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Phi Delta Kappan

ENCOURAGING RESPONSIBLE STUDENT BEHAVIOR

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Using a Discipline System to Promote Learning

On returning to the classroom after 24 years, Mr. Marshall struggled to maintain discipline. In Part 1 of this article, he describes how his frustration led him to develop a system that would promote responsible behavior by internally motivating students. In Part 2, Ms. Weisner describes the positive changes in her students' behavior and learning after she implemented Mr. Marshall's program in her classroom.

BY MARVIN MARSHALL AND KERRY WEISNER

Part 1: Creating the System

BY MARVIN MARSHALL

AFTER 24 years as a counselor, supervisor, and administrator, I decided that I wanted to spend my final years in education doing what I enjoyed most — classroom teaching. I took a position teaching middle school social studies, computers, and math. Since I had previously taught at this level (as well as at the elementary and high school levels), I felt familiar with the situation. What I did not realize was that the situation had changed. What struck me immediately was the amount of inappropriate student behavior. Graffiti, rudeness, disrespect, and lack of interest in learning were prevalent. Although I was aware that society had changed, I had forgotten just how clearly students reflect the society in which they grow.

After a few weeks in the classroom, I realized that I might as well have been wearing a blue suit with copper buttons to school every day — I had become a cop. I had returned to the classroom to be a teacher, a mentor, a facilitator, a role model, a coach, a builder of young people — not a policeman.

My discomfort with this role inspired me to begin to design a system that would promote responsible behavior. The system would draw on my own teaching, counseling, and administrative experiences, as well as on the insights of others who had explored the area of human potential.

STEPHEN COVEY

The first of Stephen Covey's "sev-

en habits of highly effective people" is to be proactive.[1] I decided that, rather than follow the customary approach of constantly *reacting* to inappropriate classroom behaviors, I would be *proactive.* Since I was a teacher, it made perfect sense for me to start by teaching something.

It is an understatement to suggest that young people are influenced by their peers. Young people have a strong desire to be liked, and the easiest way to be liked by others is to be like them. The most obvious example is the adoption of particular clothing styles. Peer influence and the desire to conform are so strong that some students will not take books home because studying and achievement in school rank low in their subculture.

I realized that identifying and articulating instances of conforming to peer influence could serve as a first step in resisting inappropriate influences and behaviors. I decided to employ this concept of "external motivation." I reflected on George Orwell's classic, *1984*, and how he both explained and illustrated the critical importance of language to influence, direct, and control thought. Orwell used the example of "freedom" to make his point: the *word* "freedom" is necessary to articulate the concept it represents. I decided to use key terms to promote responsible behavior.

ABRAHAM MASLOW

Once I had made this decision to promote responsible behavior, it seemed that the most effective approach would be to develop a hierarchy. Jean Piaget had developed a hierarchy of cognitive development. Lawrence Kohlberg had developed a hierarchy of moral development. Abraham Maslow had developed a hierarchy of needs but also spoke to a hierarchy of values that are at the very core of human nature.

> Human life will never be understood unless its highest aspirations are taken into account. Growth, self-actualization, the striving toward health, the quest for identity and autonomy, the yearning for excellence (and other ways of phrasing the striving "upward") must now be accepted beyond question as a widespread and perhaps universal human tendency.[2]

My hierarchy was to be one of *social development* — a way to explain human social behavior in simple terms that anyone could understand. I began by considering a classic work on the subject, *Lord of the Flies.* This 1954 novel, which won William Golding a Nobel Prize in literature, is about a couple of dozen British schoolboys who are stranded on a tropical island and left to their own devices. Without any social order, anarchy and chaos erupt. At this point, two of the bigger boys become bullies. They start bossing the younger boys and making the rules. From this story, I derived my hierarchy's two lowest levels — *anarchy* and *bossing/bullying.*

Society cannot exist without some norms, some external controls. A society becomes civil when its people cooperate and live according to these external influences. The concept of *cooperation* suggested the third level of the social development hierarchy.

As noted above, there is another type of external influence, to which young people in particular are susceptible. Young people should be aware of their basic desire to belong. With this understanding will come further awareness that resisting peer influence may at times be extremely challenging. A "herd" or "join the gang" mentality can even draw young people toward some action that they know is not good for them or for society. I felt that the strong urge to conform — even to *inappropriate* external influences — also needed to be recognized in the hierarchy. Thus the third level was altered to *cooperation/conformity.*

As people grow, mature, cultivate manners, and develop values of right and wrong, the prompts for civility, originally external, become internalized. Doing the right thing simply because it is the right thing to do — without being asked or told — is the concept that characterizes the fourth

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and highest level. I refer to this level as *democracy* because taking the initiative to be responsible is an essential characteristic of self-rule.

