

STRATEGY

2

Preventing Misbehavior

Taking Proactive Steps to Prevent the Occurrence of Misbehavior in the Classroom

You can take steps to address conditions that are known to foster inappropriate behavior. You can neutralize most of those factors fairly easily and minimize the effects of the others. These preventive measures are very effective in reducing misbehavior in your classes.

Chapter Preview

This chapter presents tactics for preventing the occurrence of misbehavior in the classroom. Definitions of *misbehavior* are provided. Twenty-six sets of conditions are identified as causes of misbehavior, and suggestions are provided for minimizing their effects. It is also recognized that teachers misbehave in certain ways, and suggestions are made for avoiding those misbehaviors as well. Finally, attention is given to the positive effects of *classroom synergy*, a mutually energizing phenomenon that can occur among members of the class. One of the effects of synergy is a reduction in misbehavior.

DEFINITIONS OF MISBEHAVIOR

Some educators object to the term *misbehavior* on the grounds it is prejudicial and dependent on teacher idiosyncrasies. They prefer terms such as *inappropriate behavior*, *disruptive behavior*, and *maladaptive behavior*. Because teacher judgment is always involved in this question and because *misbehavior* is a widely understood and accepted term, it is used in this book to refer to classroom behavior that interferes with the educational process.

Authorities have defined *misbehavior* in different ways. Which of the following do you consider most accurate or helpful?

- Thomas Gordon, renowned psychologist and author of *T.E.T.: Teacher Effectiveness Training* (1987) and *Discipline That Works* (1989), defines *misbehavior* as “an adult concept in which a specific action of the child is seen as producing an undesirable consequence for the adult” (p. 107). To paraphrase Gordon, we might say that misbehavior is anything students do that teachers don’t like.
- Linda Albert, author of *A Teacher’s Guide to Cooperative Discipline* (2003), defines *misbehavior* as inappropriate acts associated with students’ pursuit of mistaken goals, which are attention seeking (“Look at me”), power seeking (“You can’t make me”), revenge seeking (“I’ll get even”), or withdrawal (dropping out). Such misbehavior appears when students fail to achieve their prime goal of acceptance in the classroom. Albert bases her definition on work done earlier by psychiatrist and child development expert Rudolf Dreikurs (with P. Cassell, 1995).
- Barbara Coloroso (2002), featured in Chapter 1, advocates an approach based on inner discipline. She categorizes *misbehavior* as mistakes (accidental or uninformed), mischief (intentional but benign), and mayhem (intentional and more serious).
- Spencer Kagan, psychologist and author of *Win–Win Discipline* (with P. Kyle and S. Scott, 2004), describes *misbehavior* as disruptions that can be categorized into four types—aggression, breaking rules, confrontations, and disengagement (ABCD). These disruptions, he says, almost always spring from one of seven student positions—attention seeking, avoiding failure, angry, control seeking, energetic, bored, or uninformed.
- William Glasser (1998), psychiatrist and prolific writer and consultant in teaching, curriculum, and discipline, defines *misbehavior* as unacceptable acts students perform in an attempt to meet one or more of five prime needs—safety, love and belonging, fun, freedom, and power. He believes misbehavior is minimized to the extent students are able to satisfy those needs in the classroom.
- C. M. Charles (2008) describes *misbehavior* as any action that, through intent or thoughtlessness, interferes with teaching or learning, threatens or intimidates others, or oversteps society’s standards of moral, ethical, or legal behavior.

TYPES OF MISBEHAVIOR

Thirteen types of misbehavior are likely to occur in your classes—some frequently, some rarely. It is often helpful to talk with your students about these kinds of misbehavior, at least those that affect your class most often. This helps students understand the undesirable effects of such behavior and encourages the class to think of ways in which self-defeating behaviors can be avoided. The thirteen types are as follows:

