

## Back to Basics: Rules, Praise, Ignoring, and Reprimands Revisited

By: Robert A. Gable, Peggy H. Hester, [Marcia L. Rock](#), and Kimberly G. Hughes

Gable, R. A., Hester, P. P. , Rock, M. L. , & Hughes, K. (2009). Back to Basics: Rules, Praise, Ignoring, and Reprimands Revisited. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 44 (4), 195-205.

Made available courtesy of Sage Publications: <http://www.sagepub.com/>

**\*\*\*Reprinted with permission. No further reproduction is authorized without written permission from Sage Publications. This version of the document is not the version of record. Figures and/or pictures may be missing from this format of the document.\*\*\***

### **Abstract:**

Research begun in the 1960s provided the impetus for teacher educators to urge classroom teachers to establish classroom rules, deliver high rates of verbal/nonverbal praise, and, whenever possible, to ignore minor student provocations. In that there have been significant advances in the knowledge of what constitutes effective classroom management, a review of past-to-present literature was conducted to determine whether it is time to alter the thinking about one or more of these basic behavioral strategies. The research conducted over the years supports the basic tenets of these strategies, but with some important caveats. Finally, there are several newer strategies that warrant attention.

**Keywords:** interventions; behavior, classroom; management; behavior

### **Article:**

Some 40 years ago, researchers began a series of studies on classroom rules, teacher praise, planned ignoring, and verbal reprimands. Among the most widely cited studies were those conducted by Zimmerman and Zimmerman (1962); Becker, Madsen, Arnold, and Thomas (1967); and Madsen, Becker, and Thomas (1968). The results of these studies have served as the basis for the preparation of generations of classroom teachers who work with children and adolescents with learning and behavior disabilities. Recent legislation mandates that school personnel make use of only those strategies for which there is strong empirical support (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments, 1997; Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004; No Child Left Behind, 2002). For that reason, it was time to revisit the classroom use of rules, praise, ignoring, and reprimands.

A review of the accumulated literature was conducted to determine how past-to-present research might inform current classroom management practices in general and special education. The review of the literature included general education, special education, and psychology, from the 1960s to the present. The key search words were (a) teacher praise and attention, (b) verbal praise, (c) classroom rules and expectations, (d) ignoring, (e) extinction, (f) inappropriate behavior, (g) reprimands, (h) positive feedback, and (i) recruiting positive attention. In all, approximately 50 different sources were examined, including empirical studies, literature reviews, position papers, and textbooks.

In what follows, the relationship among the following classroom practices is discussed: rules, praise, ignoring, and reprimands. The circumstances under which one or more of these strategies are most likely to have a positive influence on student behavior were examined. The conditions under which one or more of these practices may not be effective or may even have a deleterious effect on student behavior is detailed. Changes in thinking that have occurred over time, including the emergent strategies of contingent instruction and precorrection are highlighted. Finally, the accumulated literature on rules, praise, ignoring, and reprimands is summarized, and suggested ways are provided that school personnel might increase the positive effects of these longstanding class-room management practices.

## **Classroom Rules**

Teacher educators have long advocated that school personnel establish a set of basic rules with which to create a safe, orderly, and productive classroom. Classroom rules are explicit statements that define behavior expectations and that help to establish a predictable teaching and learning environment (Grossman, 2004; Kerr & Nelson, 2006; Madsen et al., 1968). Classroom rules can be put in one of two general categories: organization rules and learning rules (Performance Learning Systems, 2007). The former spell out behavioral boundaries for students, offer predictability, and ensure a safe and disciplined classroom environment (Van Acker, 2007); whereas, the latter support students' success in learning academic content. Both sets of rules encourage students to accept increased responsibility for their own behavior.

## **Effective Use of Rules**

Gone are the long lists of classroom rules that enumerate an inordinate number of behaviors teacher deem unacceptable (eg, no running, no talking, no wearing hats, no leaving your seat). Today, there is general agreement that teachers should have relatively few classroom rules (ie, four–five rules), stated positively and age-appropriately (eg, keep hands and feet to yourself, listen quietly while others are talking, raise your hand to speak, and follow directions the first time; Burden, 2006; Grossman, 2004; Kerr & Nelson, 2006; Maag, 2004; Scheuermann & Hall, 2008 ). In addition, there is general consensus that class-room rules should be necessary, reasonable, easy to understand, and enforceable (Burden, 2006; Grossman, 2004; Kerr & Nelson, 2006). While some authors assert that classroom rules should be differentiated according to the specific situation (Kerr & Nelson, 2006; Maag, 2004), others argue that rules should be far-reaching enough to cover multiple classroom situations and more general than those regulations that address routine classroom activities (Smith & Rivera, 1993). In either case, students should be taught, situationally and systematically, to comply with classroom rules. Paine, Radicchi, Rosellini, Deutchman, and Darch (1983) suggested that instruction take place daily and that it be brief (ie, 3–5 min). Teacher modeling is a proven effective way to introduce multiple examples and nonexamples and affords the teacher an opportunity to clarify the qualities that distinguish acceptable and unacceptable behavior. It also is essential that teachers explain to their students the positive consequences for rule-following and the negative consequences for rule-violating behavior (Burden, 2006; Kerr & Nelson, 2006).