I will describe the levels in more detail later, but it is important to recognize a few points at this stage. The usual terms associated with motivation are *extrinsic* and *intrinsic*. Extrinsic motivation applies when the aim of the performance is to gain approval, to receive a reward, or to avoid punishment. Intrinsic motivation applies when people perform for inner satisfaction. I intentionally chose the terms *external* and *internal* rather than extrinsic and intrinsic because my purpose is to promote responsibility in young people, and responsibility is not a characteristic that we ordinarily associate with "intrinsic" motivation. Intrinsic motivators such as interest, curiosity, or a challenge are more likely to lead to the feeling of satisfaction. The motivation to be responsible is more cognitive than emotional and is rooted in ethics and values.

Although humans operate from both external and internal motivation, the motivation itself often cannot be discerned from a person's actions. For example, if a youngster makes her own bed because her parent asks her to (external motivation) or does so because she wants to (internal motivation), the action is the same; the bed has been made. In a classroom, both levels are acceptable. Similarly, no attempt is made to distinguish between the two lowest levels. Neither *anarchy* nor *bossing/bullying* is an acceptable level of classroom behavior.

DOUGLAS McGREGOR

While earning a master's degree in business administration, I had the opportunity to read widely in the areas of business and economics. One book in particular had a profound influence on me. In 1960, Douglas McGregor, then the Sloan Professor of Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, published *The Human Side of Enterprise.*[3] This book was a major force in promoting the application of behavioral science to the improvement of productivity in organizations.

McGregor examined the factors underlying the different ways that people attempt to influence human activity. He studied various approaches to managing people, not only in industrial organizations but also in schools, public services, and private agencies. He concluded that the thinking and activity of people in authority are based on two very different sets of assumptions about people. He referred to these assumptions as Theory X and Theory Y.

Theory X. McGregor labeled the set of assumptions upon which the top-down, authoritarian style is based as Theory X. He concluded that this style is inadequate for full human development. Theory X consists of the following beliefs:

1. The average person has an inherent dislike for work and will avoid it if possible.

2. Because of this inherent aversion, most people must be coerced, controlled, directed, or threatened with punishment to get them to put forth adequate effort toward the achievement of goals and objectives.

3. The average person prefers to be directed, wishes to avoid responsibility, has relatively little ambition, and wants security above all.

Under a Theory X management style, responsibilities are delineated, goals are imposed, and decisions are made without involving individuals or requesting their consent. Rewards are contingent upon conforming to the system, and punishments are the consequence of deviation from the established rules.

Theory X styles vary from "hard" to "soft." A drill instructor uses a "hard" approach. In a "soft" approach, less coercive strategies are used, such as rewarding people for adhering to expected standards of behavior.

Theory Y. Theory Y assumptions are more consistent with current research and knowledge. The management style associated with Theory Y leads to higher motivation and greater realization of goals for both the individual and the organization. Theory Y managers rely on *collaboration* rather than *coercion.*

The assumptions of Theory Y are:

1. The expenditure of physical and mental effort is as natural in work as it is in play. Depending upon controllable conditions, work can be a source of satisfaction and will be performed voluntarily, or it can be a source of punishment and will be avoided.

2. People will exercise self-direction and self-control in pursuit of objectives to which they are committed.

3. Commitment to objectives depends on the rewards associated with achieving them. *The most significant of such rewards is the internal reward of self-satisfaction.*

4. The average person learns, under proper conditions, not only to accept responsibility but also to seek it. Avoidance of responsibility is a general consequence of experiences. It is not an inherent human characteristic.

5. The capacity to exercise a relatively high degree of imagination, ingenuity, and creativity in the solution of problems is distributed widely, not narrowly, in the population.

6. Under the conditions that we encounter in modern life, the intellectual potential of the average per-

son is only partially used.

Theory Y encourages growth and development. *Above all, Theory Y points up the fact that the limits of human collaboration are limits not of human nature but of the authority figures' ingenuity and skill in discovering how to realize the potential of the people with whom they work.*

The Theory Y style is not a soft approach to managing. It can be very demanding. It sets up realistic objectives and expects people to achieve them. It is more challenging to the participants.

