in elementary schools, who move from class to class) and in schools have an overall shortage of classrooms. Floating can sometimes be annoying to the teacher, though it actually also has advantages, such as not having to take responsibility for how other teachers' rooms are arranged. If you find yourself floating, it helps to consider a few key strategies, such as:

- consider using a permanent cart to move crucial supplies from room to room
- make sure that every one of your rooms has an overhead projector (do not count on using chalkboards or computers in other teachers' rooms)
- talk to the other teachers about having at least one shelf or corner in each room designated for your exclusive use

Establishing daily procedures and routines

Procedures or **routines** are specific ways of doing common, repeated classroom tasks or activities. Examples include checking daily attendance, dealing with students who arrive late, or granting permission to leave the

classroom for an errand. Academically related procedures include ways of turning in daily homework (e.g. putting it on a designated shelf at a particular time), of gaining the teacher's attention during quiet seat work (e.g. raising your hand and waiting), and of starting a "free choice" activity after completing a classroom assignment.

Procedures serve the largely practical purpose of making activities and tasks flow smoothly—a valuable and necessary purpose in classrooms, where the actions of many people have to be coordinated within limited time and space. As such, procedures are more like social conventions than like moral expectations. They are only indirectly about what is ethically *right* or ethically *desirable* to do (Turiel, 2006). Most procedures or routines can be accomplished in more than one way, with only minor differences in outcomes. There is more than one way, for example, for the procedure of taking attendance: the teacher could call the role, delegate a student to call the role, or note students' presence on a seating chart. Each variation accomplishes essentially the same task, and the choice may be less important than the fact that the class coordinates its actions *somehow*, by committing to *some* sort of choice.

For teachers, of course, an initial management task is to establish procedures and routines as promptly as possible. Because of the conventional quality of procedures, some teachers find that it works well simply to announce and explain key procedures without inviting much discussion from students ("Here is how we will choose partners for the group work"). Other teachers prefer to invite input from students when creating procedures (asking the class, "What do *you* feel is the best way for students to get my attention during a quiet reading time?"). Both approaches have advantages as well as disadvantages. Simply announcing key procedures saves time and insures consistency in case you teach more than one class (as you would in high school). But it puts more responsibility on the teacher to choose procedures that are truly reasonable and practical. Inviting students' input, on the other hand, can help students to become aware of and committed to procedures, but at the cost of requiring more time to settle on them. It also risks creating confusion if you teach multiple classes, each of which adopts different procedures. Whatever approach you choose, of course, they have to take into account any procedures or rules imposed by the school or school district as a whole. A school may have a uniform policy about how to record daily attendance, for example, and that policy may determine, either partly or completely, how you take attendance with your particular students.

Establishing classroom rules

Unlike procedures or routines, **rules** express standards of behavior for which individual students need to take responsibility. Although they are like procedures in that they sometimes help in insuring the efficiency of classroom tasks, they are really about encouraging students to be responsible for learning and showing respect for each other. Exhibit 8 lists a typical set of classroom rules.

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- Treat others with courtesy and politeness.
- Make sure to bring required materials to class and to activities.
- Be on time for class and other activities.
- Listen to the teacher and to others when they are speaking.
- Follow all school rules.

Exhibit 8: Sample set of classroom rules

Note three things about the examples in Exhibit 8. One is that the rules are not numerous; the table lists only five. Most educational experts recommend keeping the number of rules to a minimum in order to make them easier to remember (Thorson, 2003; Brophy, 2004). A second feature is that they are stated in positive terms (“Do X...” rather than negative terms (“Do not do Y...”)), a strategy that emphasizes and clarifies what students should *do* rather than what they should avoid. A third feature is that each rule actually covers a collection of more specific behaviors. The rule “Bring all materials to class”, for example, covers bringing pencils, paper, textbooks, homework papers, and permission slips—depending on the situation. As a result of their generality, rules often have a degree of ambiguity that sometimes requires interpretation. Infractions may occur that are marginal or “in a grey area”, rather than clear cut. A student may bring a pen, for example, but the pen may not work properly. You may therefore wonder whether this incident is really a failure to follow the rule, or just an unfortunate (and in this case minor) fault of the pen manufacturer.

