

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND THE DISRUPTIVE CHILD

Glenn H. Buck outlines a range of nonintrusive and intrusive strategies for effective classroom management of inappropriate behaviors.

GLENN H. BUCK

Regardless of subject or grade level taught, discipline is consistently a major concern for all educators, but for music educators, teaching disruptive students can present a special challenge. Student behavior in general appears to be getting worse: increased gang violence, vandalism, drug abuse, and a general disrespect for authority are having a profound impact on many of the nation's classrooms. Researchers have pointed out that teachers and the general public perceive discipline as one of the most important issues in education today.¹ Due to the very nature of the activities that occur in our music classrooms (such as high levels of stimulation and large-group, cooperative activities), students with little self-control and/or an acute need for attention seem to stand out. Even typically good-natured students can present occasional behavior problems in the music class. As a result, the need for today's music educators to respond effectively to classroom disruption is especially pertinent.

Why Students Misbehave

Students misbehave for a variety of reasons, and knowing the underlying cause of a student's misconduct helps the teacher to determine which inter-

Glenn H. Buck is a doctoral candidate at the University of Florida in Gainesville.

.....

Activities and tasks that are too difficult for students will frequently result in acting out or aggressive or withdrawn behavior.

.....

vention strategies may or may not be successful. The first and one of the most common of these reasons is boredom. Lesson activities that require students to sit idly for long periods of time frequently result in misbehavior. The beginning band director who feels the necessity of tuning up each and every instrument with precision may not only be expecting the impossible but may also be losing the attention

and commitment of even the best-behaved players.

Some students misbehave out of frustration. Activities and tasks that are too difficult for students will frequently result in acting out or aggressive or withdrawn behavior. A young student who is expected to discriminate abstract musical concepts, such as high versus low pitches, before he or she has had adequate aural experiences will soon become inattentive and off-task. Similarly, a student who uses a wheelchair and is not provided with opportunities to participate in class activities will soon lose interest and become bored.

Another reason some students misbehave is to get attention. Sometimes, no matter how interesting or stimulating you think your lesson is, it is difficult to compete with peer attention. Jason, who is just discovering the opposite sex, feels compelled to show the female world that no matter how hard the teacher comes down on him, it's not going to bother him. Likewise, Sarah, who has little academic success and gets little peer acceptance in the regular classroom, finds that she can get lots of attention (and what she perceives as acceptance) in the music class by acting silly.

Misbehavior may also be due to a real or perceived power struggle. For whatever reasons, some students need to feel power over authority figures.

Because Jonathan has been dominated and sometimes humiliated by other teachers, he feels the need to test the limits of his music teacher and to find out how much influence he can exert over him or her. Power struggles are often a coping strategy for students with little self-confidence. These students may feel threatened by the actual demands of their environment or by their perceived inability to cope with these demands. Instead of risking failure, students with insecurities often set up defensive postures that continually keep them in conflict with the teacher, thereby avoiding tasks that may demonstrate their inadequacies.

Some students misbehave because they have simply given up trying to meet academic and social expectations that they perceive as unattainable: "Why should I behave when everything I've ever done has been a failure?" "No matter what I do, the teacher and students won't like me." Students who accept this perception of themselves are very difficult to work with. For teachers, it is difficult to undo years of self-debasement that can accompany actual academic and social failure.

A New View of Discipline

Surveys of teachers reveal that most report discipline problems as a contributing source of stress and burnout.² It is interesting to note that when teachers are asked what discipline means to them, most refer to the term "punishment": verbal reprimands, verbal threats, paddling, suspension, or expulsion.³ This point of view is inadequate, however, as punishment is only one component of the larger construct called discipline. In fact, it may be extremely naive to assume that only behavior management strategies that incorporate punishment will be capable of managing student behavior.