The traditional model for attempting to manage or change people has been authoritarian and aligned with Theory X. But the conviction that this model is the best way to achieve our objectives is a delusion. It brings to mind an old story about a scientific expedition to capture a Tonkin snub-nosed monkey. Only an estimated 100 to 200 members of this particular species exist, and they reside only in the jungles of Vietnam. The scientists wanted to capture one of the monkeys alive and unharmed. Using their knowledge of monkeys, they devised a trap consisting of a small bottle with a long narrow neck. A handful of nuts was placed in it, and the bottle was staked out and secured by a thin wire attached to a tree. Sure enough, one of the desired monkeys scented the nuts in the bottle, thrust an arm into the long neck, and grabbed a fistful. But when the monkey tried to withdraw the prize, his fist, now made larger by its contents, would not pass through the narrow neck of the bottle. He was trapped, anchored in the bottle, unable to escape with his booty, and yet unwilling to let go. The monkey was easily captured.

We may smile at the monkey's foolishness, but in some respects we operate in the same manner. We cling to the very things that hold us back, remaining captive through sheer unwillingness to let go. Peter Drucker, perhaps the dean of management theory and practice in this country, has said that people fail because of what they will not give up. They cling to what has worked in the past, even after it has clearly stopped working.

Society has changed. Young people today are exposed to influences and operate in contexts that are different from those that previous generations experienced. For example, the concept of "student rights" means that the classroom climate today is quite different from what it once was. Traditional attempts to enforce discipline, aimed at gaining obedience, too often reap resistance, rebellion, and outright defiance rather than the desired compliance and cooperation.

HOW SCHOOLS USE THEORY X

We are accustomed to telling students what to do, punishing them if they resist, and rewarding them if they comply. Telling, punishing, and rewarding are coercive and manipulative. They are based on the assumptions of Theory X.

Telling someone what to do (in contrast to sharing information) carries with it the implication that what the person is doing is not good enough — that the person has to change. This is a negative message that no one enjoys hearing. Besides, if telling worked, students would do exactly as they were told, and repetition would be unnecessary. To see the ineffectiveness of telling, just complete this sentence: "If I have told you once, I have told you. . . ."

Punishment, another coercive approach, is based on the idea that a student has to be harmed to learn or be hurt in order to be instructed. The truth is that people do best when they feel good about themselves, not when they feel bad. Punishment is counterproductive to a teacher/student relationship because imposed punishment (whether called natural or logical) immediately prompts negative feelings against the person meting out the punishment. Punishment satisfies the punisher more than it influences the punished.

As a high school assistant principal in charge of supervising a student body of 3,200, I never had a teacher come into my office demanding that a student be made more responsible; instead, the teacher wanted the student punished. The motivating force for the adult was the desire for a "pound of flesh." If imposed punishments were successful in changing people's behavior, young people would *want* to act more responsibly, and the same students would not be repeatedly assigned to detention.

If a youngster is believed to be an adult, then the youngster should be treated as an adult. However, if we agree that youngsters are not yet adults, then logic and experience dictate that we treat them in such a way that they will become more responsible. There are over two million people incarcerated in this country. Schools should be promoting responsible behavior, not just obedience, so that when young people become older they will not join this increasing number.

Rewarding appropriate behavior is also manipulative. A reward can serve as an incentive if the person is interested in the reward. Grades are a case in point. A student who is interested in obtaining a good grade will work for it. However, if a good grade is not in a person's "quality world" (to use William Glasser's terminology), then a grade is not much of an incentive. Rewards can also serve as wonderful acknowledgments. How-

ever, *giving rewards for meeting expected standards of behavior* conveys a false message. The implication is that society will continue to reward expected standards of proper behavior as the young person grows. The practice of rewarding young people for acting appropriately conveys the message that responsible behavior for its own sake is not good enough — that one needs to receive something in order to be motivated to act appropriately and responsibly.

Like the monkey, a person who clings to a coercive approach loses freedom. A person becomes liberated when he or she is willing to let go of Theory X strategies, which are generally accompanied by stress, resistance, and poor relationships. In direct contrast, the use of collaboration and empowerment — the outgrowths of Theory Y — reduces stress, improves relationships, and is much more powerful in effecting change in others.