Some authorities encourage teachers to solicit student input when developing the rules and get student commitment to follow them (e.g., signing a written agreement; Burden, 2006; Maag, 2004). For example, the teacher might highlight for the class (e.g., verbally “walk through” the day) the major activities and solicit from students their thoughts about what acceptable or appropriate behavior would look and sound like. The teacher might draw three columns on the board; the first column would contain the major activities, the second, desired behavior, and the third column, a checkmark if a rule should apply. Experience has shown that students sometimes suggest consequences that are overly harsh and/or rules that are not enforceable. The teacher may need to guide discussion in a way that (a) minimizes the number of rules and (b) the magnitude of the consequences for infractions. Once the teacher has taught students the rules and checked for understanding, it is useful to periodically introduce booster training sessions in which rules are reviewed and students practice acceptable behavior. Teachers should self-monitor the fidelity with which they enforce classroom rules by keeping a simple running record of their actions.

## **Gaining Cooperation and Enforcing Rules**

Experience suggests that student compliance and disruptive classroom behavior co-vary inversely. That is, increased compliance usually leads to a reduction in the incidence of problem behavior (Parrish, 1986). Some authorities suggest that teacher requests for rule compliance should be specific, delivered within 3 feet of the student, and only after establishing eye contact (Shores, Gunter, & Jack, 1993; Van Hourten, Nau, MacKenzie-Keating, Sameoto, & Colavecchia, 1982). Others contend that requests for eye contact should be reserved for teacher delivery of positive reinforcement. However, given an increasingly diverse student population and growing recognition of disparate cultural norms, there is good reason to question the present-day relevance of past practices (Cartledge & Loe, 2001; Gable, Hendrickson, Tonelson, & Van Acker, 2002).

Notwithstanding conventional wisdom, simply establishing a set of classroom rules does not guarantee positive

outcomes. For example, teacher failure to impose some kind of consequences for every violation renders rules ineffective (Madsen et al., 1968). Students are more likely to follow classroom rules if they believe that teachers are cognizant of compliant versus noncompliant behavior (Kounin, 1970). Uncertainty regarding teacher expectations can unwittingly cause students to engage in unacceptable behavior (Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1999). Moreover, anecdotal evidence suggests that inconsistent enforcement of classroom rules is a major source of teacher/pupil conflict. Therefore, to reduce the probability of future misbehavior, teachers should monitor students' rule-abiding behavior and be prepared to intervene to address repeated violations (Grossman, 2004).

Most teachers can attest to the fact that some students repeatedly violate classroom rules. For these students, researchers suggest that teachers introduce strategies designed with a two-fold purpose: (a) to decrease the likely future occurrence of the behavior and (b) to increase the probability that a more acceptable behavior will occur. This can be accomplished in various ways. For example, teachers can remove social or environmental events that trigger behavior problems (eg, student placement close to an antagonistic classmate or in a high traffic area of the classroom) and introduce events that signal students to engage in more appropriate behavior (eg, nonverbal teacher cues to prompt rule-following behavior). It is important for school personnel to adhere to the fair-pair rule (White & Haring, 1980) and introduce one strategy to decrease problem behavior and another strategy to teach an appropriate substitute for it.

According to Neff and colleagues, teachers who include do and don't requests are able to increase substantially the rate at which students comply with class-room rules (Neff, Shafer, Egel, Cataldo, & Parrish, 1983). Rhode, Jensen, and Reavis (1992) suggested the use of precision requests to increase student compliance. Precision requests consist of (a) the student's name, (b) a precise description of the required behavior, (c) use of a polite and unemotional tone, and (d) a wait time of at least 5 seconds for the student to comply (eg, "Joanna, stop please—it is disrespectful to pull down artwork displayed on the wall." "Be responsible by keeping your hands and feet to yourself. Do it now, please.").

Although not all authorities encourage teachers to identify the student's motivation to misbehave (Grossman, 2004; Lane, Gresham, & O'Shaughnessy, 2002), it probably is important to do so for any student who is a chronic rule violator (i.e., three or more times). Among the most common violations is the failure to comply with a teacher request (Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997). The reason for a student's failure to comply may be a function of the following: (a) a skill deficit (the student does not possess the skill); (b) performance deficit (the student possesses the skill but sees no reason to engage in it); or, (c) a self-control performance deficit (the student possesses the skill but is unable to deal with competing forces—anger, frustration, fatigue; e.g., Gresham, Van, & Cook, 2006; Van Acker, 2007). Each of these sources of noncompliant behavior necessitates a different intervention. Given the increasingly diverse student population and the relatively complex nature of rules and expectations it is not surprising that many teachers find it difficult to make good use of classroom rules.