Discipline, in its truest sense, describes a system made up of preventive and intervention strategies designed to manage rather than control student behavior. In a preventive context, the music educator is responsible for preventing inappropriate behavior by:

- setting clearly defined classroom rules;

- consistently reviewing and applying those rules;
- structuring the classroom environment to increase student learning;
- engaging student attention by using effective teaching behaviors and challenging curricular content;
- individualizing instruction and adapting assessment techniques to individual needs; and
- providing feedback regarding student academic and behavioral progress in a constructive and positive manner with the use of positive praise, contingent rewards,

increased teacher attention, and so forth.

In this context, discipline turns inappropriate student behavior into an opportunity for learning, rather than an opportunity for punishment. In an intervention context, the music educator is responsible for increasing appropriate behavior by knowing a wide variety of behavior management techniques, rationally applying these techniques in a professional manner, and discontinuing the application of these intervention techniques when they are no longer needed.



Photo by Kathleen Menke

Management as Prevention

In order to prevent student misbehavior, it is important to understand the relationship between classroom management and student behavior. Researchers have repeatedly demonstrated that when classroom teachers apply principles of effective classroom management, student conduct improves.⁴ Likewise, when these teaching behaviors are absent, student conduct is more likely to deteriorate. Effective classroom management involves three general orientations.

■ *Structuring the environment for learning.* Teachers who use planned seating arrangements reduce opportunities for misbehavior. For general music classrooms, placing chairs in a circle rather than in rows tends to reduce the amount of off-task behavior by making the disruptive student visible to everyone. Alternating the

seating of disruptive and nondisruptive students also keeps disruptive students away from each other. For younger students especially, making sure that noninstructional manipulative objects are out of arms' reach can prevent off-task behavior. Also, providing small, individual carpet squares for kindergarten children to sit on can offer a feeling of personal space.

■ *Structuring the curriculum for learning.* Music educators who use multilevel objectives to meet the needs of students performing at different intellectual and academic levels help prevent student disruption. A multilevel objective is one that is broken down into different levels of complexity. For example, if the objective is to learn about musical instruments, students with lesser abilities can learn the names of the instruments, while students with greater abilities can learn

the names, families, and histories of instruments. Grading procedures can reflect the different ability levels of the students and the objectives they are expected to master.

Curriculum should also be presented and reviewed in a variety of sensory modalities. Younger children especially should have opportunities to explore sound and music through visual, auditory, and tactile sensory channels. For older students, motivation can be maintained by making sure materials and activities are age-appropriate and current.

■ *Structuring the teacher's behavior to prevent student misbehavior.* Researchers who examine effective teaching have consistently found that the teachers who maintain better classroom behavior are those who set and maintain clear and concise classroom rules; keep rules simple and few in number (3–5); state rules in terms of what students should do—sit up, look at teacher, raise hand during no-talking time—rather than what students should not do; and keep rules posted and refer to them frequently.⁵

In addition to having clearly defined rules, effective teachers develop a hierarchy of positive and negative consequences for different types of student behaviors. The effective teacher can quickly discern the difference between a minor or a major offense and quickly decide on a consequence appropriate to the offense.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

*Effective teachers
develop a hierarchy of
positive and negative
consequences for
different types of
student behaviors.*

■ ■ ■ ■ ■



File photo

Effective teachers also decrease student disruption by starting class on time, conducting themselves in a professional manner, and setting clearly defined goals for each class lesson, usually communicated to students through the use of an advance and post organizer. Advance organizers are presented at the beginning of class and tell students what they did during the previous class or rehearsal, what they will do during the present lesson, how they are to do it, and why they are doing it. Post organizers are used at the end of class and tell the students what they accomplished during the lesson and what objectives they will work toward for the next lesson.