WILLIAM GLASSER

The psychiatrist William Glasser devised a pioneering clinical approach called Reality Therapy. Glasser's work with patients led him to conclude that the failure to take responsibility for one's actions is a major cause of psychological illness. He rails against external motivators to change behavior. In his landmark book, *Schools Without Failure*, he illustrates how coercive approaches are counterproductive for lasting success.

> Attempts to apply external pressure upon students to motivate them generally fail. In contrast, Reality Therapy does not concern itself directly with motivation. We don't attempt to direct motivation because we know that it can be produced only with a "gun" or some other forceful method. But guns, force, threats, shame, and punishments are historically poor motivators and work (if we continue the gun example) only as long as they are pointed and as long as the person is afraid. If he loses fear, or if the gun is put down, the motivation ceases.[4]

In a more recent work, Glasser notes that the following verbs all signal coercion: force, compel, manipulate, boss, threaten, control, criticize, blame, complain, nag, badger, put down, preach, rank, rate, withdraw, reject, ridicule, bribe, reward, punish.[5]

With his Choice Theory, Glasser further explains that all problems are present problems. For example, an abused person may, because of an unhappy past, have difficulties dealing with the present, but he or she is still not totally incapable of doing so. The past — be it abuse, neglect, or rejection — is not the problem. This means that inquiry into an earlier experience may be of interest but has little bearing on the resolution of a problem.

Finally, Glasser asserts that all problems are at their core relationship-oriented. An obvious example is that if a client has a poor relationship with a counselor, counseling sessions will have little success. The client's negative emotion impinges upon anything positive emanating from the session. Similarly, how a student feels has a direct bearing on learning. Cognition does not occur in isolation. If the student does not feel emotionally, psychologically, and physically safe, learning will be diminished.

In summation, my system to promote responsible behavior incorporates several of Glasser's ideas:

- taking responsibility for one's own behavior;
- using a noncoercive approach;
- investing little if any time in determining the motivation for a behavior; and
- establishing a safe environment.

W. EDWARDS DEMING

W. Edwards Deming was the American who showed first the Japanese and then the world how to improve quality while simultaneously reducing manufacturing costs. The underlying principle of the Deming approach is continuous *self-inspection.* In traditional approaches, quality control was a specialized task placed at the end of the manufacturing process. If the product failed to pass inspection, the cost of producing the product was wasted. Deming showed how to build quality into the manufacturing process by empowering workers through the encouragement of collaboration. The result was zero defects — improved quality at less cost.

Deming believed that in an atmosphere of cooperation and collaboration, everyone wins. This view is in contrast to the usual competitive approach, which implies that if one person wins, the other person loses — the winner gets the loser's piece of the pie. Deming showed that people working together can make the pie bigger. Rather than building barriers, which is often a result of competition, he believed in breaking down barriers so that people could derive joy from their efforts. Among his prime principles were *continuous improvement, driving out fear, and building trust rather than control.* Deming understood that you cannot legislate or dictate desire and that it is internal motivation such as desire that is the key to improved achievement.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A SYSTEM

My teaching and administrative experiences had taught me that hav-

ing a *system* is even more beneficial than having a *talent.* I had seen many "natural teachers" at their wits' end with certain students. Relying on a system rather than relying on talent means that there is always something available to help in challenging situations. That dependable aid is precisely what I wanted to offer practitioners. But I also knew that if a system were to be implemented and replicated, it would have to be simple. With this in mind, I set out to tie together all the ideas discussed above. The result was the Raise Responsibility System.

Now Kerry Weisner, an elementary teacher, shares how she has used this system to promote both responsible behavior and learning in her classroom.

Part 2: The System in Practice

BY KERRY WEISNER

NEARLY 25 years ago, as a beginning teacher struggling somewhat with classroom discipline, I eagerly scanned teacher magazines in search of tips. One technique came well recommended: I should divide my class into teams; offer points for good behavior, kind deeds, and diligent work habits; and then each week present the winning team with something special — perhaps a chocolate bar, a comic book, or a fancy pen. The magazine promised that this system would build self-esteem and motivate students to behave, do their best work, learn well, and be kindhearted. Armed with enticing treats for incentives, I had great expectations for improved behavior from those few students who occasionally challenged me and for an increased level of motivation from the rest of the class. This was so easy. Why hadn't I thought of it myself?