1. ***Inattention***—daydreaming, doodling, looking out the window, thinking about things irrelevant to the lesson
2. ***Apathy***—a general disinclination to participate, as demonstrated by sulking, not caring, being afraid of failure, not wanting to try or do well
3. ***Needless talk***—chatting during instructional time about matters unrelated to the lesson
4. ***Moving about the room***—getting up and moving around without permission, congregating in parts of the room
5. ***Annoying others***—provoking, teasing, picking at, calling names
6. ***Disruption***—shouting out during instruction, talking and laughing inappropriately, having confrontations with others, causing “accidents”
7. ***Lying***—falsifying to avoid accepting responsibility or admitting wrongdoing or to get others in trouble
8. ***Stealing***—taking things that belong to others
9. ***Cheating***—making false representations or wrongly taking advantage of others for personal benefit
10. ***Sexual harassment***—making others uncomfortable through touching, sex-related language, or sexual innuendo
11. ***Aggression and fighting***—showing hostility toward others, threatening them, shoving, pinching, wrestling, hitting, bullying
12. ***Malicious mischief***—doing intentional damage to school property or the belongings of others
13. ***Defiance of authority***—talking back to the teacher, hostilely refusing to do as the teacher requests

CAUSES OF MISBEHAVIOR AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM

It is well known that certain classroom conditions seem to foment misbehavior. Here, those conditions are called *causes* of misbehavior, a label that is useful but not entirely correct because these conditions do not always promote misbehavior. However, the term *cause* is retained for ease of use.

Twenty-six sets of conditions can be identified that often lead to misbehavior. Preventive discipline acts to remove the conditions where possible and to limit their influence if they cannot be removed entirely. To have a well-behaved, stress-free class, you must attend to these causative conditions, which are grouped here in accordance with where they seem to reside.

Causes of Misbehavior That Reside in Individual Students

Ten causes of misbehavior seem to reside within individual students: unmet needs, thwarted desires, expediency, urge to transgress, temptation, inappropriate habits, poor behavior choices, avoidance, egocentric personality, and neurological-based behavior (NBB). The following are suggestions for addressing these ten causes.

1. **Unmet needs.** In the classroom, students continually try to meet needs related to security, belonging, hope, dignity, power, enjoyment, and competence. When any of these needs is not being satisfied, students become unsettled, distracted, and more prone to misbehave.

Teacher action: By observing students and talking with them, you can identify most student needs and help students meet them in an acceptable manner.

2. **Thwarted desires.** When students fail to get something they want badly, they may complain, become destructive, sulk, pout, or act out.

Teacher action: Tell students you can see they are troubled or distracted. Ask if there is anything you can do to help. Be sympathetic, but don't dwell on the problem. Try to get them interested in something else.

3. **Expediency.** Students always look for ways to make their lives easier and more enjoyable. They take shortcuts, conveniently forget what they are supposed to do, look for ways to get out of work, and intentionally break rules.

Teacher action: Expedient behavior is seldom a problem in classes that are interesting and enjoyable, but it appears often in classes students consider dull and boring. Hold discussions about expediency and its troublesome effects. Ask students why they sometimes take the easy way, such as reading a book summary or review rather than the assigned book, rushing through a writing assignment, or copying others' ideas. If students are comfortable enough to answer honestly, they will probably say they do so because they don't like the work, don't see the point in it, or don't want to spend time on it. Ask them what would encourage them to give their best effort. Listen to their suggestions, and make use of them if you can.

4. **Urge to transgress.** All of us feel the urge to transgress rules and regulations and often do so knowing there is a chance we will get caught or even harm ourselves or others. Students succumb to this urge frequently, especially when class activities are not appealing; they also cheat, take shortcuts, tell lies, break class rules, and annoy others, seemingly for little benefit.

Teacher action: Discuss this urge, its effects, and how it can be controlled sensibly. Discuss the reasons for rules, including how they reduce potential harm, equalize opportunity, and help us live together harmoniously. If students are old enough, ask if they understand what the terms *ethics*, *ethical conduct*, and *personal character* mean. Ask why they think ethical people are so widely admired.

5. **Temptation.** Students regularly encounter objects, situations, behaviors, and people they find powerfully attractive. This phenomenon is evident in association with music and lyrics, desirable objects, ways of speaking, styles of clothing, lifestyles, personal grooming, and cheating on tests and assignments. Although the pursuit of these temptations can result in mild or severe misbehavior, students nevertheless find them so attractive they will occasionally do, adopt, mimic, acquire, or associate with them, even when forbidden to do so.

