



# The Learning Curve

A newsletter for student teachers in the Chicago Public Schools  
[www.cps-humanresources.org/sti/](http://www.cps-humanresources.org/sti/)

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## Eleven Techniques for Better Classroom Discipline

By Budd Churchward

Here are eleven techniques that you can use in your classroom that will help you achieve effective group management. They have been adapted from an article called "A Primer on Classroom Discipline: Principles Old and New" by Thomas R. McDaniel, *Phi Delta Kappan*, September 1986.

### 1. Focusing

Inexperienced teachers sometimes think that by beginning their lesson, the class will settle down. Sometimes this works, but the children are also going to think that you don't mind talking while they talk. They get the idea that you accept their inattention and that it is permissible to talk while you are presenting a lesson.

The focusing technique means that you will demand their attention before you begin. It means that you will wait and not start until everyone has settled down. Experienced teachers know that silence on their part is very effective. They will punctuate their waiting by extending it 3 to 5 seconds after the classroom is completely quiet.

### 2. Direct Instruction

The technique of direct instruction is to begin each class by telling the students exactly what will be happening. The teacher outlines what he and the students will be doing this period.

An effective way to marry this technique with the first one is to include time at the end of the period for students to do activities of their choosing. The students soon realize that the more time the teacher waits for their attention, the less free time they have at the end of the hour.

### 3. Monitoring

The key to this principle is to circulate. Get up and get around the room. While your students are working, make the rounds.

An effective teacher will make a pass through the whole room about two minutes after the students have started a written assignment. She checks that each student has started and that the children are on the correct page. The delay is important. She wants her students to have a problem or two finished so she can

check that answers are correctly labeled or in complete sentences. She provides individualized instruction as needed.

Students who are not yet quite on task will be quick to get going as they see her approach. Those that were distracted or slow to get started can be nudged along.

The teacher does not interrupt the class or try to make general announcements unless she notices that several students have difficulty with the same thing. The teacher uses a quiet voice and her students appreciate her personal and positive attention.

### 4. Modeling

McDaniel tells us of a saying that goes "Values are caught, not taught." Teachers who are courteous, prompt, enthusiastic, in control, patient, and organized provide examples for their students through their own behavior. The "do as I say, not as I do" teachers send mixed messages that confuse students and invite misbehavior.

### 5. Non-Verbal Cuing

In the 1950's, a shiny nickel bell sat on the teacher's desk. With one tap of the button on top he had everyone's attention.

*Continued on page 3*

## Inside this issue:

Things To Do	2
Staying Organized	4
Useful Web Sites	4



Maria Rodriguez-O'Keefe from the Office of Instruction and School Management congratulates Rafael Contreras, Spanish teacher at Foreman HS.

Mr. Contreras was nominated by his student teacher for an Instructional Leader Award.

Forty CPS cooperating teachers were recognized at a reception on June 1, 2005. To see the other winners, go to the events page of the CPS Student-Teaching Initiative Web site listed above.

## Getting Started

A positive, productive classroom environment cannot exist if the teacher and students are uncomfortable with each other.

Since you are probably new to the school and they are new to the grade, plan on creating opportunities to learn about each other the first few days you are in charge of the class.

You can start by introducing yourself. Tell the students something about your personal life (family, hobbies, travel) and your educational background (major, schools attended, organizations you belong to, or activities you participate in).

### Break the Ice

You might also begin your

class with one of the following ice breaker activities so students can introduce themselves.

### Color, Car, & Character

The Center for Faculty Development at Union University in Jacksonville, Tennessee ([www.uu.edu](http://www.uu.edu)) suggests this activity which might work well with high-school students:

While distributing paper and pencils to all of the participants, the group leader asks each participant to write his or her name on the piece of paper. Under the name, each participant is to write a color which he or she feels fits his or her personality. Beneath the color, the participant is to

*Continued on page 2*

## Getting Started

Continued from page 1

write the name of a car that he or she thinks is appropriate to his or her self-image. Finally, under the name of the car, the participant is to write the name of a fictional character with whom he or she identifies.

Then, one at a time, the group members introduce themselves by stating their names, color, cars, and fictional characters. In the introduction, each participant is to provide a brief rationale for each of his or her three choices. The exercise continues until all of the participants have introduced themselves by color, car, and character.

### If Sentences

For upper-grade elementary students, the following icebreaker from [www.teachnet.com](http://www.teachnet.com) might be appropriate:

Place enough chairs for every student in a circle. Tell the children that you're sure you all have something in common with each other. Then say something like, "I really love pizza. If you love pizza, too, stand up by your seat." Comment on how many students stand up and continue with a few more statements like this.

Then—and this is where the fun begins—tell the students to move to another seat if he or she must stand in response to the next question. The seat should not be adjacent to them or occupied. As they do this, you sit in an empty seat. The last child standing will be the next person in the middle who must form an "if" statement. The trick to getting out of the center is to pick something that lots of people will have in common. Your students should learn this after a couple of rounds.

