

Discipline, Management, and Education: Rediscovering the Whole Child

By Kristen M. Kemple

The issues of teaching, management, and discipline as related to teacher education have become particularly salient ones to me lately, as I have recently moved from my position as a professor of early childhood education in a child development department to a department of curriculum and instruction. As such transitions are prone to do, this one has pressed upon me the opportunity to draw out and re-examine my own deeply embedded ideological beliefs as I encounter perspectives that differ from those familiar ideas with which I was comfortably surrounded as a graduate student and in my earliest years as a member of the profession.

Upon accepting my new post, I was surprised to discover that there existed on the books no course devoted to classroom guidance in either early childhood or elementary education. This disconcerted me for a variety of reasons, among them the partially selfish fact that I had thoroughly enjoyed teaching such a course several times in the past. Also, successful completion of such a course had been a prerequisite to my graduate studies in child development, contributing to my view of it as a foundational and primary course. My curiosity was further peaked when I heard other faculty lament the fact that students felt

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they did not have enough information about how to manage a classroom, and how to maintain discipline. I soon began to hear such concerns voiced by students themselves. I have since learned that the absence of such a course is not unusual in teacher education programs, in spite of the observation that discipline problems are so often cited as one of the greatest dilemmas facing public schools (McDaniel, 1984).

As I kept my ears open and tried to ascertain my college of education colleagues' perspectives on the utility of a course on classroom guidance, I heard statements from some which seemed to reflect the following sentiments: "Many, if not most, management and discipline problems are the result of an inappropriate curriculum. If we focus on preparing our students to provide educationally and developmentally appropriate learning experiences, they will have fewer problematic behaviors with which to deal." And, "Knowledge about guidance and management issues should not be isolated from knowledge about curriculum and instruction. This information should be infused in all methods courses, rather than taught in a separate course as if it were an independent aspect of teaching." I found that I could not fully disagree with either of these sentiments, and yet I still pondered the perceptions of our teachers-in-training and newly graduated teachers that they were not adequately prepared to meet the challenges of maintaining a level of classroom peace and order with which they felt comfortable.

An Essential Component

During the process of listening, questioning, observing, and generally getting the lay of the land in my new academic home, I found myself frequently hearkening back to my "first day of the semester soap box speech" with which I had launched my classroom guidance course in previous semesters. In that sermon, I voiced my position that I view guidance and management **not** as what teachers do to get children quiet and under control for the purpose of being able to move on to the important **curriculum**, but rather as an essential component of the curriculum itself. Educating young children is not about managing and controlling children's behavior for the purpose of being able to proceed with experiences designed to promote their cognitive and language development.

Educating young children **is** about facilitating children's learning and growth in all areas of development; this includes promoting children's social and emotional growth by means that help them develop self-control, self-responsibility, self-discipline. This includes helping children learn to resolve conflicts by non aggressive means; helping children learn effective interactional skills; helping children learn why rules exist, how to create classroom rules, and why violations of rules have certain consequences; helping children learn how to cooperate, share, make friends, respect differences of opinion, and respect the rights and property of others. To quote John Dewey (1938), "The ultimate aim of education is creation of the power of self-control." In short, these goals embody an approach to guidance and

discipline which emphasizes the development of community and the development of self-control as essential aims. In this view, disciplined, increasingly mature social cognition and behavior become essential curricular goals in and of themselves. This of course differs radically from a view of guidance, discipline, and management as a means to an end: That “end” being a controlled classroom in which the teacher can proceed to implement an academic curriculum focused on the child’s cognitive and linguistic growth.

My perspective is of course not unique. I have recently been introduced to a textbook which embraces many of the goals and values I hold dear. In *Teaching Children to Care*, Ruth Charney (1992) maintains that the most important thing she has learned as a teacher is that discipline is a subject to be taught, just as reading and arithmetic are taught. Rather than simply react to discipline problems as they arise, Charney advocates that teachers implement an ongoing curriculum in self-control, social participation, and human development. Charney writes, “It is a challenge to help children grow up to be decent and kind, and to retain our faith in ourselves, our children, and our expectations” (p. 5). “My strongest hope is that we will begin to envision schools as centers dedicated to social growth and ethical behavior. We need to prepare in order to teach children how to behave, and we need to know it is not a waste of time” (p. 10).