Within each lesson, research on effective teaching tells us that the effective teacher varies the number and length of activities according to the developmental level of students: the younger the students, the greater the number of activities and the shorter the time period for each. The effective teacher also demonstrates skills the students are expected to learn and allows ample opportunity for practice; if kindergarten students are having trouble walking into the music room from the hall, the teacher should show them how to enter the room correctly and allow them to practice walking in correctly. Giving clear, frequent, and descriptive feedback is another important technique: "Jason, that's exactly the way I like to hear you play that passage—short and detached notes with a gradual crescendo."

Intervention Strategies

Preventive strategies can reduce the probability that students will misbehave. Preventive strategies alone, however, will not eliminate every occurrence of student disruption. It is critical that the music educator also have the ability to initiate, monitor, and evaluate a variety of specific behavior-management strategies.

Effective intervention strategies can be thought of as points along a continuum. On one side are strategies that are less teacher intrusive—intrusive meaning techniques that require the teacher to directly intervene with the disruptive student. These might start with planned ignoring and pro-

ceed by gradations to strategies that are much more teacher intrusive. An entire continuum might contain these points: Planned Ignoring, Praise Around, Giving Students Choices, Student-Teacher Conferences, Daily/Weekly Progress Reports, Contracts, Token System, and Time-Out.

As a general rule, the more serious a student's misbehavior patterns are, the more likely the teacher will need to implement more intrusive intervention strategies. Each choice of a strategy to use for an individual student or group of students is, however, highly individualized. Above all, these strategies are to be used in combination with the effective classroom-management techniques; effective behavior management cannot be separated from effective classroom management.⁶ Moreover, the goal of any behavior-management program is to discontinue the use of structured interventions when they are no longer needed.



When a student is affected more by peer attention than teacher attention, he or she may be less responsive to the teacher's ignoring.



Planned Ignoring

This strategy is defined as the planned and systematic use of ignoring inappropriate student behavior. This approach works well with attention-getting behaviors. For instance, Rebecca, a second grader, felt the need to have her teacher's constant attention. She was frequently out of her seat and always standing by her teacher's desk asking irrelevant questions. Verbal rep-

rimands and threats of punishment only appeared to make the situation worse. When the teacher began ignoring Rebecca, however, there was a brief increase followed by a dramatic decrease in the number of times she was out of her seat. Combining positive attention such as verbal praise for in-seat behavior with the out-of-seat ignoring had a profound effect on Rebecca's appropriate behavior.

Caution: Ignoring was effective in Rebecca's situation, but it may not be in other situations. When a student is affected more by peer attention than teacher attention, he or she may be less responsive to the teacher's ignoring. For these students, more intrusive methods need to be used. Planned ignoring is also not a substitute for direct intervention of more serious behavior problems. Severe behavior (causing harm to others, destruction of property) should not be ignored but dealt with using more intrusive strategies. The use of planned ignoring with students with communication difficulties also can lead to increased levels of disruptive behavior if the students are unable to find acceptable ways of expressing themselves. Although planned ignoring is a standard practice in many educational settings, it may be frowned upon by some administrators. If possible, music teachers should elicit support for this procedure from administrators, the student's teacher, and when necessary, from parents.

Praise Around

This approach works well with students who display an abnormally strong need for attention and power. It is the systematic ignoring of the child who displays inappropriate behavior while praising and attending to other appropriately behaved students located around the misbehaving student. Kathy, a kindergarten student who seems to gain satisfaction from the negative attention she receives for not walking to the circle-group as she enters music class, can be managed effectively by the teacher praising all the other students ("Johnny's sitting down, Mary's sitting down, etc.") and ignoring Kathy. In this manner, Kathy soon realizes that if she wants to receive attention, she can get it only

by following the everyday procedures of the classroom.

Caution: This approach, while effective with younger children, may be less effective for older students who can create more ingenious ways of getting the teacher's attention. Like planned ignoring, if student behavior is dangerous to the child who is misbehaving, or to other students in the disruptive student's vicinity, more direct interventions will be needed.