### Mumble Jumble

If you are teaching young children, this interactive activity from [www.icebreakers.us](http://www.icebreakers.us) might be useful.

Before the activity begins, the leader will cut up a few pictures into puzzle pieces. Each group member will grab a piece of a puzzle from a bag. The group members will keep their puzzle piece to themselves until the leader says, "GO!" At this point, the group members will try to locate the other members of the group with the pieces to form the appropriate pictures. Whichever group does it first, wins.

## Things To Do

Find out as much information as possible about your school and the surrounding community. A useful tool is the school report card available at this Web site:

[www.statereportcards.cps.k12.il.us/](http://www.statereportcards.cps.k12.il.us/)

Familiarize yourself with the physical layout of the school. Find the following places:

- Parking facilities and nearest public transportation
- Rest room
- Computer lab
- Library
- Main and emergency doors
- Teachers' lounge
- Copy machine room
- School calendar with upcoming events
- The quickest way to get around the school

Meet and greet your colleagues. Use these questions to begin conversations and obtain important information:

- What time are teachers expected to arrive and leave the building?
- Where do you sign in?
- How are supplies requested?
- Do you need an ID?
- Are there lockers for teachers?
- Is there a teacher's handbook?
- What before- or after-school activities are offered?
- Where do teachers have their mailboxes?
- What suggestions do you have for obtaining a teaching position?
- How do you keep your paperwork organized?
- How do teachers purchase resources?
- What stores or vendors do you recommend to buy instructional materials?
- What are some good places to go for field trips?

And download the CPS Student-Teaching Handbook from the "Join Us" page at [www.cps-humanresources.org/sti/](http://www.cps-humanresources.org/sti/).

"My advice for future student teachers is DO EVERYTHING. If you are told you don't have to do something, just say, 'That's O.K. I'd like to learn anyway.'

1. Learn to take attendance
2. Talk to parents
3. Write out lesson plans and turn them in on time
4. Learn how to use the copy machine
5. Learn how to use the CPS mail run and read information from the principal
6. Get a binder and write down all the dates for completing something."

Sharon White  
Fall 2004 Student Teacher  
Chicago State University

## Techniques

*Continued from page 1*

Teachers have shown a lot of ingenuity over the years in making use of non-verbal cues in the classroom. Some flip light switches. Others keep clickers in their pockets.

Non-verbal cues can also be facial expressions, body posture, and hand signals. Care should be given in choosing the types of cues you use in your classroom. Take time to explain what you want the students to do when you use your cues.

### 6. Environmental Control

A classroom can be a warm, cheery place. Students enjoy an environment that changes periodically. Study centers with pictures and color invite enthusiasm for your subject.

Just as you may want to enrich your classroom, there are times when you may want to impoverish it as well. You may need a quiet corner with few distractions. Some students will get caught up in visual exploration.

For them, the splash and the color is a siren that pulls them off task. They may need more "vanilla" and less "rocky-road." Have a quiet place where you can steer these youngsters.

### 7. Low-Profile Intervention

Most students are sent to the principal's office as a result of confrontational escalation. The teacher has called them on a lesser offense, but in the moments that follow, the student and the teacher are swept up in a verbal maelstrom. Much of this can be avoided when the teacher's intervention is quiet and calm.

An effective teacher will take care that the student is not rewarded for misbehavior by becoming the focus of attention. She monitors the activity in her classroom, moving around the room. She anticipates problems before they occur. Her approach to a misbehaving student is inconspicuous.

While lecturing to her class this teacher makes effective use of name-dropping. If she sees a student talking or off task, she simply drops the youngster's name into her dialogue in a natural way. "And you see, David, we carry the one to the tens

column." David hears his name and is drawn back on task. The rest of the class doesn't seem to notice.

### 8. Assertive Discipline

This is traditional limit setting authoritarianism. When executed as presented by Lee Canter (who has made this form a discipline one of the most widely known and practiced) it will include a good mix of praise. This is high profile discipline. The

*"Use classroom rules that describe the behaviors you want instead of listing things the students cannot do."*

teacher is the boss and no child has the right to interfere with the learning of any student. Clear rules are laid out and consistently enforced.

### 9. Assertive I-Messages

A component of Assertive Discipline, these I-Messages are statements that the teacher uses when confronting a student who is misbehaving. They are intended to be clear descriptions of what the student is supposed to do. The teacher who makes good use of this technique will focus the child's attention first and foremost on the behavior he wants, not on the misbehavior. "I want you to..." or "I need you to..." or "I expect you to..."

The inexperienced teacher may incorrectly try "I want you to stop..." only to discover that this usually triggers confrontation and denial. The focus is on the misbehavior and the student is quick to retort: "I wasn't doing anything!" and escalation has begun.

### 10. Humanistic I-Messages

These I-messages are expressions of our feelings. Thomas Gordon, creator of Teacher Effectiveness Training (TET), tells us to structure these messages in three parts. First, include a description of the child's behavior. "When you talk while I talk..." Second, relate the effect this behavior has on the teacher. "...I have to stop my teaching..." And third, let the student know the feeling that it generates in the teacher. "...which frustrates me."

