

# **STUDENT DISCIPLINE AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Jack Campbell** is the author of *Individualizing Instruction for the Educationally Handicapped: Teaching Strategies in Remedial and Special Education*, published by Charles C Thomas. He has published articles in such journals as *Education*, *Planning for Higher Education*, *Educational Record*, *Mental Retardation*, *Education and Training of the Mentally Retarded*, and the *Journal for Special Educators of the Mentally Retarded*.

Since 1995 Jack Campbell has been the Class of 1964 Professor in the Education Department at Mount Saint Mary's College in Emmitsburg, MD. He has served as a visiting professor at St. Andrew's College in Scotland where he lectured, mentored, and conducted research. During the 17 years prior to 1995 he served as Provost and Vice President at Mount Saint Mary's College. From 1971 to 1978 he served as a professor in the special education program at the University of Nevada.

Currently he teaches undergraduate and graduate courses at Mount Saint Mary's in the areas of special education, educational psychology, assessment, and methods of research.

He has been married to Jackie Lynn Campbell for 37 years, and is the father of four grown children and the grandfather of eight. His hobbies are baseball, Jane Austen novels, and traveling in Scotland.

# STUDENT DISCIPLINE AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Preventing and Managing Discipline  
Problems in the Classroom

*By*

**JACK CAMPBELL**

*Mount Saint Mary's College  
Emmitsburg, Maryland*



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*This book is dedicated to Arthur F. Disque, an exemplary teacher who seldom encountered discipline problems because he was a master of student motivation and an exceptional facilitator of student self-discipline.*



## PREFACE

Student discipline is a major area of concern for all teachers. There is no issue about which student teachers are more concerned than discipline and classroom management. Beginning teachers tend to worry about whether students will like them, but mostly they too are concerned about discipline. Similarly, teachers early in their careers indicate that their biggest area of concern lies in discipline and classroom management. Even experienced teachers observe that their most troublesome issue is the issue of discipline in the classroom.

Order and safety in the classroom are necessary for learning to occur. Motivated students, those who willingly and persistently participate in learning activities, are orderly and tend to follow the rules and procedures that have been established. Improving the students' positive feelings and beliefs about themselves and their ability to succeed in school tends to increase the students' intrinsic motivation to learn. Understanding student self-esteem and its relationship to student motivation is invaluable in developing the appropriate plans and strategies of student discipline and classroom management. Student self-esteem must be addressed because it is directly related to student discipline.

Building student self-esteem is considerably more than simply making students feel good about themselves, and it is not something that can be addressed abstractly. Self-esteem can be improved successfully only when meaningful approbations and reinforcers are provided for legitimate success experiences in school. Similarly, understanding what student motivation is and its relationship to student discipline problems is critical. On the one hand, motivation can be seen as a construct that students have in differential amounts.

Students who have motivation do well, while unmotivated students struggle and often create discipline problems. Unfortunately, teachers frequently assume that there is nothing they can do about internal constructs such as motivation. They feel that students either have it or they don't. On the other hand, motivation can be seen as a real variable such as a form of reinforcement which is primarily external to the student. As student behavior improves as a result of reinforcers being provided, the students are often described as having improved motivation. In other words, they more willingly and persistently participate in the instructional activities that have been prepared by the teacher. Consequently, student motivation is arguably a judgment of others who have observed student behavior. Nevertheless, student motivation is unmistakably related to student discipline.

Improving student motivation must be included in a teacher's master plan because it is so highly correlated with discipline problems in the classroom. Planning for the prevention and management of student discipline problems is one of the most important activities in which teachers must engage. A teacher's discipline strategy must be part of a total, comprehensive system of classroom management. Classroom management is proactive and includes the establishment of appropriate classroom rules and procedures. Discipline, on the other hand, is reactive and is a response to a violation of an established classroom rule or procedure. The most important objective of any system of classroom management is the prevention of discipline problems. Careful planning is the key to the prevention of discipline problems, and good planning includes carefully developed procedures and necessary and manageable classroom rules.

As teachers manage their classroom rules and procedures, they periodically encounter various kinds of student misbehaviors. If these discipline problems have not been prevented, they must be managed when they occur. There are a vari-



ety of specific strategies, ranging from non-intrusive to very intrusive, that teachers can employ to effectively deal with the myriad of discipline problems they will encounter. It is almost as though there were a “discipline staircase” teachers can climb. The higher up the stairs they go, the more intrusive become the discipline strategies. It is essential for teachers to correctly choose and effectively employ the appropriate strategy. It is important not to overreact to a situation with an intervention that is too heavy-handed, and similarly, it is necessary not to under-respond to a situation and let it get out of hand.

Whether a teacher is using a nonintrusive strategy like moving to the problem or more intrusive strategies like response-cost or time-out, the most important issue for a teacher is the issue of consistency. Whatever the rules and procedures of the class, it is imperative that the teacher respond to students in a totally consistent manner. In terms of discipline, all children must be treated exactly the same all the time. In addition to consistency, perhaps the next most important concept in student discipline is respect. If teachers are respected by their students, they will have fewer discipline problems with which to deal and will be more effective in dealing with those that occur. The first and most important step in earning students’ respect is to respect them.

Even though student discipline problems can often be categorized into some general types, it is virtually impossible to anticipate particular problems and to employ predetermined strategies of intervention. Teachers need to become proficient in using a hierarchy of discipline strategies and comfortable with responding “on the spot” to a multitude of unique and unexpected situations. In order to do this effectively, it is important, if not essential, for teachers to have developed a sound theoretical foundation from which to approach each unique student discipline situation.