Teacher action: Conduct discussions with your students where together you analyze temptation and seek to understand why certain objects, styles, and opportunities are so seductive. Help students foresee the undesirable consequences of following disapproved styles and manners. Help them clarify the lines that separate the approved from the disapproved, and reinforce their resolve to resist factors that are likely to harm them or others.

6. Inappropriate habits. Inappropriate habits are ingrained ways of behaving that violate established standards and expectations. Jason uses profanity at school. Maria is discourteous and calls others names. Larry shirks his assignments. Some of these habits are learned in school, but most become established in the home or community.

Teacher action: Bring inappropriate habits to students' attention without pointing a finger at anyone. Discuss their harmful effects, and if necessary, have students practice desirable alternatives to habits such as name-calling, teasing, verbal putdowns, cheating, lying, and disregarding the feelings of others.

7. Poor behavior choices. The behaviors students exhibit in attempting to meet their needs are sometimes acceptable, sometimes not. Levels of acceptability may not be clear to students. Alicia, when seeking attention, annoys others so much they avoid her. Alan, seeking an increased sense of power, refuses to do what his teacher requests.

Teacher action: Alicia and Alan need to understand that their behavior choices are detrimental to themselves and others. To help students such as Alicia and Alan, ask questions like these in class: What are some of the things you have seen students do to (get attention, be acknowledged, get better grades than they deserve, get out of work, become members of groups, etc.)? Does their behavior usually get them what they want? What could those students do that would probably bring better results?

8. Avoidance. None of us likes to face failure, intimidation, ridicule, or other unpleasant situations and treatment; hence, we are inclined to avoid situations where they might occur. But in school, we can't always do that. Consider Norona, who refuses to participate in a group assignment. Her refusal seems to show disrespect for the teacher, but her real reason is that she is intimidated by her peers and doesn't want them to think she is stupid.

Teacher action: To help students such as Norona behave advantageously in circumstances they dislike, show them how to face unpleasant situations and work through them. Rather than single out Norona, ask the following in a group discussion: Are there things you try to avoid in school, such as people, events, or activities you find frightening or embarrassing? Which of those things could best be dealt with through avoidance (e.g., a clique that is maligning other students)? Which of those things cannot be dealt with through avoidance (e.g., giving an oral report in front of the class)? What is the worst thing that can happen in class if we make a mistake? Can mistakes help us learn? What could a person do to reduce the fear of mistakes or unpleasant situations? (Consider exploring these ideas in pairs, then small groups, and then large groups.)

9. *Egocentric personality.* Students with egocentric personalities focus primarily on themselves, believe they are superior to others, and think they do little wrong. Most classes contain one or more such students.

Teacher action: To help these students behave more appropriately, ask questions such as the following in class discussions: Are the needs and interests of all students important, or do only certain students deserve attention? Is one person often entirely right and everyone else entirely wrong? Is everyone entitled to an equal opportunity in the class? How should you and I react to a person who always wants to dominate, be first, be right, or quarrel with those who don't agree? (Make sure the proffered suggestions are positive in nature, not negative.)

10. *Neurological-based behavior (NBB).* A few students behave undesirably not through intent or thoughtlessness but because their brains function in ways that lead to behavior that is largely outside their control. These students do not respond well, or at all, to normal discipline tactics. NBB involves a number of different diagnoses, such as learning disabilities, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), sensory-processing disorder, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and autism spectrum disorder.