**TABLE 1**  
**Rules and Expectations Matrix**

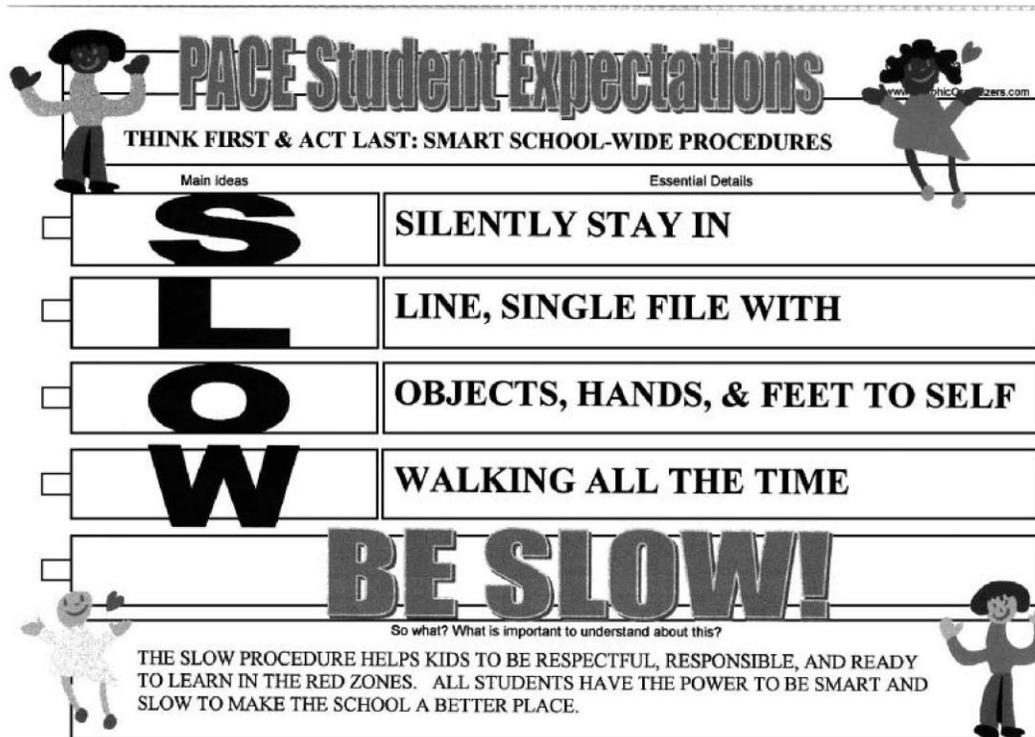
Expectations	Hall Rules	Cafeteria Rules	Recess Rules
Be safe	Walk facing forward. Stay to the right except when directed otherwise.	Hold tray with two hands. Keep all food to self without sharing.	Use equipment safely. Follow game rules.
Be prepared	Have planner signed.	Have lunch money ready.	Put on outerware and be in line on time.
Be respectful	Keep hands, feet, and objects to self. Use voices quietly.	Keep hands, feet, and objects to self. Face forward, and keep the line moving.	Keep hands, feet and objects to self. Use polite language and respectful tone of voice.

### The Overlapping Relationship Between Rules, Expectations, and Behavioral Routines

Today, there is growing sentiment that rules are largely compliance-driven in that they do not serve a skill-building function. Accordingly, authorities encourage teachers to put emphasis on classroom expectations and use rules as supporting guidelines that teach students what exactly constitutes appropriate behavior. Table 1 illustrates how specific rules are used to support broader behavioral expectations. Rather than serving a purely

regulatory function, expectations are a way to define appropriate classroom behavior (Bear, 2005) and to build cohesion among students (Henley, 2006). In that teacher expectations will vary (eg, participation in a cooperative learning activity versus transition from one classroom to another), each set of expectations should be taught separately to students, and later be publicly posted and reviewed on a regular basis.

Behavioral routines or classroom procedures provide the daily infrastructure that support rules and expectations, while minimizing student confusion and teacher disorganization (Burden, 2006; Henley, 2006). Peterson (1992) maintained that a “routine implements an action designed to achieve a specific outcome as efficiently as possible” (p. 62). Among the most common behavioral routines are those that relate to (a) student use of the restroom, (b) conduct at assemblies, (c) classroom transitions, and (d) going to the cafeteria. Teachers have used both graphic organizers and scaffolding strategies to clarify for students expected behavior and to help establish behavioral routines (Bear, 2005; Rock, 2004). Figure 1 contains an example of a graphic organizer to teach students expected procedures when walking in the hallway. As can be seen, the graphic organizer contains a mnemonic to increase student understanding and retention. Last, there may be some classroom activities that are relatively low intensity and can be addressed by means of cues and verbal/nonverbal teacher prompts. Low frequency or low intensity behavior such as an occasional comment to a classmate probably does not warrant anything more than a verbal or nonverbal prompt. In all, classroom rules, expectations, and behavioral routines afford teachers an opportunity to manage predictable classroom behavior and to align the complexity of the management strategy to the importance of the particular behavior. Mirroring previous practices, schools have begun to explicitly teach students what is expected of them not only in the classroom, but also on a schoolwide basis and to acknowledge appropriate behavior in ways that are valued by the students (Bullock & Gable, 2003; Sugai & Lewis, 1999).



**Figure 1.** Behavioral routines/procedures.

### Teacher Use of Classroom Praise

The second of the overlapping strategies is praise. Researchers have long been interested in teacher use of classroom praise and its influence on both academic and nonacademic behavior (Gable, Hendrickson, Young, Shores, & Stowitscek, 1983; Gunter & Denny, 1998; Lampi, Fenty, & Beaunae, 2005; Sutherland & Wehby, 2001). Praise consists of verbal or written statements that acknowledge a desired student behavior and is manifested in several different ways. While not without its critics (Larrivee, 2002), use of contingent praise has strong empirical support (Strain & Joseph, 2004).

**TABLE 2**  
**More Effective vs. Less Effective Teacher Praise**

More Effective Praise Statements	Less Effective Praise Statements
"Excellent job listening and following directions the first time."	"Good Job!" "Super!"
"Your eyes are on me and your mouth is quiet. Thank you for showing me you are ready to learn."	
"Wow, you are a working machine today. You completed your math work correctly before the end of class."	"Great Work!"
"Way to go! Finding ways to include everyone's ideas helps all members of your cooperative learning group feel like they are important."	"Terrific!"

**TABLE 3**  
**Scaffolding Praise**

Scaffolding Step	Example Praise Statement
Teacher models praise	"Excellent class! Everyone is really on-task today in reading."
Class engages in group praise	"Everyone give yourself a pat on the back or kiss your brain!"
Partners share praise	"Turn to a neighbor and tell him or her how great he or she is doing being ready to learn during reading."
Student self-praises	"Whisper to yourself how well you did following my directions to practice smooth blending."