As with classroom procedures, rules can be planned either by the teacher alone, or by the teacher with advice from students. The arguments for each approach are similar to the arguments for procedures: rules “laid on” by the teacher may be more efficient and consistent, and in this sense more fair, but rules influenced by the students may be supported more fully by the students. Because rules focus strongly on personal responsibility, however, there is a stronger case for involving students in making them than in making classroom procedures (Brookfield, 2006; Kohn, 2006). In any case the question of who plans classroom rules is not necessarily an either/or choice. It is possible in principle to impose certain rules on students (for example, “Always be polite to each other”) but let the students determine the consequences for violations of certain rules (for example, “If a student is discourteous to a classmate, he/she must apologize to the student in writing”). Some mixture of influences is probably inevitable, in fact, if only because the class needs to take into account your own moral commitments as the teacher as well as any imposed by the school (like “No smoking in the school” or “Always walk in the hallways”).

Pacing and structuring lessons and activities

One of the best ways to prevent management problems is by pacing and structuring lessons or activities as smoothly and continuously as possible. This goal depends on three major strategies:

- selecting tasks or activities at an appropriate level of difficulty for your students
- providing a moderate level of structure or clarity to students about what they are supposed to do, especially during transitions between activities

- keeping alert to the flow and interplay of behaviors for the class as a whole and for individuals within it.

Each strategy presents special challenges to teachers, but also opportunities for helping students to learn.

Choosing tasks at an appropriate level of difficulty

As experienced teachers know and as research has confirmed, students are most likely to engage with learning when tasks are of moderate difficulty, neither too easy nor too hard and therefore neither boring nor frustrating (Britt, 2005). Finding the right level of difficulty, however, can be a challenge if you have little experience teaching a particular grade level or curriculum, or even if students are simply new to you and their abilities unknown. Whether familiar or not, members of any class are likely to have diverse skills and readiness—a fact that makes it challenging to determine what level of difficulty is appropriate. A common strategy for dealing with these challenges is to begin units, lessons, or projects with tasks that are relatively easy and familiar. Then, introduce more difficult material or tasks gradually until students seem challenged, but not overwhelmed. Following this strategy gives the teacher a chance to observe and diagnose students' learning needs before adjusting content, and it gives students a chance to orient themselves to the teacher's expectations, teaching style, and topic of study without becoming frustrated prematurely. Later in a unit, lesson, or project, students seem better able to deal with more difficult tasks or content (Van Merriënboer, 2003). The principle seems to help as well with “authentic” learning tasks—ones that resemble real-world activities, such as learning to drive an automobile or to cook a meal, and that present a variety of complex tasks simultaneously. Even in those cases it helps to isolate and focus on the simplest subtasks first (such as “put the key in the ignition”) and move to harder tasks only later (such as parallel parking).

Sequencing instruction is only a partial solution to finding the best “level” of difficulty, however, because it does not deal with enduring individual differences among students. The fundamental challenge to teachers is to individualize or differentiate instruction fully: to tailor it not only to the class as a group, but to the lasting differences among members of the class. One way to approach this sort of diversity, obviously, is to plan different content or activities for different students or groups of students. While one group works on Task A, another group works on Task B; one group works on relatively easy math problems, for example, while another works on harder ones. Differentiating instruction in this way complicates a teacher's job, but it can be done, and has in fact been done by many teachers (it also makes teaching more interesting!). In the next chapter, we describe some classroom management strategies that help with such multi-tasking.

Providing moderate amounts of structure and detail

Chances are that at some point in your educational career you have wished that a teacher would clarify or explain an assignment more fully, and perhaps give it a clearer structure or organization. Students' desire for clarity is especially common with assignments that are by nature open-ended, such as long essays, large projects, or creative works. Simply being told to “write an essay critiquing the novel”, for example, leaves more room for uncertainty (and worry) than being given guidelines about what questions the essay should address, what topics or parts it should have, and what its length or style should be (Chesebro, 2003). As you might suspect, some students desire clarity more than others, and improve their performance especially much when provided with plenty of structure and clarity. Students with certain kinds of learning difficulties, in particular, often learn effectively and stay on task only if provided with somewhat explicit, detailed instructions about the tasks expected of them (Marks, et al., 2003).