Teacher action: Teachers who have students with NBB need help from specialists, who are usually provided by the school. Behavior of students with NBB can often be improved by removing extraneous stimulation from the classroom environment. A number of other tactics are also helpful. Mel Levine (2002) says that from the moment students get out of bed in the morning until they are back in bed at night, they have one mission that overrides all others—to avoid humiliation at all costs. He also says that we need to demystify NBB for affected students and peers. He says to explain plainly to the class and others that some people function (are “wired up,” if you prefer) in such a way that they lose control at times and more often than others do. Students need to be reassured that teachers can help them avoid getting into trouble and will partner with them because they care. We need to think of NBB students separately from their behavior. We should always model the calm, soothing behavior we want them to display and make sure they feel loved and respected as human beings. Other helpful suggestions are (1) to be careful with eye contact, which stimulates upper-cortex activity and is often interpreted as a challenge or threat; (2) to react to situations calmly (a raised voice tends to make students with NBB raise their voices in return); and (3) to provide additional structure to unstructured activities, which are especially difficult for students with NBB.

Causes of Misbehavior That Reside in Class Peers and Groups

Two significant causes of misbehavior reside in class peers and groups: provocation and contagious group behavior. Here are suggestions for dealing with them.

1. *Provocation.* A great amount of school misbehavior occurs from students' provoking each other through petty annoyance, putdowns, sarcastic remarks, and aggression

or bullying. Heather is trying to study, but Art's incessant chatter frustrates her to the bursting point. Marty calls Jerry a name, and Jerry responds hotly. Randall is trying to pay attention but can't because Larry keeps poking him in the back with a pencil.

Teacher action: Provocation often produces strong emotions that reduce self-control and increase combativeness. Discuss this phenomenon with your class. Ask questions such as these: Can you name some things people say or do that upset you so much you want to retaliate? How do you feel when this happens? If you retaliate, is it likely to improve the situation or make it worse? What might you do that would resolve the incident peacefully? Is provoking others or bullying them consistent with the class character we are trying to build? Would you provoke or bully others if the teacher were standing beside you?

2. Contagious group behavior. Students often succumb to peer pressure or get caught up in group emotion and, as a result, misbehave in ways that would be out of character if they were by themselves. It is difficult for students to disregard peer pressure, easy to get swept up in group energy and emotion, and easy to justify one's misbehavior as "only what others were doing." Because Kerry and Lee want to look cool to their peers, Kerry defaces school property and Lee bullies a weaker member of the class. Neither would do these things if by himself or herself.

Teacher action: Discuss this phenomenon with your class. Tell the class about some event in which a friend of yours—let's say Sarah—behaved badly just because others were doing so. Indicate that Sarah is now very embarrassed about her behavior and wishes no one knew about it. Ask your students if they know any stories like Sarah's they can share, without mentioning names the class might recognize. (Tell them they must not mention family matters or members. Doing so is a sure way to get parents upset at you.) If students share stories, guide the class in analyzing one or two of them. If they don't contribute a story, have a fictional one ready for their consideration. After hearing or recounting the story, ask questions such as the following:

- Is the behavior something the person will be proud of later?
- Why do you suppose the person behaved that way? (perhaps to have fun, show comradeship, test limits, be seen as clever or cool)
- What do you think the long-term results will be for the person? (perhaps an unpleasant story to remember, regret, guilt, getting caught, being found out, worry, disappointing one's family, possible punishment, living with knowing you did the wrong thing)
- How do you think the possible benefits compare with the probable harmful effects?
- Once you do something you are ashamed of, how can you make amends?
- How can you stay away from or keep out of group activities that are unlawful, unethical, or against the rules?

Causes of Misbehavior That Reside in Instructional Environments

Four causes of misbehavior reside in instructional environments, and all can be easily corrected. They are physical discomfort, tedium, meaninglessness, and lack of stimulation.

1. **Physical discomfort.** Students often become restless when made uncomfortable by inappropriate noise, temperature, lighting, seating, or workspaces.

Teacher action: Attend to comfort factors in advance, and ask students about them. Make corrections as necessary.

2. **Tedium.** Students begin to fidget after a time when an instructional activity requires continued close attention, especially if the topic is not appealing.

Teacher action: Add something that increases the interest level, or break the work into shorter segments.

3. **Meaninglessness.** Students grow restless when required to work at topics they do not comprehend or for which they see no purpose.

Teacher action: Make sure the topic is meaningful to students—that they understand it and see its relevance and importance in their lives.

4. **Lack of stimulation.** The topic and learning environment provide little that is attractive or otherwise stimulating. Students take no interest in the lesson.