Easy? Well, not for me! I didn't seem to have the necessary skills to get this straightforward little plan to work. It turned out that I wasn't a very accurate judge of who should be awarded points. I could never pay enough attention to determine which team was truly the quietest at dismissal time, and I found it almost impossible to accurately assess which group had the tidiest handwriting. Since I was not alert enough to notice *every* act of kindness in the room, the children themselves began to interrupt lessons to point them out to me.

As it happened, my students, grade 5 that year, were quick to pick up on my obvious lack of skill, and the more vocal ones were not about to let any errors go by unnoticed. Often squabbles broke out, and eventually even the "good kids" started to complain if I awarded points in a way with which they didn't agree. Somehow, this wasn't what I had envisioned! Instead of becoming more cooperative, self-disciplined, and focused on lessons, these children were becoming greedy and resentful, interested in only one thing — getting points, *more* points than their neighbors.

Where were those thoughtful, well-behaved, motivated students who wanted to learn simply for the joy of learning? What happened to that respectful and purposeful classroom atmosphere that I was trying to create? Why were the children more interested on Monday mornings in the nature of the Friday prize than in the wonderful lessons that I had spent long hours preparing? I was sadly disappointed in myself as a teacher.

A QUEST

Fed up with conflict and never one to really enjoy competitive activities anyway, I knew I couldn't follow through with the magazine's suggestion. After three weeks, I accepted what seemed obvious: I wasn't cut out to be the truly effective teacher the magazine described. When it came to classroom discipline, I simply didn't have the talent. Somehow I would have to find another way.

Discouraged with my inability to successfully follow popular educational advice as outlined by that upbeat teaching article, I turned in-

stead to personal experience for direction. I started to reflect on the teachers who had taught *me* over the course of my schooling. Certain ones clearly stood out in my memory as powerful and inspiring. What characteristics did they share?

They had cultivated personal bonds with students by

- treating us with respect and kindness;
- using an honest, direct teaching approach;
- showing interest in us as individuals;
- sharing stories from their own lives;
- maintaining an approachable manner so that we felt safe; and
- displaying a willingness to give extra help and encouragement.

They had held high expectations:

- requiring us to work hard;
- insisting that we try;
- challenging us to think; and
- expecting us to behave appropriately.

They had employed best teaching practices:

- capturing interest through an engaging classroom environment;
- providing a reason to want to attend class;
- making learning fun;
- using a variety of carefully planned teaching strategies; and
- giving varied and meaningful assignments.

For the next 20 years, I tried to emulate these memorable educators. Although I gradually developed an increasingly clearer sense of direction, I still struggled on a day-to-day basis with students who misbehaved, were insensitive, or avoided responsibility. I felt as if I had a pretty good idea of *where* I wanted to go, but only the vaguest notion of *how* to get there. Eventually I began to investigate motivation research and was greatly affected by what I found.

With great conviction, I set out to find an approach to classroom teaching and discipline based on *internal motivation.* Forget the gimmicks, the quick-fix approaches, the prizes, the stickers, the pizzas for reading, and those merit points for good behavior. The studies clearly showed that none of these things would bring about long-term, lasting results. I was determined to find a program that would encourage the children in my charge to work consciously toward becoming compassionate, self-disciplined, responsible individuals; nothing less would do. Yet the challenge remained: How on earth could *anyone* do that with 6-year-olds?

Although this idealistic vision certainly captured my imagination, I knew that in a practical teaching sense I didn't have much to go on. What I needed were concrete teaching strategies that would allow me to assist students who daydreamed class time away, ridiculed classmates, or deliberately hurt others in the schoolyard. Once again, feeling discouraged, I felt destined to spend the rest of my career searching for something that didn't exist.

And then one day, all of that changed with just a quick click of my computer mouse. Prompted by mail-ring conversations regarding discipline plans based on behavior modification and other imposed approaches, I entered the phrase "rewards and punishments" into a search engine. Up came a site titled "Dr. Marvin Marshall — Discipline Without Stress, Punishments, or Rewards" (www.MarvinMarshall.com).

Eureka! Here was the information for which I had been endlessly searching. The website described a simple system based on internal motivation that focused on promoting responsibility rather than on promoting obedience. It was *exactly* what I needed to inspire children to lead responsible lives.