### Effective Use of Praise

Praise statements usually draw attention to a correct answer (e.g., "Yes,  $20 + 20 = 40$ ") or include feedback on student behavior, such as "great job ... super reading" (Gunter & Reed, 1996). However, behavior-specific, contingent feedback in which the teacher describes precisely the behavior usually is more effective (Feldman, 2003; Weinstein, 2003). Although not common practice (Kalis, Vannest, & Parker, 2007), the teacher might say, "I really like the way Johnny is standing quietly in line." Table 2 offers additional examples of effective teacher praise statements. Table 3 illustrates a scaffolding strategy for teacher praise.

Among myriad reasons for teachers to use praise is the fact that it can promote a more positive relationship between teacher and student, and in turn, a more supportive learning environment (Shores et al., 1993; Walker et al., 1999). Researchers also have shown that the power of praise increases when it is delivered in close physical proximity to the student and in a manner acceptable to the student (e.g., verbal or nonverbal, public or private; Burnett, 2001; Feldman, 2003; Lampi et al., 2005). Last, while tangible rewards should be used sparingly (Bear, 2005), for students with a history of gaining attention by misbehaving, it may be necessary to pair verbal praise with more tangible reinforcement (Piazza, Bowman, Contrucci, Delia, Adelinis, & Gold, 1999; Walker et al., 1999).

Brophy (1981) argued that praise is not always synonymous with positive reinforcement. He asserted that its function is determined by the relationship between verbal and nonverbal aspects of teacher behavior, the context in which the interaction occurs and, most importantly, the actual effect it has on pupil behavior. Although not widely researched, there also may be age- and gender- related dimensions of teacher praise. For example, Miller and Hom (1997) reported that older students view classmates who receive praise (and little negative feedback) as less capable, which is opposite the opinion held by younger children. Burnett (2001) suggested that younger children would rather receive ability feedback and that female students prefer attention for effort more than male students do. Last, in some cases, teacher classroom praise may be counterproductive when a student does not wish to please the teacher (Feldman, 2003).

The classroom behavior problems of some students are the result of long-standing coercive interactions (eg, student complies with teacher request simply to terminate a highly aversive exchange, student confronts teacher and the teacher backs-off), which can make positive interventions, including the use of praise, less effective (Walker et al., 1999). It also is important to recognize that, for some students, teacher attention even in the form of disapproval is better than no attention at all (Alberto & Troutman, 2006; Madsen et al., 1968). One proactive option is to increase a student's opportunity to respond and respond correctly (at least 75%), which results in higher rates of academic engagement and, in turn, an increased opportunity for teachers to acknowledge successful student performance (Sutherland, Wehby, & Yoder, 2002). Another significant by-product of this approach is the increased probability that teachers will come to view students more positively and focus less on their negative behavior (Sutherland et al., in press). Strategies that teachers can use to increase the use of praise include: peer coaching, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation (Kalis et al., 2007). Peer coaching usually consists

of systematic classroom observation (ie, use of tally sheet) by another teacher and a subsequent sharing of information. The observer may record the number of opportunities that students have to respond and, in turn, receive positive feedback. Teachers can use a hand-held counter or simply transfer a penny from one pocket to another for each praise statement as a way to monitor their verbal behavior (Kalis et al., 2007). Finally, Gunter and Reed (1996) developed a protocol that teachers can use to conduct a functional assessment of their teaching behavior. Teachers videotaped instruction and then self-evaluated various discrete behaviors, including praise. Gunter and Reed reported that teachers could reliably self-evaluate their instruction and make adjustments that led to positive changes in teaching behavior.

### **Student Recruitment of Teacher Praise**

Another way to increase the rate of teacher praise is to teach students how to recruit it. Classroom researchers have shown that students can be taught ways to gain teacher attention and praise that can trigger inactive teacher “contingencies of reinforcement” (Alber & Heward, 2000). That is, student recruitment efforts (e.g., “See, I completed the assignment”) can motivate teachers to praise student behavior. Likewise, students have long been taught to engage in various kinds of teacher pleasing behavior to evoke a more positive teacher response (e.g., establish and maintain eye contact, nod occasionally) (Graubard, Rosenberg, & Miller, 1965).

In all, use of classroom praise is a multidirectional strategy. Teachers can deliver contingent praise, and students can be taught to solicit it (Alber & Heward, 2000). Numerous studies highlight the positive influence of contingent praise and the fact that praise usually works best in combination with other strategies, including increased student opportunities to respond correctly (Sutherland et al., 2002) as well as teacher physical proximity (Gunter, Shores, Jack, Rasmussen, & Flowers, 1995; Shores et al., 1993). Most teachers express a preference for strategies that do not demand a great deal of time (Elliott, Witt, Galvin, & Peterson, 1984; Witt, 1986)—praise is just that. Contingent praise requires virtually no teacher preparation and can be applied effectively to a wide range of academic and nonacademic behavior.

Given the documented positive effects of teacher praise, it is puzzling why so many teachers make little use of it (Gable et al., 1983; Gunter & Denny, 1998; Shores et al., 1993; Sutherland & Wehby, 2001; Sutherland et al., 2002). There are several possible explanations. First, in both the popular press and the professional literature, critics have raised questions about the legitimacy of classroom praise (Larrivee, 2002). Second, the climate of the workplace does not always support the use of evidence-based practices such as teacher praise (Gable, 2004). Finally, some teachers may not feel comfortable routinely acknowledging positive pupil behavior. Even so, there is absolutely no reason to believe that praise is either controlling or has a detrimental effect on children (Kratowill & Stoiber, 2000). In fact, there is a compelling body of empirical evidence regarding its positive impact on both academic and nonacademic behavior (Lampi et al., 2005; Shores et al., 1993; Sutherland et al., 2002; Walker et al., 1999).