Teacher action: Select topics and activities in which students have natural interest. When that is not possible, introduce elements students are known to enjoy, such as novelty, mystery, movement, competition, group work, and role-playing.

Causes of Misbehavior That Reside in Teachers and Other School Personnel

We must honestly acknowledge that teachers sometimes misbehave in the classroom. Other adults at school do so as well, including administrators, librarians, clerical staff, health personnel, cafeteria personnel, custodial personnel, and family members working in the school. Ten factors are occasionally evident in school personnel that can lead to student misbehavior.

1. **Poor habits.** Personnel in the schools have sometimes unknowingly acquired counterproductive ways of speaking, dealing with, or relating to students, and they may have become set in those ways.

Teacher action: Watch closely to see how students react to you and other school personnel. Toward any given school person, do they seem friendly? Wary? Eager to cooperate? Reticent? If they are reticent, fearful, uncooperative, or unfriendly, analyze the situations you observe and see if you can determine the problem. Correct your own behavior, should that be necessary, but be careful

about approaching colleagues with criticism. If you need to do so, casually say to the teacher (as appropriate to the situation), “I’ve been getting along with Tony and other students much better since I’ve begun asking their opinions on matters, rather than just telling them what to do.”

2. *Unfamiliarity with better techniques.* Some educators have not had occasion to learn some of the newer, more effective ways of teaching and relating with today’s students.

Teacher action: If you feel you might be less than well informed, ask students about things school people do that they really like. Notice what effective teachers at your school do, and don’t be reluctant to request ideas from them. Your school may keep a library of professional books and journals, and through the Internet, you can access dozens of sites that present outstanding ideas and suggestions for working enjoyably and productively with students.

3. *Presenting poor models of behavior.* At times, all of us are inconsistent, irresponsible, and short on self-control, and we sometimes treat students with discourtesy or disregard. We can’t expect to be perfect, but we must realize that when we behave unprofessionally or treat students poorly—which is to say, in ways we would not want to be treated—we not only damage relationships but also encourage students to imitate our poor behavior.

Teacher action: Always be the best model you can for your students, who watch you very closely and often pattern their behavior after yours (especially when you misbehave). If you do anything you realize is inappropriate, call attention to it, explain why it was wrong, and apologize if doing so seems necessary.

4. *Showing little interest in or appreciation for students.* We sometimes fail to show interest in students or appreciation for them as individuals, despite knowing they want our attention. If we disregard them repeatedly, students become hesitant toward us or may seek our attention in disruptive ways.

Teacher action: Give all students as much personal attention as possible. Greet them personally, exchange a friendly word, show you are aware of them and their difficulties, try to help them feel at ease, and acknowledge their progress.

5. *Succumbing to personal frustration.* Some educators are worn down from continually having to deal with misbehavior, inconsiderate parents, and other stressful conditions. They become dispirited, which makes it difficult to work with students in a kind, helpful manner.

Teacher action: Educators often experience intense frustration from trying unsuccessfully to get students to comply with expectations. If you are trying to use force, replace it with encouragement and enticement, and you will see your students become more cooperative, willing to learn, and considerate. Go out of your way to communicate with parents and show appreciation for their children.

6. ***Succumbing to provocation.*** Students may do and say things intentionally to annoy you, hoping to see you become upset and befuddled and perhaps lose self-control.

Teacher action: Do not allow students to provoke you. When they try to do so, disregard their comments and actions and proceed as if nothing has happened. If you feel it necessary to respond, say only, “Something is causing violations of our agreement about being considerate of others. I don’t understand why. Is there something we can do to fix the problem?”

7. ***Providing ineffective guidance and feedback.*** In the absence of helpful guidance and feedback, students sometimes do not understand what is expected of them, how much progress they have made, or how they can improve.

Teacher action: Make sure students understand clearly what they are supposed to do and how they should go about it. During and after assigned activities, tell students what they have done well or poorly and indicate how they can improve. Ask them to give their opinions about the activity and their efforts.

8. ***Using ineffective personal communication.*** Some educators are not adept at communicating with students on a personal level. This shortcoming may cause students to become uneasy and reticent.