Richard Curwin and Allen Mendler (1988a) express a sympathetic conviction concerning the place of guidance and management in education: “...teaching is more positive when managing student behavior is perceived as part of the job....The lessons students learn about behavior, communication, and getting along with others make a longer, more lasting impression “ (p.26). Howard Gardner’s work on a theory of multiple intelligences draws further attention to the nearly exclusive emphasis in many schools on linguistic and logicomathematical functioning (Gardner & Hatch, 1989), and proposes the “personal intelligences”, both interpersonal and intrapersonal, as distinct intelligences worthy of careful attention in schooling (Gardner, 1983). Similar emphases on the importance of developing children’s responsible decision-making abilities, the role of personal relationships, the classroom as a democratic community, and the role of facilitative language in classroom guidance are salient in the writings of Thomas Gordon (1974), Hiam Ginott (1972), and William Glasser (1969). Alice Miel (1987) may have most succinctly captured this point of view when she ventured that, if forced to select only one set of skills to develop in future teachers, she would emphasize the teaching of cooperation, both as a way of teaching and as something to be taught (Miel, 1987).

Important Interrelationships

As I consider the multiple roots of my own perspective on this issue, I am led to dig up and dust off a term which I no longer use often, but which nonetheless represents a philosophy permeating my work in early childhood education. The historical roots of early childhood education (ECE) are imbued with the “whole

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child perspective,” which is well-supported by theoretical and empirical work in the fields of developmental and cognitive psychology (for example, Case, 1985; DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987; Elkind, 1987, 1991; Kamii & DeVries, 1980; Marini & Case, 1989; Piaget, 1932/1965). Contemporary ECE continues to be closely linked with the field of developmental psychology and its recognition of the integral interconnections between social, emotional, physical/motor, cognitive, and linguistic functioning. Rheta DeVries and Lawrence Kohlberg (1987) and Constance Kamii and DeVries (1980), for example, have written extensively of the implications of Piagetian theory for early childhood education, with particular attention to the critical role of peer social interaction in children’s construction of knowledge. These scholars have provided evidence that cooperative interaction with peers (which Piaget defined as including conflict) plays an essential role in the development of autonomous thinking by confronting children with various and conflicting perspectives, and creating the sense of disequilibrium which serves as a driving force behind problem-solving. Robbie Case’s neo-Piagetian theory and supporting research have provided evidence for the inter relatedness of children’s cognition in the social and physical realms by helping to explain horizontal decalage and weak correlations across different tests of the same underlying structure (both problematic to Piagetian theory) by careful analysis of the complexity of operations involved in the tasks used for comparison (Case, 1985; Marini & Case, 1989).

This recognition of interrelations in domains of development suggests that, when we intervene to promote growth in one area of development, we must consider the implications of that intervention for other areas of growth, as well as the impact of other areas of development on the success of any given intervention or educational experience. Recognition of and respect for the interrelations among various areas of development has led to an ideology prevalent in ECE which does not impart a primacy to intellectual development over the socio-emotional realm, but which rather takes the growth and development of the whole child, a creature who’s entirety is something more than the sum of its parts, as the responsibility of early childhood educators. These values hearken back to the work of George Brown (1971) in the tradition of humanistic education. Brown’s writings about “confluent education” describe a method and philosophy of teaching in which the cognitive and affective domains are integrated in planning and practice. This holistic perspective is further reflected in the Association for Teacher Educators (ATE) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children’s (NAEYC) recent position statement on guidelines for early childhood teacher certification (ATE & NAEYC, 1991). In addition to knowledge of emotional, moral, and social development of the young child, this position statement asserts that early childhood teachers should be trained in such skills as “using group and individual guidance and problem-solving techniques to assist the construction of knowledge and nurture prosocial interaction among children, to encourage interpersonal problem-solving, and to develop self-control and positive self-esteem” (p.20).

Integration with Existing Courses?

I reflect now on the persuasion of some of my colleagues that inappropriate curriculum is at the root of many inappropriate child behaviors. I certainly cannot disagree with this view; I believe that I see this phenomenon in action on a regular basis as I visit classrooms in my community. However, suggesting that we concentrate our attentions on teaching students how to orchestrate appropriate curriculum as a means of avoiding discipline problems is clearly too simple, and shortchanges our future teachers. A curriculum which is so meaningful and engaging as to eradicate the occurrence of undesirable behavior among young children is beyond my imagination. Furthermore, this view seems either to suggest that immature socioemotional behavior is merely the result of lack of intellectual stimulation (a dichotomous view which pits the intellectual realm in a position of superior importance over the socioemotional realm) or to suggest that the socioemotional realm of development is beyond the domain of education, and is to be avoided by keeping kids too busy to engage in the kinds of encounters which are potential sources of socioemotional learning and moral growth.