### **Teacher Use of Planned Ignoring**

The third management strategy is planned ignoring. There are various ways teachers can deal with classroom misbehavior, including ignoring inappropriate student behavior. Planned ignoring is a form of extinction designed to weaken, decrease, or eliminate a behavior (Sheuermann & Hall, 2008). For example, when the teacher ignores call-outs (i.e., does not attend to verbal misbehavior), the intent is to signal to the student that inappropriate behavior will not lead to desired outcomes (Alberto & Troutman, 2006).

### **Effective Use of Planned Ignoring**

In introducing an extinction strategy, Sheuermann and Hall (2008) suggested that teachers explain to students that when a target behavior occurs there will be no teacher response. The underlying assumption is that by withholding reinforcement, the student will cease to engage in the target behavior. In some instances, that is what happens. However, in other cases, inappropriate student behavior is positively reinforced by classroom peers (e.g., classmates encourage a peer to call out or otherwise disrupt instruction), the behavior itself is reinforcing to the student (e.g., student gets pleasure and satisfaction from exercising control over a situation), or the behavior is escape-motivated (e.g., aversive teacher-pupil interactions; Burnhill, 2005). In these

instances, ignoring student behavior is likely to have little or no appreciable effect. Interventions that focus on the source of the inappropriate behavior will be more effective (e.g., teacher behavior, curricular demands/expectations; Burnhill, 2005).

Notwithstanding its strong theoretical underpinnings, planned ignoring can be a difficult strategy to implement consistently. In addition, ignoring the student can exacerbate the problem by increasing the frequency or magnitude of inappropriate student behavior (Madsen et al., 1968). Past research suggests that praising appropriate behavior and ignoring inappropriate behavior sometimes increases the disruptive behavior of certain students (O’Leary, Becker, Evans, & Saudargas, 1969). Understandably, it might be disconcerting to the teacher to witness an increase rather than decrease in the problem behavior. Two points are worth emphasizing. First, an increase in problem behavior concomitant to the teacher beginning to ignore a particular behavior may reflect the fact that teacher attention is the motivation behind the behavior and the student simply is trying harder to illicit it. The second point is that the increase usually is temporary especially if the teacher reinforces alternative or incompatible student behavior. Finally, lapses in teacher ignoring of inappropriate behavior can serve as intermittent reinforcement that makes it more resistant to extinction (Witt, VanDerHeyden, & Gilbertson, 2006).

The accumulated research on planned ignoring is some-what equivocal. There are instances in which planned ignoring will produce positive changes in pupil behavior. However, inappropriate student behavior often serves multiple functions (e.g., attention getting, task avoidance) and there are multiple controlling factors that may further diminish the impact of ignoring. Today, many experts encourage teachers to focus not only on what the behavior of the most challenging students looks like (i.e., form), but also to identify the reason(s) the students engage in the behavior (i.e., function) and to use that knowledge to develop a plan of intervention (Lane et al., 2002).

### **Teacher Use of Nag Statements and Verbal Reprimands**

For various reasons, some teachers do not make use of positive strategies such as contingent praise. Instead, they resort to coercion to deal with inappropriate student behavior, such as threats, nags, and/or reprimands (Shores et al., 1993; Van Acker, 2007). Teacher threats, nags, or verbal reprimands can have a more immediate impact on student behavior than praise statements. That is, reprimands (e.g., “Stop talking—now!”) can lead to the cessation of student misbehavior, if only temporarily (Alber & Heward, 2000). Another problem is that teachers who rely on coercive strategies may unintentionally pay more attention to a student’s misbehavior and engage in increasingly more coercive interactions, which may reinforce the very behavior they wish to extinguish (Alberto & Troutman 2006; Madsen et al., 1968; Shores et al., 1993).

There is ample evidence that teacher threats, nags, or reprimands can increase the probability that students will engage in escape-motivated behavior (e.g., defiant acts, noncompliance with teacher requests; Shores et al., 1993). Yet another reason to avoid negative teacher responses is that they alienate students, undermine the integrity of the teacher/pupil relationship, and often exacerbate an already difficult situation. Last, critical teacher comments are highly correlated with subsequent student verbal or physical aggression (Van Acker, Grant, & Henry, 1996).

### **Effective Use of Reprimands**

If teachers believe strongly that a mild reprimand is appropriate, researchers maintain that private, quiet reprimands are more effective than loud reprimands delivered in front of an entire class (O’Leary, Kaufman, Kass, & Drabman, 1970). Reprimands should be brief as opposed to lengthy (Abramowitz, O’Leary, & Futersak, 1988). Furthermore, a reminder regarding the expected behavior should accompany a teacher reprimand. While some experts advise that teachers maintain a ratio of praise-to-nags of at least of 4:1 or 3:1 (Kalis et al., 2007; Shores et al., 1993), there is growing support for more proactive strategies.