It is very important for teachers to understand that discipline problems are a form of student behavior. Because the

misbehaviors of students are operant behaviors, they are amenable to the principles of operant conditioning or behavior management. Teachers who embrace a sound theoretical underpinning, such as behaviorism, are in an ideal position to attack the many different situations that will arise in the name of discipline problems. It is always better to respond to a discipline situation from a sound, well understood theoretical base, than it is to foolishly attempt to respond to such situations in some type of “cookbook” fashion.

This text is designed to provide that theoretical foundation and to provide a hierarchy of intervention strategies that have proven to be effective in dealing with student discipline problems. It also highlights how a theoretical foundation should be integrated into a teacher’s plan of classroom management and how the hierarchy of discipline strategies form an essential component of that plan.

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# **STUDENT DISCIPLINE AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT**





## Chapter 1

# SELF-ESTEEM AND STUDENT MOTIVATION

Students with high self-esteem have a strong sense of personal efficacy. They feel good about themselves, and they are comfortable with who they are. Children who feel good about themselves tend to be motivated to succeed in school. Motivated students tend to be well behaved and to consistently follow classroom rules and procedures. They are happy, willing participants in the learning experience. They are inclined to be interested or they easily become interested in the learning activities provided by the teacher, and they tend not to disrupt or cause problems.

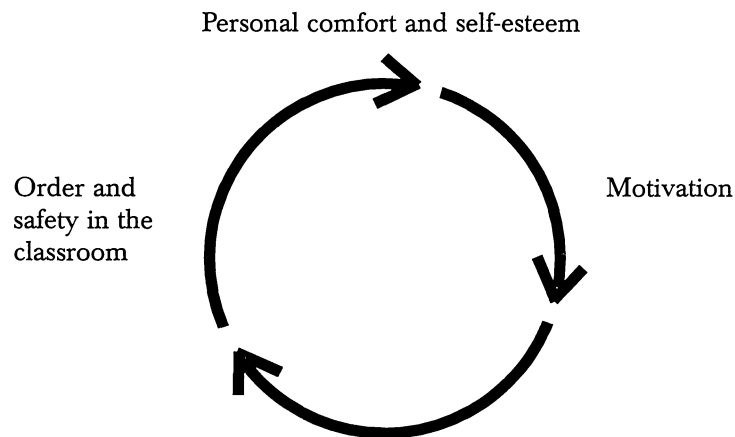


Figure 1.1. Self-esteem/motivation cycle.

A child's self-esteem is related to his motivation in school. Waschull and Kernis (1996) found that the more stable a child's self-esteem, the better they scored on measures of curiosity/interest and the more likely they were to respond to a school-related challenge. These findings relate to the cycle depicted in Figure 1.1. If a student feels good about himself and feels that he has legitimate self-worth, that student will be motivated to fully and completely participate in the teaching/learning activities of the class. Students who feel good about themselves, participating fully in the activities of the classroom, help create an orderly, safe environment for all members of the class. When students do not feel that they can be successful on the tasks of the classroom, they will tend to stop trying and before long are likely to disrupt the orderly process of the scheduled activity. In other words, they become discipline problems.

The ultimate goal, of course, is for the activities that teachers plan, organize, and implement to result in student learning. The cycle of self-esteem and student motivation can be depicted as a hierarchy which concludes with successful learning on the part of the student (Figure 1.2).

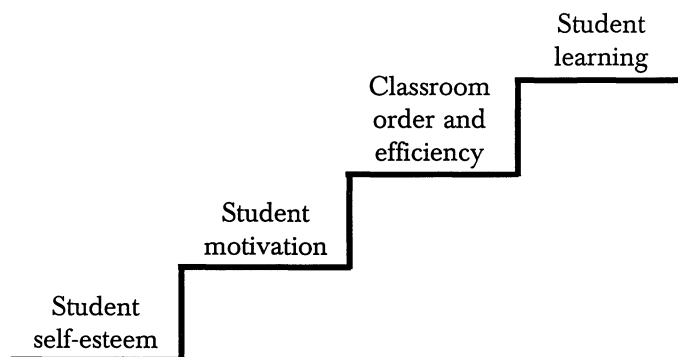


Figure 1.2. Steps to effectiveness and efficiency in the classroom.

## **BUILDING STUDENT SELF-ESTEEM**

The more that teachers can create and maintain the self-esteem of their students, the more successful they will be in effectively facilitating student learning. Dembrowsky (1990) suggests five general ways educators can help develop self-esteem in children.

1. Develop positive teacher/student relationships.
2. Maximize the child's strengths rather than focus only on weaknesses.
3. Try to make the child's expectations more positive.
4. Help students take responsibility for their own lives.
5. Expose students to positive role models.

These are objectives with which most teachers are familiar and agree. However, they are objectives that many have not internalized or incorporated sufficiently into their teaching strategies.

### **Developing and Maintaining Self-esteem**

Addressing the development and maintenance of the self-esteem of all students, especially those who are or might be management or discipline problems, is a primary concern of all teachers. Not only do good teachers want to create an environment where learning is occurring, they also want an environment that is orderly and safe, an environment devoid of discipline problems. An essential ingredient of such an environment is students who feel good about themselves and who are confident of their ability to be successful in school. Some specific strategies that teachers can employ to foster self-esteem in their students are:

1. *Create a sense of identity for the students.* Help them become an important component of the class and school ecology. One way to do this is to emphasize something special about each child, something at which the child is particularly good. A special identity for almost everyone can be found in such