Giving Students Choices

Similar to praising others, giving choices works especially well with young children (preschool and early elementary grades). For older children, this technique can also be effective with students who need to feel a certain amount of control over their environment. Telling students that they can either complete their assignments alone or with a "buddy" may reduce some of the noncompliance that occurs when tasks are assigned. Likewise, giving an entire class the opportunity to schedule lesson activities can be effective with some students. For example, students can vote on whether they want to have the singing portion of the lesson first or last.

Caution: Giving students choices is effective and can give some students a healthy feeling of independence. Giving too many choices too frequently, however, can be disruptive in itself. Detailing the choices, allowing time for students to make decisions, and class voting can be extremely time consuming. Educators can train students to make decisions efficiently by praising those who make decisions quickly and get to work immediately.

Student-Teacher Conferences

Student-teacher conferences can be effective with students of any age, especially for those students who have stopped trying. Talking to a student before or after class can be a powerful strategy if conferences are conducted in a nonthreatening and nonjudgmental manner. During these one-to-one discussions, it is important to focus objectively on the student's behavior. Start off the conference by pointing out the positive attributes of the student ("Jeff, I know you love to come to music. You

are a good singer and you have a good sense of rhythm. I really like having you in my class.") and avoiding negative statements ("You are the worst student in my class. You can't sit still for a second and you can't stop talking."). Communicate how the student's misbehavior makes you feel ("Jeff, I get tired when I try to teach and you're talking with Susan. It makes me very frustrated to stop in the middle of a song and have to speak to you. I go

home at night very tired and usually with bad headaches."). Ask the student why the problem is occurring; listen closely and remain nonjudgmental. Ask the student to change his or her behavior ("Jeff, can you change your behavior? Can you sit and sing without talking to Susan?"). Develop a plan of action, if necessary.

Following the conference, the teacher should monitor the student's behavior. If the student has improved

Figure 1. Sample Progress Report

Name: _____

Day/Week of: _____

Behavior	Y/N
1. Made rehearsal on time	_____
2. Remembered practice chart	_____
3. Sat quietly while tuning up	_____
4. Raised hand to ask questions	_____

Comments:

his or her behavior, the teacher should provide positive feedback. The student needs to know that because his or her behavior improved, the teacher's behavior also improved by increasing the amount of positive feedback.

Caution: Some students may be good for a short period following a conference but may soon regress to preconference levels of disruption. In such cases, more intrusive measures should be considered. Student confer-

ences are also time-consuming, and music educators who move large numbers of students in and out of their classroom each period may have limited opportunities for this intervention technique.

Daily/Weekly Progress Reports

For students with more frequent and consistent patterns of disruptive behavior, and for students who do not respond to less intrusive intervention

techniques, regularly scheduled reports can be effective in reducing disruptive behavior. A progress report can be a simple three- or four-item checklist that the teacher checks off at the end of class or end of the week (see figure 1). Checks or points can be exchanged for rewards at a later time.

Caution: Unless teachers and parents display an attitude that the progress reports are of the utmost importance, the student certainly will not value them. As a result, students may soon purposely misplace, lose, or fail to take reports home. Praise and reinforcement for good progress reports is essential. Students who do not derive any positive satisfaction from maintaining good progress reports will soon lose interest in them.

Contracts

Similar to progress reports, contracts are effective with students who manifest serious and consistent behavioral problems. A contract is an agreement that outlines specific procedures, responsibilities, and consequences for appropriate behavior that is maintained over a specified period of time (see figure 2).

Caution: Contracts are especially beneficial for older students who have the ability to monitor their own behavior and understand the long-term nature of contracts. For younger students, contracts may be extremely frustrating because positive consequences are typically not delivered on a frequent basis. Similar to progress reports, contracts must be important to all the participants to be effective.