### **The Shift From Reactive to Proactive Classroom Management**

Several authorities urge teachers to resist the temptation to use reprimands and to substitute contingent

instruction, which is one way to communicate to a student what behavior to *start* rather than point out only the behavior to *stop* (Curran, 2006 [IRIS Center]). Contingent instructions are specific teacher directions for students to stop engaging in inappropriate behavior and to start engaging in a more appropriate alternative response (Curran, 2006 [IRIS Center]). Connolly, Dowd, Criste, Nelson, and Tobias (1995) described contingent instruction as a coupling request, by which teachers address both inappropriate (i.e., calling out) and desired behavior (i.e., raising your hand). In using this strategy, teachers should pause briefly between the initial request for a student to cease an inappropriate behavior and the subsequent request for the student to engage in the correct behavior. It is especially important that teachers point out to the student the benefit of engaging in more acceptable behavior (e.g., remain part of classroom activity, proceed to cafeteria with classmates; Brophy, 1998).

In the past, the majority of classroom management strategies focused on consequent or reactive events (Gable, Bullock, & Evans, 2006). At one time, 90% of teachers' disciplinary responses consisted of some kind of negative consequences or punishment (Colvin, Sugai, & Patching, 1993). However, in recent years, attention has shifted from consequent events to antecedent events and the use of preventative classroom interventions. One such strategy is precorrection. Precorrection is a proactive strategy that allows teachers to look at possible antecedent events and analyze the contextual basis for inappropriate student behavior (Crosby, Jolievette, & Patterson, 2006). For example, Colvin et al. (1993) devised a precorrective strategy to deal with predictable classroom behavior problems. The focus is on (a) manipulating contextually based classroom antecedents of inappropriate pupil behavior, (b) establishing an acceptable level of classroom conduct, (c) using behavioral rehearsal to teach students positive behaviors, (d) and teacher use of cues, prompts, and positive reinforcement of appropriate student behavior.

Precorrection begins with teacher identification of a potentially difficult situation, both the context in which the behavior occurs and the behavior itself. Next, the teacher (a) delineates the expected behavior, (b) modifies the context in which the behavior is to occur, (c) provides multiple opportunities for students to practice the expected behavior, (d) delivers positive reinforcement to students who engage in the expected behavior, and (e) gives reminders to students regarding the expected behavior before the opportunity arises to engage in the behavior (Colvin et al., 1993). Similarly, Lewis (2004) advocated an error correction strategy that is comprised of three parts:

1. Signaling the student that an error has occurred (refer to a particular rule; "We respect others and that means no put downs.").
2. Asking the student to engage in a more appropriate response ("How can you show respect and still get your point across?").
3. Ensuring that the student has ample opportunity to practice and be reinforced for engaging in a more acceptable behavior. In either case, teacher precorrection decreases the likely future occurrence of the inappropriate behavior (Lampi et al., 2005).

Precorrection statements should be given before students engage in an activity that may precipitate problem behavior, which also serves to increase greater student self-regulation (Colvin et al., 1993; Van Acker, 2007). However, error correction is useful only to the extent that the student is able to engage in the desired response or the teacher is willing to teach it directly and systematically. As with any intervention, the effectiveness of precorrection is relative to the power of competing contextual forces (e.g., amount of encouragement classmates give a student to act-up; Van Acker, 2007).

### **Conclusions Regarding the Use of Rules, Praise, Ignoring, and Reprimands**

The accumulated evidence shows that rules, praise, ignoring, and reprimands continue to represent sound classroom management strategies, but with several caveats. First, experts assert that teachers should limit the number of rules to those that can be enforced consistently and concentrate, rather, on behavioral expectations. Second, those classroom expectations should be taught directly and systematically, and students should have ample opportunity to engage in the behavior and receive positive teacher feedback. Third, teacher feedback

should include a clear message regarding both start and stop behaviors (Van Acker, 2007), whereas, low intensity behavior may be addressed best through teacher cues and prompts (e.g., “Class, remember to...”). Fourth, many authorities no longer view praise as a stand-alone strategy; rather, they suggest that teachers pair praise with physical proximity and increased opportunities for students to respond correctly. This recommendation is predicated on the so-called spread effect that stems from the use of multiple evidence-based practices. Finally, if teachers choose to use planned ignoring, it should be coupled with differential reinforcement of incompatible behavior to increase the level of acceptable student behavior (Scheuermann & Hall, 2008).

In the review, it was found that, over time there has been a marked increase in the importance attached to antecedent strategies, such as contingent instruction and precorrection. In addition, there has been growing recognition that positive classroom reinforcement must be strong enough to support a plan of intervention (Deunic, Smith, Brank, & Penfield, 2006). Both research and experience underscore the fact that there are times when the use of rules, praise, or ignoring is counter indicated. When it is obvious that rules, praise, or ignoring are not working, the best course of action is to develop a plan of intervention based on a functional behavior assessment (Alberto & Troutman, 2006; Burnhill, 2005; Kerr & Nelson, 2006; Lane et al., 2002).

In all, the accumulated research supports the efficacy of longstanding classroom management strategies consisting of rules, praise, ignoring, and reprimands. And, because such tactics require neither extensive preparation nor excessive effort, it makes good sense for teachers to make use of these proven-effective strategies. Along with the judicious use of classroom rules, contingent praise, planned ignoring, and quiet reprimands, strategies, such as maximizing learning time, offering ample opportunities for high rates of correct responding, and monitoring of group-individual performance, allow teachers to establish a positive classroom climate conducive to learning. There is one final thought. A recommitment to the basic practices puts teachers one-step closer to creating a classroom environment in which all students are successful learners.