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As a teacher, the challenge is to accommodate students' need for clarity without making guidance so specific or detailed that students do little thinking for themselves. As a (ridiculously extreme) example, consider a teacher gives "clear" instructions for an essay by announcing not only exactly which articles to read and cite in the essay and which topics or issues to cover, but even requires specific wording of sentences in their essays. This much specificity may reduce students' uncertainties and make the teacher's task of evaluating the essays relatively straightforward and easy. But it also reduces or even eliminates the educational value of the assignment—assuming, of course, that its purpose is to get students to think for themselves.

Ideally, then, structure should be moderate rather than extreme. There should be just enough to give students some sense of direction and to stimulate more accomplishment than if they worked with less structure or guidance. This ideal is an application of Vygotsky's idea of the zone of proximal development that we discussed in Chapter 2: a place (figuratively speaking) where students get more done with help than without it. The ideal amount of guidance—the "location" of the zone of proximal development—varies with the assignment and the student, and it (hopefully) decreases over time for all students. One student may need more guidance to do his or her best in math, but less guidance in order to write her or his best essay. Another student may need the reverse. But if all goes well, both students may need less at the end of the year than at the beginning.

Managing transitions

Transitions between activities is often full of distractions and "lost" time, and is a time when inappropriate behaviors are especially likely to occur. Part of the problem is intrinsic to transitions: students may have to wait before a new activity actually begins, and therefore get bored at the very moment when the teacher is preoccupied with arranging materials for the new activity. From the point of view of the students, transitions may seem essentially like unsupervised group time, when seemingly any behavior is tolerated.

Minimizing such problems requires two strategies, one of which is easier to implement than the other. The easier strategy is for you, as teacher, to organize materials as well as possible ahead of time, so that you minimize the time needed to begin a new activity. The advice sounds simple, and mostly is, but it sometimes takes a bit of practice to implement smoothly. When one of us (Kelvin) first began teaching university, for example, particular papers or overhead transparencies sometimes got lost in the wrong folder in spite of Kelvin's efforts to keep them where they were easy to find. The resulting delays about finding them slowed the pace of class and caused frustrations.

A second, more complex strategy is to teach students ways to manage their own behavior during transitions (Marzano & Marzano, 2004). If students talk too loudly at these times, for example, then discuss with them what constitutes appropriate levels or amounts of talk, and discuss the need for them to monitor their own sound level. Or if students stop work early in anticipation of ending an activity, then talk about—or even practice—waiting for a signal from yourself to indicate the true ending point for an activity. If certain students continue working *beyond* the end of an activity. On the other hand, try giving them warning of the impending end in advance, and remind them about to take responsibility for actually finishing work once they hear the advance warning, and so on. The point of these tactics is to encourage responsibility for behavior during transitions, and thereby reduce your own need to monitor students at that crucial time.

None of these ideas, of course, mean that you, as teacher, should give up monitoring students' behavior entirely. Chances are that you still will need to notice if and when someone talks too loudly, finishes too early, or continues too long, and you will still need to give some students appropriate reminders. But the amount of reminding will be less to the extent that students can remind and monitor themselves—a welcome trend at any time, but especially during transitions.

Maintaining the flow of activities

A lot of classroom management is really about keeping activities flowing smoothly, both during individual lessons and across the school day. The trouble is that there is never just “one” event happening at a time, even if only one activity has been formally planned and is supposed to be occurring. Imagine, for example, that everyone is supposed to be attending a single whole-class discussion on a topic; yet individual students will be having different experiences at any one moment. Several students may be listening and contributing comments, for example, but a few others may be planning what they want to say *next* and ignoring the current speakers, still others may be ruminating about what a previous speaker said, and still others may be thinking about unrelated matters—the restroom, food, or sex. Things get even more complicated if the teacher deliberately plans multiple activities: in that case some students may interact with the teacher, for example, while others do work in an unsupervised group or work independently in a different part of the room. How is a teacher to keep activities flowing smoothly in the face of such variety?