THREE PRINCIPLES TO PRACTICE

Excited, I decided to start by implementing three recommended practices:

1. I was *positive* in everything I said. Students do better when they feel good about themselves.
2. I taught students that they always have the freedom to *choose their responses* — regardless of the situation. Realizing that they had choices, the students became more self-controlled and responsible. They felt empowered.
3. I learned to ask questions that would effectively guide students to *reflect* and *self-evaluate.*

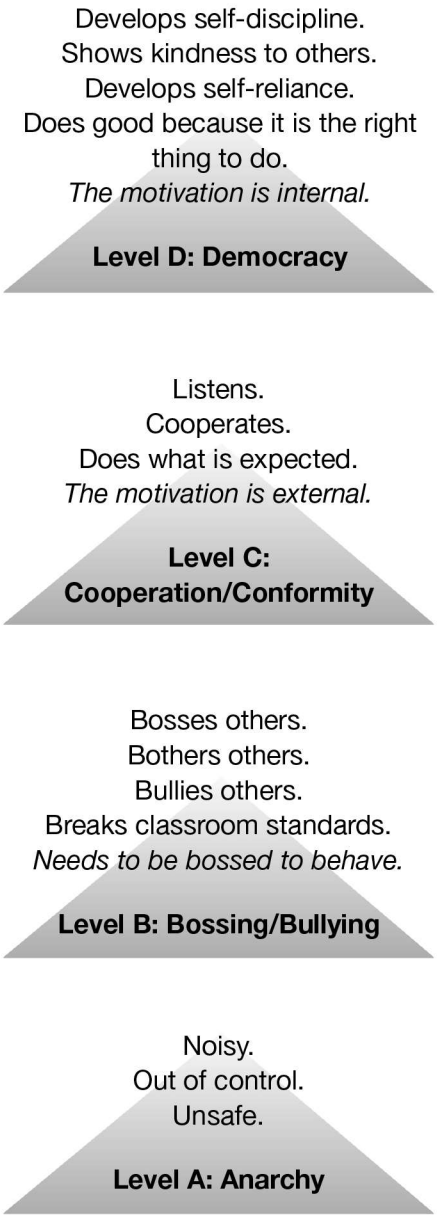
Practicing these three principles of adopting *positivity,* empowering through *choice,* and encouraging *reflection* greatly reduced my stress as a teacher and allowed me to view misbehavior as I would any academic difficulty — as *an opportunity to teach and learn* instead of as a problem. My goal became to influence students, rather than trying to coerce them into making constructive changes in their behavior.

THE THREE PHASES OF THE RAISE RESPONSIBILITY SYSTEM

In Part 1 of this article, Marvin Marshall detailed the theories behind his Raise Responsibility System. As applied in the classroom, the system has three phases: 1) *teaching*, 2) *asking*, and 3) *eliciting*.

Phase 1: teaching the hierarchy. The foundation of the Raise Responsibility System is the hierarchy of social development. Classroom behaviors can be assigned to different levels of the hierarchy. I chose behaviors appropriate to my grade and displayed

them on a chart:



Using the familiar situation of a piece of trash lying on the classroom floor, I introduced the concepts underlying the hierarchy. I described the type of behavior with regard to the trash that would be indicative of each successive level of social development.

At the lowest level of behavior, Level A, a student might pick up the trash but then throw it at someone. Moving up the ladder, a student operating on Level B also would not feel compelled to pick up the trash but instead might kick it around the room. At an acceptable Level C, a student would pick up the trash at the request of the teacher. At Level D, a student would take the initiative to pick up the trash and deposit it in the trash can without being asked — whether or not anyone was watching — simply because this was the *right* thing to do.

The important points for students to understand are:

1. Levels A and B behaviors are always *unacceptable.* The use of authority by the teacher is required at both of these levels.

2. Level C behavior is acceptable, but the motivation is *external* — to gain approval or avoid punishment.

3. Levels C and D differ in *motivation,* not necessarily in their behaviors.

4. Level D is the goal, where the motivation is *internal* — taking the initiative to do the right, appropriate, or responsible thing.

I was astonished at how quickly my young students grasped these concepts and were able to generate novel examples of their own. With understanding in place, I was ready to implement the second phase of the program: reflective questioning.

Phase 2: asking students to reflect on their behavior. The point of this phase is to guide a misbehaving student to self-evaluate. The first question I always asked was, "On what level was that behavior?" It was clear that the effectiveness of this phase was the result of *asking* the child to identify the level of behavior, rather than using the traditional approach of *telling* the child that the behavior was unacceptable. Also, by referring to a level — rather than to the student's specific behavior — the deed was separated from the doer. Students did not feel a need to defend themselves.