Teacher action: Speak regularly with students in a friendly way. Students want you to know their names and exchange pleasantries with them. They sometimes want to know your views on various matters and want to tell you theirs, which can provide them with a measure of personal validation. However, you should avoid comments that hurt feelings or dampen enthusiasm. Rather, say things that increase optimism and bolster confidence. Build students up when you can, but do so honestly.

9. ***Failure to plan proactively.*** Many educators do not plan ahead sufficiently to foresee potential problems. Then, when unexpected events occur, they are not prepared to respond effectively.

Teacher action: Think carefully about problems that might arise in class and about possible student reactions to topics, lessons, requests, and unexpected events. By anticipating potential difficulties, you can avoid most problems and prepare yourself to deal with whatever might happen. Think through what you will do when people are injured or become suddenly ill, grow defiant, or get into fights. Decide what you will do and say if an unauthorized visitor approaches you, if a parent berates you, if the class moans when you make an assignment, and so forth. Determine how you can respond decisively to such eventualities yet maintain positive relationships.

10. ***Using coercion, threat, and punishment.*** Students don’t like to be forced to do anything, and they don’t like to be threatened. If you treat them abrasively, they will keep a watchful eye on you, fearful of being scolded, embarrassed, or demeaned, and will very likely develop negative attitudes toward you and school.

Teacher action: Give up coercion and threat, and replace them with considerate helpfulness, personal attention, and good communication.

RECOGNIZING AND CORRECTING TEACHER MISBEHAVIOR

As mentioned, we should frankly acknowledge that we teachers also misbehave at times. Despite our dedication and concern for students, we sometimes do or say things that provoke antagonism, inhibit student progress, or leave the class dispirited. Five types of teacher misbehavior should be addressed and eliminated: inducing fearfulness, denigrating students, being demanding and abrasive, presenting poor models of behavior, and not making classes interesting and worthwhile. When we misbehave in any of these ways, it is usually because we are either fearful of losing control or simply don't know how to use positive tactics that work well.

Do what you can to avoid such misbehavior. Think back at the end of each day and judge yourself against the types of teacher misbehavior just listed. If you see a need for improvement, work on the behaviors one by one until you get satisfactory results. Tell your students what you are doing, and ask for their feedback.

Consultant

C. M. CHARLES ON PREVENTING MISBEHAVIOR THROUGH SYNERGETIC TEACHING



C. M. Charles was for many years Professor of Teacher Education at San Diego State University, where he is now Professor Emeritus. He directed innovative programs in teacher education and five times received outstanding professor and distinguished teaching awards. He also served on many occasions as advisor in teacher education and curriculum to the governments of Peru and Brazil. Charles is author of a number of books that have attracted wide audiences in the United States and abroad, with translations into several foreign languages.

One of those books, *The Synergetic Classroom: Joyful Teaching and Gentle Discipline* (2000), explains how to energize classes, when desired, to maximize student achievement, enjoyment, and satisfaction, which in turn reduces the likelihood of discipline problems. Here are some of Charles's comments related to synergetic teaching. For more information, see Charles's website: www.teacherweb.com/ca/sdsu/charles.

Many teachers today are unhappy or frustrated in their work. Most who feel this way insist they very much want to teach and help students but find their students distressingly unmotivated, uncooperative, difficult to teach, and hard to handle. Teachers' daily

struggle under these conditions, with little to show for their effort, erodes class morale and saps energy and initiative, allowing classes to decline into dull daily grinds. These teachers are not enjoying school, and they know their students are not enjoying it either.

Yet many teachers in schools everywhere are notably successful. Their students learn, enjoy themselves, and appreciate the educational experience. These results are not produced by expensive instructional materials or costly facilities. They occur because of what the teacher does to relate to students, teach effectively, and make sure students enjoy the experience. For instance, they know how to rally students to their side. They know how to build trust. They know how to strengthen and capitalize on student dignity and enhance personal relations in their classes. They know how to communicate well and help students resolve problems and conflicts. They know how to make lessons consistently interesting and worthwhile. And they add sparkle to daily classroom life with their personal charisma. By doing these things, teachers feed energy to their students who, in turn, feed energy back to the teacher. This mutually energizing phenomenon, referred to as *synergy*, is at the heart of synergetic teaching and discipline.