A common mistake of beginning teachers in multi-faceted settings like these is to pay too much attention to any *one* activity, student, or small group, at the expense of noticing and responding to all the others. If you are helping a student on one side of the room when someone on the other side disturbs classmates with off-task conversation, it can be less effective *either* to finish with the student you are helping before attending to the disruption, *or* to interrupt yourself to solve the disruption on the other side of the room. Although one of these responses may be necessary, either one involves disruption *somewhere*. There is a risk that either the student's chatting may spread to others, or the interrupted student may become bored with waiting for the teacher's attention and wander off-task herself.

A better solution, though one that at first may seem challenging, is to attend to *both* events at once—a strategy that was named **withitness** in a series of now-classic research studies several decades ago (Kounin, 1970). Withitness does not mean that you focus on all simultaneous activities with equal care, but only that you remain aware of multiple activities, behaviors, and events to some degree. At a particular moment, for example, you may be focusing on helping a student, but in some corner of your mind you also notice when chatting begins on the other side of the room. You have, as the saying goes, “eyes in the back of your head”. Research has found that experienced teachers are much more likely to show withitness than inexperienced teachers, and that these qualities are associated with managing classrooms successfully (Emmer & Stough, 2001).

Simultaneous awareness—withitness—makes possible responses to the multiple events that are immediate and nearly simultaneous—what educators sometimes called **overlapping**. The teacher's responses to each event or behavior need not take equal time, nor even be equally noticeable to all students. If you are helping one student with seat work at the precise moment when another student begins chatting off-task, for example, a quick glance to the second student may be enough to bring the second one back to the work at hand, and may scarcely interrupt

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your conversation with the first student, or be noticed by others who are not even involved. The result is a smoother flow to activities overall.

As a new teacher, you may find that *withitness* and overlapping develop more easily in some situations than in others. It may be easier to keep an eye (or ear) on multiple activities during familiar routines, such as taking attendance, but harder to do the same during activities that are unfamiliar or complex, such as introducing a new topic or unit that you have never taught before. But skill at broadening your attention does increase with time and practice. It helps to keep trying. Merely demonstrating to students that you are “withit”, in fact, even without making deliberate overlapping responses, can sometimes deter students from off-task behavior. Someone who is tempted to pass notes in class, for example, might not do so because she believes that you will probably notice her doing it anyway, whether or not you are able to notice in fact.

Communicating the importance of learning and of positive behavior

Altogether, the factors we have discussed—arranging space, procedures, and rules, and developing *withitness*—help communicate an important message: that in the classroom learning and positive social behavior are priorities. In addition, teachers can convey this message by offering timely feedback to students about performance, by keeping accurate records of the performance, and by deliberately communicating with parents or caregivers about their children and about class activities.

Communicating effectively is so important for all aspects of teaching, in fact, that we discuss it more fully later in this book (see Chapter 8, “The nature of classroom communication”). Here we focus on only one of its important aspects: how communication contributes to a smoothly functioning classroom and in this way helps prevent behavior problems.

Giving timely feedback

The term *feedback*, when used by educators, refers to responses to students about their behavior or performance. Feedback is essential if students are to learn and if they are to develop classroom behavior that is socially skilled and “mature”. But feedback can only be fully effective if offered as soon as possible, when it is still relevant to the task or activity at hand (Reynolds, 1992). A score on a test is more informative immediately after a test than after a six-month delay, when students may have forgotten much of the content of the test. A teacher’s comment to a student about an inappropriate, off-task behavior may not be especially welcome at the moment the behavior occurs, but it can be more influential and informative then; later, both teacher and student will have trouble remembering the details of the off-task behavior, and in this sense may literally “not know what they are talking about”. The same is true for comments about a *positive* behavior by a student: hearing a compliment right away makes it easier to the comment with the behavior, and allows the compliment to influence the student more strongly. There are of course practical limits to how fast feedback can be given, but the general principle is clear: feedback tends to work better when it is timely.