## References

- Abramowitz, A. J., O’Leary, S. G., & Fattersak, M. W. (1988). The relative impact of long and short reprimands on children off-task behavior in the classroom. *Behavior Therapy*, 19, 243-247.
- Alber, S., & Heward, W. (2000). Teaching students to recruit positive attention: a review and recommendations. *Journal of Behavioral Education*, 10, 177-205.
- Alberto, P., & Troutman, A. (2006). *Applied behavior analysis for teachers* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.
- Bear, G. (2005). *Developing self-discipline and preventing and correcting misbehavior*. Boston: Pearson Allyn and Bacon.
- Becker, W. C., Madsen, C. H., Arnold, C. R., & Thomas, D. R. (1967). The contingent use of teacher attention and praise in reducing classroom behavior problems. *Journal of Special Education*, 1, 287-307.
- Brophy, J. (1981). Teacher praise: a functional analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 51, 5-32.
- Brophy, J. (1998). *Motivating students to learn*. Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Bullock, L. M., & Gable, R. A. (Eds.). (2003). *School wide proactive strategies for dealing with challenging behavior*. Reston, VA: Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders.
- Burden, P. (2006). *Classroom management: creating a successful K-12 learning community* (3rd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Burnett, P. (2001). Elementary students’ preferences for teacher praise. *Journal of Classroom Interaction*, 36, 16-23.
- Burnhill, G. P. (2005). Functional behavioral assessment in schools. *Intervention in the School and Clinic*, 40, 131-143.
- Cartledge, G., & Loe, S. A. (2001). Cultural diversity and social skill instruction. *Exceptionality*, 9(1&2), 33-46.
- Colvin, G., Sugai, G., & Patching, W. (1993). Precorrection: an instructional approach for managing predictable problem behaviors. *Intervention in the School and Clinic*, 28, 143-150.
- Connolly, T., Dowd, T., Criste, A., Nelson, C., & Tobias, L. (1995). *The well-managed classroom: promoting*

student success through social skills instruction. Boys Town, NE: Boy's Town Press.

Crosby, S., Jolievette, K., & Patterson, D. (2006). Using precorrection to manage inappropriate academic and social behaviors. *Beyond Behavior*, 16, 14-17.

Curran, C. M. (2006). Encouraging appropriate behavior. The IRIS Center for Faculty Enhancement. Retrieved October 23, 2006, from [http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/case\\_studies/ICS-005.pdf](http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/case_studies/ICS-005.pdf)

Deunic, A. P., Smith, S. W., Brank, E. M., & Penfield, R. D. (2006). Classroom-based cognitive-behavioral interventions to prevent aggression: efficacy and social validity. *Journal of School Psychology*, 44, 123-139.

Elliot, S. N., Witt, J. C., Galvin, G. A., & Peterson, R. (1984). Acceptability of positive and reductive behavioral interventions: factors that influence teachers' decisions. *Journal of School Psychology*, 22, 353-360.

Feldman, S. (2003). The place for praise. *Teaching PreK-8*, 5(6).

Gable, R. A. (2004). Hard times and an uncertain future: issues that confront the field of emotional/ behavioral disorders. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 27, 341-352.

Gable, R. A., Bullock, L. M., & Evans, W. H. (2006). Changing perspectives on alternative schooling for children and adolescents with challenging behavior. *Preventing School Failure*, 51, 5-9.

Gable, R. A., Hendrickson, J. M., Tonelson, S. M. & Van Acker, R. (2002). Integrating academic and nonacademic instruction for students with emotional/behavioral disorders. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 25, 66-73.

Gable, R. A., Hendrickson, J. M., Young, C., Shores, R. E., & Stowitscek, J. J. (1983). A comparison of teacher approval and disapproval statements across categories of exceptionalities. *Journal of Special Education Technology*, 6, 15-22.

Graubard, P. S., Rosenberg, H., & Miller, M. B. (1965). Student applications of behavior modification to teachers and environments or ecological applications to social deviancy. Reprinted in R. Ulrich, T. Stachnik, & J. Marbry (Eds.). *Control of human behavior: behavior modification in education* (pp. 421-432). Glenview, IL: Scotts, Foresman and Company.

Gresham, F. M., Van, M. B., & Cook, C. R. (2006). Social skills training for teaching replacement behaviors: remediating acquisition deficits in at risk students. *Behavioral Disorders*, 32, 363-377.

Grossman, H. (2004). *Classroom behavior management for diverse and inclusive schools* (3rd ed.). New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Gunter, P. L., & Denny, R. K. (1998). Trends and issues in research regarding academic instruction of students with emotional behavioral disorders. *Behavioral Disorders*, 24, 44-50.

Gunter, P. L., & Reed, T. M. (1996). Self-evaluation of instruction: a protocol for functional assessment of teaching behavior. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 31, 225-230.

Gunter, P. L., Shores, R. E., Jack, S. L., Rasmussen, S. K., & Flowers, J. (1995). On the move: using teacher/student proximity to improve students' behavior. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 28, 12-14.

Henley, M. (2006). *Classroom management: a proactive approach*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997, Pub. L. No. 105-17, (1997).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, Pub. L. No. 108-446, (2004).

Kalis, T. M., Vannest, K., & Parker, R. (2007). Praise counts: using self-monitoring to increase effective teaching practices. *Preventing School Failure*, 51, 20-27.

Kerr, M. M., & Nelson, C. M. (2006). *Strategies for managing behavior problems in the classroom* (4th ed.). Columbus, OH: Merrill Prentice Hall.

Kounin, J. (1970). *Discipline and group management in classrooms*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Kratochwill, T. R., & Stoiber, K. C. (2000). Empirically supported interventions and school psychology. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 15, 233-253.

Lampi, A., Fenty, N., & Beaunae, C. (2005). Making the three Ps easier: praise, proximity and precorrection. *Beyond Behavior*, 15, 8-12.