If you are able to teach in ways that increase class synergy, you can be sure your students will like and respect you. They will willingly, even eagerly immerse themselves in the educational activities you provide. As they do so, they will begin to show more responsibility, self-direction, and self-discipline. Discipline problems will be few and far between, and a high level of camaraderie will be present. All these things contribute to a sense of exhilaration that teachers and students prize in school but only occasionally experience.

Virtually all teachers can learn to teach in a synergetic manner. The first step is to understand students' nature and needs. You can see that all too often, our curriculum, activities, and discipline methods are not in harmony with students' needs and natures but rather work contrarily to them. Many of us expect students, even when bored to death, to pay attention, show interest, and do as they are directed. When students are slow to comply, we get upset and sometimes try to force them to do so, not realizing that coercion produces an array of student emotions that interfere with learning. Teachers err most seriously when they say and do things that damage trust and student dignity, thus promoting student dislike for teacher and school.

Synergetic teaching helps avoid those pitfalls. It provides teachers the tools they need for student enjoyment and success. It is based on working *with* students. By capitalizing on needs and desires, it makes activities enjoyable. By using effective communication and personal attention, it promotes trust and desire to cooperate. As these conditions increase in class, discipline problems fade to a minimum, and those that do occur can be dealt with easily and productively.

All teachers have two great dreams—to work with students who try to learn and to escape from the constant struggle against student lethargy and misbehavior. Synergetic teaching enables you to achieve both dreams. Students conduct themselves more appropriately because the major conditions that lead to misbehavior are removed. At the same time, your enjoyment in working with students increases. You can look forward to each day and go home at night pleasantly tired, rather than raggedly frustrated.

Students will be pleased to see you each day and you them. Teaching will increasingly become what you always hoped it would be—joyful and satisfying.

The following sections indicate what you can do to increase synergy in your classes.

Clarify Student Needs and the Kinds of Attention Those Needs Should Receive

Briefly discuss with your class the predominant needs we all share. Go through the following list, and reassure students you will take these needs fully into account in the class. (Of course, you should adjust the discussion to your students' developmental level.)

- *Security*, feeling safe without worry
- *Sense of hope*, feeling that school is worthwhile and success is possible
- *Personal dignity*, feeling respected and worthwhile
- *Belonging*, feeling a part of things, being valued, having a place in the class
- *Sense of power*, having some control of and input into events in the class
- *Enjoyment*, participating in activities that are pleasurable or rewarding
- *Sense of competence*, being able to do many things well, including the expected school work

Point out to your students that you know they become uncomfortable when these needs are not being met at school and that discomfort reduces enjoyment, learning, and willingness to try. Explain that the same is true for teachers. Reassure your students, therefore, that you will reduce or eliminate topics and activities they clearly do not like or that affect them adversely and that you will not permit anything in the class to damage their sense of safety and security, feeling of belonging, and sense of hope.

Emphasize Class Conditions and Activities Students Are Known to Like

Tell your students you will strive for the following qualities in the classroom and that you need their help making sure they occur:

- A teacher who is friendly, interesting, helpful, and supportive
- Camaraderie—enjoyable associations among classmates
- Interesting topics to learn about that are intriguing and worthwhile
- Students' awareness of the importance of what they are asked to learn
- Enjoyable instructional activities
- Opportunity for and likelihood of success and accomplishment
- Attention drawn tactfully to student accomplishments

As well, discuss with students some of the things they normally dislike in school, as listed below. Indicate you will guard against them. Note, however, that

some students do not object to all of these activities or conditions. You might wish to ask their opinions about them. Also ask if they can see situations in which some of these conditions might be necessary.