The principle of timely feedback is consistent, incidentally, with a central principle of operant conditioning discussed in Chapter 2: reinforcement works best when it follows a to-be-learned operant behavior closely (Skinner, 1957). In this case a teacher’s feedback serves as a form of reinforcement. The analogy is easiest to understand when the feedback takes the form of praise; in operant conditioning terms, the reinforcing praise then functions like a “reward”. When feedback is negative, it functions as an “aversive stimulus” (in operant terms), shutting down the

behavior criticized. At other times, though, criticism can also function as an unintended reinforcement. This happens, for example, if a student experiences criticism as a reduction in isolation and therefore as an increase in his importance in the class—a relatively desirable change. So the inappropriate behavior continues, or even increases, contrary to the teacher's intentions. Exhibit 9 diagrams this sequence of events.

Example of Unintended Negative Reinforcement in the Classroom:

Student is isolated socially → Student publicly misbehaves → Student gains others' attention

Reinforcement can happen in class if an undesirable behavior, leads to a less aversive state for a student. Social isolation can be reduced by public misbehavior, which stimulates attention that is reinforcing. Ironically, the effort to end misbehavior ends up stimulating the misbehavior.

Exhibit 9: Attracting attention as negative reinforcement

Maintaining accurate records

Although timeliness in responding to students can sometimes happen naturally during class, there are also situations where promptness depends on having organized key information ahead of time. Obvious examples are the scores, marks, and grades returned to students for their work. A short quiz (such as a weekly spelling test) may be possible to return quite soon after the quiz—sometimes you or even the students themselves can mark it during class. More often, though, assignments and tests require longer processing times: you have to read, score, or add comments to each paper individually. Excessive time to evaluate students' work can reduce the usefulness of a teacher's evaluations to students when she finally does return the work (Black, et al., 2004). During the days or weeks waiting for a test or assignment to be returned, students are left without information about the quality or nature of their performance; at the extreme they may even have to complete another test or do another assignment before getting information about an earlier one. (Perhaps you yourself have experienced this particular problem!)

Delays in providing feedback about academic performance can never be eliminated entirely, but they can be reduced by keeping accurate, well-organized records of students' work. A number of computer programs are available to help with this challenge; if your school does not already have one in use, then there are several downloadable either free or at low cost from the Internet (e.g. <http://dmoz.org/Computers/Software/Educational/Teachers_Help/Gradebooks/>). Describing these is beyond the scope of this book. For now we simply emphasize that grading systems benefit students' learning the most when they provide feedback as quickly and frequently as possible (McMillan, 2001), precisely the reason why accurate, well-organized record-keeping is important to keep.

Accurate records are helpful not only for scores on tests, quizzes, or assignments, but also for developing descriptive summaries of the nature of students' academic skills or progress. A common way to develop a description is the student portfolio, which is a compilation of the student's work and on-going assessments of it created by the teacher or in some cases by the student (Moritz & Christie, 2005; White, 2005). To know how a student's science project evolved from its beginning, for example, a teacher and student can keep a portfolio of lab notes, logs, preliminary data, and the like. To know how a student's writing skills developed, they could keep a

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portfolio of early drafts on various writing assignments. As the work accumulates, the student can discuss it with the teacher, and write brief reflections on its strengths thus far or on the steps needed to improve the work further. By providing a way to respond to work as it evolves, and by including students in making the assessments, portfolios provide relatively prompt feedback, and in any case provide it sooner than by waiting for the teacher to review work that is complete or final.

Communicating with parents and caregivers

Since parents and caregivers in a sense “donate” their children to schools (at least figuratively speaking), teachers are responsible for keeping them informed and involved to whatever extent is practical. Virtually all parents understand and assume that schools are generally intended for learning. Detailed communication can enrich parents' understanding, of how learning is addressed with their particular child's classroom, and show them more precisely what their particular child is doing. The better such understanding in turn encourages parents and caregivers to support their child's learning more confidently and “intelligently”. In this sense it contributes indirectly to a positive learning environment in their child's class.