Lane, K. L., Gresham, F. M., & O'Shaughnessy, T. E. (2002). *Intervention for children with or at risk for emotional and behavioral Disorders*. Boston: Allyon & Bacon.

Larrivee, B. (2002). The potential perils of praise in a democratic interactive classroom. *Action in Teacher Education*, 23, 77-88.

Lewis, T. (2004). In L. M. Bullock, R. A. Gable, & K. L. Melloy (Eds.). *Classroom-level supports for students*

with learning and behavior problems. *Effective interventions for classrooms, schools, and communities—Making a difference in the lives of students with learning and behavior problems* (pp. 15-18). Reston, VA: Council for children with Behavioral Disorders. Accessed: January 4, 2009.

Maag, J. W. (2004). *Behavior management: from theoretical implications to practical applications* (2nd ed). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.

Madsen, C. M., Becker, W. C., & Thomas, D. R. (1968). Rules, praise, and ignoring: elements of elementary classroom control. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 1, 139-150.

Miller, A., & Hom, H. (1997). Conceptions of ability and the interpretation of praise, blame, and material rewards. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 65, 163-177.

Neef, N. A., Shafer, M. S., Egel, A. L., Cataldo, M. F., & Parrish, J. M. (1983). The class specific effects of compliance training with “do” and “don’t” requests; analogue analysis and class-room application. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 16(1), 81-99.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, (2002).

O’Leary, K. A., Becker, W. C., Evans, M. B., & Saudargas, R. A. (1969). A token reinforcement program in a public school. A replication and systematic analysis. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 2, 3-13.

O’Leary, K. D., Kaufman, R. E., Kass, R. E., & Drabman, R. S. (1970). The effect of loud and soft reprimands on the behavior of disruptive students. *Exceptional Children*, 37, 145-155.

Paine, S. C., Radicchi, J., Rosellini, L. C., Deutchman, L., & Darch, C. B. (1983). *Structuring your classroom for academic success*. Champaign, IL: Research Press.

Parrish, J. (1986). Experimental analysis of response covariation among compliant and inappropriate behaviors. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 19, 241-254.

Peterson, R. (1992). *Life in a crowded place: making a learning community*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Performance Learning Systems. (2007). Establishing effective rules. *Performance Learning Plus*, 32. Retrieved from [http://www.plsweb.com/resources/newsletters/enews\\_archives/32/2003/09/01/](http://www.plsweb.com/resources/newsletters/enews_archives/32/2003/09/01/)

Piazza, C. C., Bowman, L. G., Contruci, S. A., Delia, M. D., Adelinis, J. D., & Goh, N. L. (1999). An evaluation of the properties of attention and reinforcement of destructive and appropriate behavior. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 32, 434-449.

Rhode, G., Jensen, W. R., & Reavis, K. (1992). *The tough kid book: practical classroom management strategies*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

Rock, M. (2004). Graphic organizers: tools to build behavioral literacy and foster emotional competency. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 40, 10-37.

Scheuermann, B. K., & Hall, J. A. (2008). *Positive behavioral supports for the classroom*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Merrill Prentice Hall.

Shores, R. E., Gunter, P. L., & Jack, S. L. (1993). Classroom management strategies: are they setting events for coercion? *Behavioral Disorders*, 18, 92-102.

Skiba, R. J., Peterson, R. L., & Williams, T. (1997). Office referrals and suspension: disciplinary intervention in middle schools. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 20, 295-315.

Smith, D. D., & Rivera, D. M. (1993). *Effective discipline* (2nd ed.). Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Strain, P. S., & Joseph, G. E. (2004). A not so good job with “good job”: a response to Kohn 2001. *Journal of Positive Behavioral Interventions*, 6(1), 55-60.

Sugai, G., & Lewis, T. (1999). *Safe schools: school wide discipline practices*. Reston, VA: Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders.

Sutherland, K. M., & Wehby, J. (2001). The effects of self-evaluation on teacher behavior in classrooms for students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Journal of Special Education*, 35, 161-171.

Sutherland, K., Wehby, J., & Yoder, P. (2002). Examination of the relationship between teacher praise and opportunities for students with EBD to respond to academic requests (emotional and behavioral disorders). *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 10, 5-14.

Van Acker, R. (2007). Strategies for dealing with classroom aggression. Paper presented at the Working Forum of the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders. Las Vegas, NV.

Van Acker, R., Grant, S. H., & Henry, D. (1996). Teacher and student behavior as a function of risk for aggression. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 19, 316-334.

- Van Houten, R., Nau, P. A., MacKenzie-Keating, S. E., Sameoto, D., & Colavecchia, B. (1982). An analysis of some variables influencing the effectiveness of reprimands. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 15, 65-83.
- Walker, H. M., Colvin, G., & Ramsey, E. (1999). *Antisocial behavior in schools: strategies and best practices* (2nd ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brookes/Cole.
- Weinstein, C. S. (2003). *Secondary classroom management: lessons for research and practice* (2nd ed.). Boston: McGraw Hill.
- White, O. R., & Haring, N. G. (1980). *Exceptional teaching: a multimedia training package*. Columbus, OH: Merrill.
- Witt, J., VanDerHeyden, A., & Gilbertson, D. (2006). Trouble- shooting behavioral interventions: a systematic process for finding and eliminating problems. *School Psychology Review*, 33, 363-384.
- Witt, J. (1986). Teacher resistance to the use of school-based interventions. *Journal of School Psychology*, 24, 37-44.
- Zimmerman, E. H., & Zimmerman, J. (1962). The alteration of behavior in an elementary classroom. *Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior*, 5, 50-60.