Having learned the hierarchy, the students found it easy to accurately assess their levels of behavior, and when they identified an action as being on an unacceptable level, they felt a strong sense of responsibility for correcting it or at least not repeating it.

I was taken completely by surprise as I immediately began to see positive changes and significant improvements in the students' behavior. They began to analyze their actions and take responsibility for their choices. The little girl who nearly drove me crazy by constantly making noises suddenly started to display excellent self-control. The impulsive youngster who often bullied others on the playground started having peaceful noon-hour experiences. The disorganized little boy who could never keep track of his belongings made a commitment to return a special book that he wanted to borrow. Proudly and responsibly, he followed through with his plan! Having experienced the powerful feelings of satisfaction that emerge from being capable and responsible, my students began acting with more empathy and caring toward others.

Although I believed strongly in the power of internal motivation, I had always assumed that any success based on such a teaching model would be measured in years, rather than in days and weeks. I had mistakenly equated *lasting results* with a lengthy and delayed process.

Phase 3: eliciting changes in behavior. On rare occasions, a student continued to misbehave even after having identified a behavior as being on an unacceptable level. Then I used the process of "guided choices." I gave the student an activity to prompt self-reflection, with the goal

of eliciting (rather than imposing) a plan of action. In this way the student could develop a procedure that would redirect impulses and assist in preventing a similar inappropriate behavior in the future. This approach demonstrates that one can use authority when necessary, but without being punitive.

A GIFT FOR LIFE

Moment by moment, choice by choice, we each create a life, the quality of which depends largely upon the choices we make. With awareness, we can consciously choose to make decisions that will lead to positive results. The Raise Responsibility System gives young people, even young children, the awareness they need in order to look at their choices and plan future behavior.

Although initially it appeared that the children who often misbehaved were the ones who were benefiting from the Raise Responsibility System, it wasn't long before I realized that *every* student had been given an incredible gift. The very nature of the hierarchy inspires young people to set their sights at the highest level. They found that they could better themselves by consciously choosing to aim for Level D, the level at which they could be autonomous — making appropriate choices without relying on the teacher to direct them.

I noticed that by adding to the list of descriptors for Level D, I could easily influence the children to operate more consistently at this level. For instance, when I added the phrase *shows initiative*, those who had always shown initiative got reinforcement and a boost to their self-esteem because they recognized this quality in their own actions, and those who tended to operate at lower levels had yet another trait to which they could aspire.

EXTENDING THE HIERARCHY TO LEARNING

Gradually, as I experienced continued success with the Raise Responsibility System, I realized that the way in which I understood the system was evolving. I no longer viewed it in a limited way — as only a tool for handling classroom discipline. I began to see that there was enormous potential and value in using the hierarchy to inspire young people in all areas of their lives.

One day I decided to have a discussion with my students about how they could use their understanding of the four levels of development to help themselves become better readers. We talked about the 30-minute "Whole School Read" session in which we participate each morning. I asked the youngsters to describe hypothetical behaviors of students operating at each of the four levels during this daily reading time.

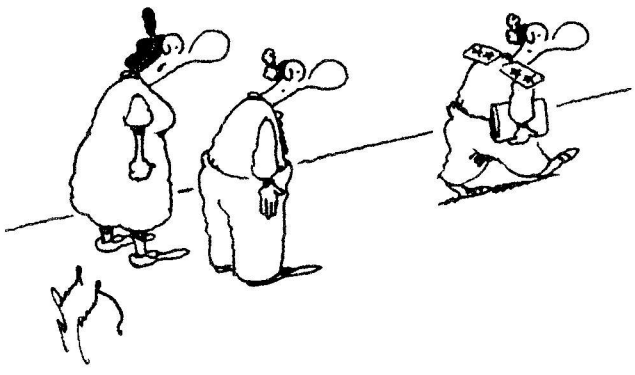
They were able to clearly describe conduct at each level:

At level A, students wouldn't be practicing reading at all. They would be deliberately misbehaving and causing a disturbance. At level B, students wouldn't be doing much reading either. They would be annoying or distracting others, perhaps by poking them or making jokes. They would probably flip through the pages of a book but wouldn't put in the effort to actually read. We reviewed that when students are behaving at Levels A and B, a teacher must step in and use authority, because neither Level A nor Level B conduct is ever acceptable.