There are various ways to communicate with parents, each with advantages and limitations. Here are three common examples:

- *A regular classroom newsletter:* A newsletter establishes a link with parents or caregivers with comparatively little effort on the part of the teacher. At the beginning of the year, for example, a newsletter can tell about special materials that students will need, important dates to remember (like professional development days when there is no school), or about curriculum plans for the next few weeks. But newsletters also have limitations. They can seem impersonal, and they may get lost on the way home and never reach parents or caregivers. They can also be impractical for teachers with multiple classes, as in high school or in specialist subjects (like music or physical education), where each class follows a different program or curriculum.
- *Telephone calls:* The main advantage of phoning is its immediacy and individuality. Teacher and parent or caregiver can talk about a particular student, behavior, or concern, and do it *now*. By the same token, however, phone calls are not an efficient way for informing parents about events or activities that affect everyone in common. The individuality of phoning may explain why teachers often use this method when a student has a problem that is urgent or unusual—as when he has failed a test, missed classes, or misbehaved seriously. Rightly or wrongly, a student's successes tend not to prompt phone calls to the student's home (though in fairness students may be more likely to tell parents about their successes themselves, making it less essential for the teacher to do so).
- *Parent-teacher conferences:* Most schools schedule periodic times—often a day or evening per term—when teachers meet briefly with parents or caregivers who wish to meet. Under good conditions, the conferences have the individuality of phone calls, but also the richness of communication possible only in face-to-face meetings. Since conferences are available to all parents, they need not focus on behavior or academic problems, but often simply help to build rapport and understanding between parents or caregivers and the teacher. Sometimes too, particularly at younger grade levels, teachers involve students in leading their own conferences; the students display and explain their own work using a portfolio or other archive of

accumulated materials (Benson & Barnett, 2005; Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005). In spite of all of these advantages, though, parent-teacher conferences have limitations. Some parents cannot get to conferences because of work schedules, child care, or transportation problems. Others may feel intimidated by any school-sponsored event because they speak limited English or because they remember painful experiences from their own school days.

Even if you make several efforts to communicate, some parents may remain out of contact. In these cases it is important to remember that the parents may *not* be indifferent to their child or to the value of education. Other possibilities exist, as some of our comments above imply: parents may have difficulties with child care, for example, have inconvenient work schedules, or feel self-conscious about their own communication skills (Stevens & Tollafield, 2003). Even so, there are ways to encourage parents who may be shy, hesitant, or busy. One is to think about how they can assist the school even from home—for example, by making materials to be used in class or (if they are comfortable using English) phoning other parents about class events. A second way is to have a specific task for the parents in mind—one with clear structure, such as photocopying materials to be used by students later. A third is to remember to encourage, support, and respect the parents' presence and contributions when they *do* show up at school functions. Keep in mind that parents are experts about their own particular children, and without them, you would have no students to teach!

Responding to student misbehavior

So far we have focused on preventing behaviors that are inappropriate or annoying. The advice has all been proactive or forward-looking: plan classroom space thoughtfully, create reasonable procedures and rules, pace lessons and activities appropriately, and communicate the importance of learning clearly. Although we consider these ideas important, it would be naïve to imply they are enough to prevent all behavior problems. For various reasons, students sometimes still do things that disrupt other students or interrupt the flow of activities. At such moments the challenge is not about long-term planning but about making appropriate, but prompt responses. Misbehaviors left alone can be contagious, a process educators sometimes call the **ripple effect** (Kounin, 1970). Chatting between two students, for example, can gradually spread to six students; rudeness by one can eventually become rudeness by several; and so on. Because of this tendency, delaying a response to inappropriate behavior can make the job of getting students back on track harder than responding to it as immediately as possible.

There are many ways to respond to inappropriate behaviors, of course, and they vary in how much they focus on the immediate behavior compared to longer-term features or patterns of a student's behavior. There are so many ways to respond, in fact, that we can describe only a sample of the possibilities here. None are effective all of the time, though all do work at least some of the time. We start with a response that may not seem on the surface like a remedy at all—simply ignoring misbehaviors.

Ignoring misbehaviors

A lot of misbehaviors are not important or frequent enough to deserve any response at all. They are likely to disappear (or *extinguish*, in behaviorist terms) simply if left alone. If a student who is usually quiet during class happens to whisper to a neighbor once in awhile, it is probably less disruptive and just as effective to ignore the infraction than to respond to it. Some misbehaviors may not be worth a response even if they are frequent, as long as they do not seem to bother others. Suppose, for example, that a certain student has a habit of choosing quiet