- Sitting still for long periods
- Keeping quiet for long periods
- Working alone
- Not knowing why something is being taught or learned
- Memorizing facts for tests
- Completing lengthy reading and writing assignments
- Doing repetitive work
- Engaging in individual competition where there is little or no chance of winning
- Having little or no choice in activities, assignments, or assessment

Work to Develop Class Ethics and Trust

The term *ethics* refers to doing what one believes to be the honorable thing in all situations. Ethical student behavior should be a prime goal of education, and ethical teacher behavior is essential for building trust in the class. Students see teachers as ethical and trustworthy when they are unfailingly kind, considerate, helpful, fair, and tactfully honest. Trust is essential in synergetic discipline, as it enables teachers and students to count on each other for support and fair treatment.

Emphasize and Use Your Personal Charisma

Charisma is an aspect of personality that attracts others. Students greatly enjoy charismatic teachers and flock to them. Charisma seems to emerge from a blend of talent, experience, knowledge, and understanding of others, and it is made evident in how people react to each other. We can all increase our level of charisma and display it through personal charm, friendliness, enthusiasm, and helpfulness.

Improve the Quality of Communication in Your Classroom

Except for trust, no element of synergy is more important than *communication*. The type of communication that contributes most to synergy is verbal give-and-take between teacher and students. It involves listening sensitively, showing genuine interest, and speaking encouragingly rather than arguing, moralizing, or giving unsolicited advice.

Make Use of Coopetition

Coopetition, pronounced “co-opetition,” refers to members of groups cooperating together in order to compete against other groups. Coopetition is not given a great deal of attention in teaching, but it contributes powerfully to synergy. In school, it is

exemplified in team athletic events and other performances and competitions. Cooperation can be incorporated into almost all areas of the curriculum. Generally speaking, students respond to it more enthusiastically than to any other activity.

Resolve Class Problems and Conflicts Amicably and Productively

A class *problem* is a situation or condition that affects the class seriously enough to require attention, while a class *conflict* is a strong disagreement between students or between teacher and student.

How to Address Problems. Suppose students in a high school geometry class are troubled by a heavy load of homework, or suppose a middle school teacher is greatly embarrassed when the principal visits and makes a comment about the room being untidy. When such situations hinder teaching or learning for any reason, they should be addressed immediately. The teacher, sensing the problem, might say, “Class, something is going on that I think we need to talk about.” The problem should then be clarified, possible solutions should be sought, and a solution should be selected and tried.

How to Address Conflicts. *Conflicts* are interpersonal situations characterized by strong disagreements, which may or may not include misbehavior. If the individuals involved do not know how to find a peaceful solution, they tend to fight each other verbally and sometimes physically. Conflict threatens personal dignity, which is strongly defended. Examples of conflict situations include disputes over who won a contest, who is entitled to play with a toy, whether work was turned in on time, and whether work has met the standards expected. Conflict is best resolved through a win-win approach, in which both sides are made to feel most of their concerns have been adequately addressed.

To resolve conflicts effectively in your class, follow these guidelines:

- Make sure all individuals involved have the opportunity to express their concerns.
- Insist that all comments, observations, and suggestions be presented in a courteous manner.
- Encourage both sides to be open and honest but tactful.
- Encourage each person to try to see things from the other’s point of view.
- Try to focus attention on the areas of agreement between the disputants.
- Help disputants formulate solutions as joint agreements.
- Don’t allow students to argue back and forth, defend themselves, or debate.

IN SUMMARY

Misbehavior can be defined in many ways. One of the most useful definitions is “any action that, through intent or thoughtlessness, interferes with teaching or learning, threatens or intimidates others, or oversteps society’s standards of moral, ethical, or

legal behavior.” Thirteen types of classroom misbehavior were described, and suggestions were presented for dealing with them. Prevention—the easiest and most time-effective strategy for improving classroom behavior—calls on teachers to understand and recognize the causes of misbehavior and take steps to eliminate, soften, or circumvent them. Twenty-six causes of misbehavior were listed in the chapter. One of the main causes is incompatibility between school activities and student needs. Given this, teachers are urged to align class expectations, topics, and activities with predominant student needs, such as security, belonging, hope, dignity, power, enjoyment, and competence. Synergetic teaching was presented as one style of teaching that reduces misbehavior.

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