Token System

Tokens are a very intrusive form of behavior management; they should only be used for chronic and difficult-to-correct behavioral problems. Points, checks, stars, or plastic chips can serve as tokens and be awarded to individual students for selected target behaviors. At a later time, earned tokens are cashed in for tangible rewards such as free time, inexpensive toys, or school supplies (e.g., pencils, erasers). The ultimate goal of any token program, however, is to gradually phase out the system. Teachers should gradually increase the amount of time between

Figure 2. Sample Contract

Student:

I, _____, agree to maintain appropriate behaviors as agreed upon (listed below). I understand that I am required to share a weekly progress report with my parents. Failure to do so will result in a conference to reevaluate this contract.

Behaviors agreed upon:

Teacher:

I, _____, agree to monitor this student's behavior, positively reinforce him/her when appropriate behaviors are being displayed, and provide a progress report at the end of each week. After a successful six-week period, I also agree to provide the class with _____.

Period of time this contract is to be in effect: _____



File photo

the awarding of tokens until the student no longer needs them to maintain appropriate classroom behaviors.

Caution: Tokens can be so effective that the teacher may forget to phase them out. As a result, prolonged use of tokens can be detrimental to those students who learn to depend on them and fail to learn more independent self-management techniques. Additionally, because of time limitations, token systems can be impractical in some music classrooms.

Time-Out

Time-out is removing the opportunity for the student to receive reinforcement. Typically, time-out can be exemplified by removing the disruptive student from the group for some stipulated amount of time. This strategy is effective for some students who misbehave for attention and cannot, or will not, manage their own behavior.

Janice, a second grader, has a chronic habit of making faces at other students during music class. As a first step, the music teacher determines a specified criteria (frequency level) for Janice's behavior that will result in the time-out procedure (e.g., after three faces the teacher will initiate time-out). Second, the teacher explains the procedure to Janice and details the contingencies that will occur if she

continues to be disruptive in time-out, such as additional time being added onto the time-out period. Third, the procedure is initiated and evaluated after a period of time.

In any time-out procedure, it is important for the teacher to convey an attitude that he or she does not want the child away from the group. Time-out should only be used when student behavior does not respond to other less teacher-intrusive interventions.

Caution: Unfortunately, while being an aversive experience for most children, time-out can be rewarding for others. Just as some children get used to and come to expect physical punishment, time-out can also be ineffective in reducing disruptive behavior. It is also easy for teachers to abuse time-out by isolating a child away from the rest of the class for too long a period. Ethically, it may be questionable to leave a young child in time-out for longer than a five-minute period. Teachers who wish to use this method should request training that can be acquired through in-service programs.

Effective Results

Dealing with disruptive students can be a challenge for any teacher. When teachers confront frequent discipline problems that disrupt their teaching activities, stress and burnout

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Effective teaching behaviors can serve as effective prevention measures.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

are inevitable consequences. Fortunately, however, the application of effective teaching behaviors can serve as effective prevention measures. By combining effective teaching behaviors with specific behavior management techniques, music educators can significantly reduce the frequency and intensity of disruptive behavior.

Notes

1. Betty Clapp, "The Discipline Challenge," *Instructor and Teacher* 99 (September 1989): 32-34; Stanley M. Elam, "The 22nd Annual Gallup Poll of the Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," *Phi Delta Kappan* 72 (September 1990): 41-55.
2. James J. Lebda, "Suspending or Expelling Handicapped Students: A Systematic Model for Principal Decision-Making," *High School Journal* 70 (Oct-Nov 1986): 30-39.
3. Randal S. Sprick, "Solutions to Elementary Discipline Problems," *Cassette Tape #1* (Chicago: SRA, 1981).
4. Jere E. Brophy, "Classroom Management and Learning," *American Education* 18 (March 1982): 20-32.
5. S. C. Paine, J. Radicchi, L. C. Rosellini, L. Detuchman, and C. B. Darch, *Structuring Your Classroom for Academic Success* (Champaign, IL: Research Press, 1983).
6. Maribeth Gettinger, "Methods of Proactive Classroom Management," *School Psychology Review* 17 (1988): 227-42. ■