Then we discussed the higher and acceptable levels of development, C and D. Students operating at Level C would be reading — but more or less only when an adult (the teacher or a parent) was directly watching or working with them. When an adult was not supervising in their area, they probably wouldn't disturb anyone but wouldn't put in much effort, either. Their motivation for reading would be external — they would willingly cooperate and do what was necessary in order to avoid the disapproval of the adults in the room.

At this point in the discussion, I felt it was important for students to fully understand another aspect of Level C. I stressed the idea that people operating at this level sometimes comply with expectations simply in an effort to impress someone else with their conduct. In other words, their reason for reading is again *external*. They feel the need to be noticed while reading so as to "look good" in the teacher's eyes. I wanted the students to understand that a lot of energy can be wasted worrying about what others think — energy that in this particular situation could more profitably be devoted to actual reading.

When we moved on to Level D, the class imagined students who would be us-



"I think those gold stars are going to Derek's head."

ing reading time each morning to truly practice reading. It wouldn't be necessary to have an adult directly with them at all times; they would stay on task simply because they knew what was expected of them. They would read and re-read sections of their books because they knew that by doing so they would become better readers. Their motivation would be *internal*. They wouldn't be wasting any time watching the teacher in the hope of being specially noticed as "someone who was reading."

Having run through examples of all the levels of development in this particular situation, I asked, "Which of these students from our discussion will learn to read?" The class understood that it seemed unlikely that students operating at levels A and B could ever learn to read very well. Their choices and actions were leading them in the opposite direction.

We then went on to the benefits of operating at the two higher levels of the hierarchy. We discussed that students operating at Level C probably *would* learn to read but would be unlikely to get much pleasure from reading or to become proficient readers because they were reading *only* when directly supervised. They complied with the classroom expectation of reading, but their hearts weren't in it. With only a so-so effort at practicing, they would get only so-so results.

Then we discussed Level D — which is always the goal in the Raise Responsibility System. This is the level at which people take the initiative to do what is right or appropriate. People at this level *motivate themselves* to put forth effort and achieve. The results are long-lasting and powerful. These people strive to become good readers and therefore can get a lot of enjoyment from reading. Because they experience enjoyment, they keep reading and therefore become even better readers. People at this level feel good about themselves because they experience improvement and are aware that it comes as a result of choices that they have consciously made.

After these discussions, I wanted to prompt some reflection, and so I simply asked the students to analyze their own developmental level in the reading session that had just passed. After giving them a moment to think "in their heads," I asked them to honestly evaluate their own choices. I wanted them to think about whether or not their choices were leading them in a positive direction. Nothing more was said aloud, either by me or by the students, and they were left to reflect for a minute before we moved on to another lesson.

THE RESULTS

That night, without any suggestion or prompting on my part, the poorest reader in the class went home and read his reader over and over again. Prior to this, the kindly parents of this child had been sincerely concerned about his lack of reading progress and fairly supportive of the school, but they hadn't understood the value or importance of conducting nightly reading sessions with their struggling youngster, as the school had requested.

That evening they watched as their little boy independently read and re-read his reader. Both the parents and the child could see a dramatic improvement in his reading skills. They experienced the powerful impact that internal desire, coupled with just one night of true effort, could have on someone's ability to read. The boy came back to school the next day bursting with pride and determination to practice more and more so that he could move on to a new, more difficult reader. It only took one more night of practice, and he was able to do just that.

The Raise Responsibility System prompted this youngster to learn a powerful lesson that is bound to influence his behavior in the future. He could clearly see the connection between his own choices and the results from them. I could never have bribed him into such a learning experience by offering a sticker or a prize for having read a certain number of pages.

As a result of *promoting responsibility*, I discovered that obedience followed as a natural by-product. As a result of *teaching a hierarchy*, which inspired students to aim for the highest level, I observed children choosing to be more responsible and becoming willing to put forth the effort needed to learn. As a result of *encouraging self-reflection in a noncoercive manner*, I witnessed students doing what they knew to be appropriate and aiming to fulfill the highest expectations.

I am elated to have finally found an effective approach to discipline that creates a classroom in which young people feel safe, care for one another, and enjoy learning. Teaching becomes a joy when students demonstrate more responsible behavior and become motivated to put more effort into their own learning.

1. Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990).

2. Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 3rd ed. (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1987), p. xx.

3. Douglas McGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960).

4. William Glasser, *Schools Without Failure* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 18.

5. William Glasser, *Choice Theory — A New Psychology of Personal Freedom* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), p. 21.