A teacher, distracted by a student who was constantly talking while he tried to teach, once made this powerful expression of feelings: "I cannot imagine what I have done to you that I do not deserve the respect from you that I get from the others in this class. If I have been rude to you or inconsiderate in any way, please let me know. I feel as though I have somehow offended you and now you are unwilling to show me respect." The student did not talk during his lectures again for many weeks.

### 11. Positive Discipline

Use classroom rules that describe the behaviors you want instead of listing things the students cannot do. Instead of "no-running in the room," use "move through the building in an orderly manner." Instead of "no fighting," use "settle conflicts appropriately." Instead of "no gum chewing," use "leave gum at home." Refer to your rules as expectations. Let your students know this is how you expect them to behave in your classroom.

Make ample use of praise. When you see good behavior, acknowledge it. This can be done verbally, of course, but it doesn't have to be. A nod, a smile or a "thumbs up" will reinforce the behavior.

For more information on Discipline by Design, visit <http://www.honorlevel.com>. Copyright 2003 Budd Churchward. Used with permission.



Karen Clay from the CPS Office of Literacy discusses instructional strategies with a student teacher at the Spring 2005 Student-Teaching Summit.

## Staying Organized

Modeling effective practices for students is crucial for success in the classroom. You can't get upset with students who lose homework assignments if you lose their graded essays or forget your handouts in another room.

Have your materials organized so that you can find what you need, when you need them. Consider arranging supplies in convenient containers. Be creative: use copy paper boxes, coffee cans, and shoe boxes to store materials. Have a pocket planner or day organizer available to help you with time management issues.

The following suggestions for staying organized are from the Works 4 Me Tips Library at [www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org).

### Can, Shoe, and Dot Organizers

"I save tin cans to use as supply sorters. I clean them out, remove the labels, file down any sharp edges and paint them. They can be glued together or put in the same tray to organize pencils, rulers, pens, etc. Over the door shoe racks are great to use for puppets, mail, make-up work or lost and found items. I keep an inventory of my personal belongings using forms from Microsoft Works and colored dot stickers. Whenever I bring in a book, CD, or video from home, I record it on my form and stick a colored dot on it. The dots are easy to spot even from across the room."

### Observation Labels

"I make my class lists on computer generated labels. I carry this class list on a clipboard during guided reading and small group activities. As the children participate, I make notes on the labels and then stick them on the children's individual folders. I can easily see whom I still need to observe and the compiled labels give me a running record of authentic assessment throughout

the year. The notation labels in the students' folders are also valuable for both parent conferences and report card comments. This method works in other areas such as math skills, science concepts, and behavior, too."

### Portfolios

"I keep my students' papers organized by having both a working and a showcase portfolio in clearly labeled folders. If a student has a piece of work he/she wants to keep, it gets filed in the working portfolio. I file their extraordinary works in their showcase portfolio so that they'll have an abundance of work to pick from when it comes time to showcase!"

### Stay Prepared

The three most important things for a teacher to do are prepare! Prepare! Prepare! Well-planned instruction is important to getting off to a good start in your class. Have your lesson plans completed before you come to school. Don't think you can do your lesson plans on your off period or when the students are at gym. Ask yourself the following questions regularly:

- Do I have all of the supplies necessary?
- When will my lesson or unit plans be reviewed?
- Do I have all the necessary forms: attendance forms, tardy slips, hall passes, and referral forms?
- What's my "plan B?" For example, if the VCR is broken, what is my contingency plan? Or if the library is closed because of a maintenance issue, what do I plan to do with students during this time?
- What are some activities I could use if my lessons end early?

A useful Web site with "filler" activities for times when you finish a lesson unexpectedly early is <http://www.teachingideas.co.uk/timefiller/contents.htm>.

## Useful Web Sites

Web-based Interactive Teacher Development in Classroom Management: <http://home.cc.umanitoba.ca/~fboutin/>

The Really Big List of Classroom Management Resources: <http://drwilliammartin.tripod.com/classm.html>

Education World Professional Development Center: [http://www.education-world.com/a\\_curr/archives/management\\_tips.shtml](http://www.education-world.com/a_curr/archives/management_tips.shtml)

Standards-Based Instruction in CPS: <http://www.sbc.cps.k12.il.us>

## Are you registered?

Student teachers in CPS are required to register with the CPS Student-Teacher Online Registration System on the "Join Us" page at [www.cps-humanresources.org/sti/](http://www.cps-humanresources.org/sti/). Register today and receive invitations to professional development events, learn about useful resources, and attend CPS job fairs.

As part of the CPS Department of Human Resources, the Student-Teaching Initiative is designed to attract pre-service teachers from Chicago-area universities, as well as in-state and out-of-state schools of education, by offering support through the final phases of the traditional teacher certification process.

This issue of *The Learning Curve* was co-edited by Ray Salazar and Myrtis Brown.



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