The concern that others seem to voice about teaching classroom guidance in a separate course, as if it were somehow a separate component of a teacher's knowledge and behavior, is also a concern with which I can sympathize, though only in part. Any given educational experience can be the source of simultaneous learning in a variety of areas. A single activity, planned or spontaneous, can contribute to a child's problem-solving skills, knowledge of mathematical and scientific concepts, ability to consider and challenge differing viewpoints, ability to coordinate his/her efforts with those of a partner, and ability to engage in the activity without disturbing the activities of others in close proximity. As a teacher plans for and/or responds to such an activity, she or he must consider a variety of goals, including social-behavioral goals, all at once, and she or he must develop potential plans for promoting those goals. A basic guiding principal of the "whole child" approach to ECE is that young children do not approach the world in a compartmentalized way; their learning is more holistic, and is best facilitated by an integrated curriculum in which the potential for a wide range of types of learning and development are recognized and planned for in a single educational experience. This certainly supports the suggestion that, rather than providing students with a separate course in guidance, methods courses should integrate information about planning for guidance, management, and social, moral, and emotional goals.

In theory, I resonate with this suggestion. In practice, I have doubts that this can be easily accomplished. In a recently taught methods class, I made a small attempt to begin to integrate guidance and discipline planning with students' activity plans for promoting creativity. The purpose of this activity was for students to include social and emotional goals in their activity plans, to plan for guidance toward the realization of those goals, to plan for prevention of management problems, to

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predict guidance challenges which could still potentially arise, and to plan potential strategies for handling those challenges. On the first round of activity plans, I was disappointed by the simplicity and superficiality of students' responses to this challenge. Essentially, most of the anticipated problems ran along the lines of "the children may become disruptive," plans for prevention fell in the category of "children will be told beforehand that if they misbehave, they will not be able to continue the activity," or "they will lose a privilege," and means of handling problems consisted of loss of a privilege. Feedback and subsequent discussion of these plans did little to improve subsequent plans, perhaps for two related reasons. Students seemed to have little foundational knowledge of guidance and management upon which to build, and I felt overwhelmed with the "dual" task of teaching the creativity content of the course plus teaching fundamentals of management and guidance to students with minimal background.

An Important Curriculum Goal

I am left wondering. Is helping children learn to function as productive, confident, cooperating members of the classroom mini-democracy an important curricular goal? I believe it is. Is learning to respect and coordinate ones' own rights and the rights of others an important curricular goal? Are learning to appropriately express strongly felt emotions, learning to substitute prosocial behavior for aggressive tactics, learning to resolve interpersonal conflicts, learning the parameters of appropriate classroom social behavior, the reasons for those parameters, and the logical consequences of violating the limits of those parameters important curricular goals? If all of these are important educational goals (as I believe they are), then does this content not deserve to be the focus of its own course?

At the very least, such information certainly needs to be integrated with the content of methods courses, but my observations and work with students are rapidly propelling me toward the conclusion that the effective guidance of children's socioemotional development requires a knowledge of social development, relationship-enhancement skills, and behavior management skills which cannot be adequately appended to or infused into the already full schedule of a slate of methods courses. I fear that when this is attempted, the result is that discipline as a general topic is relegated to a position of lesser emphasis, and is merely mentioned rather than explained, examined, debated, and integrated with pedagogy. Furthermore, in a separate course there exists adequate time for discussion of "in vivo" methods of teaching social competence, within the context of ongoing classroom interaction. The utility of opportunities for learning in meaningful, real life conditions is supported by the work of Dewey (1938) , and of such social learning theorists as Albert Bandura, who has provided substantial argument and evidence that children can learn through incidental teaching, by observing the outcomes of others' behaviors and interactions (Bandura, 1969).

With solid background knowledge and skills related to the active and purpose-

ful promotion of children's socioemotional competence, students might more effectively practice using that knowledge and skill as part of the planning, implementation, and evaluation experiences encountered in methods classes. To best accomplish this, a guidance and discipline course might be required as a prerequisite to methods courses (or as a corequisite to the first semester of methods courses). The course could be developed with the input of methods instructors, to include attention to the areas of competence previously noted. Then, with knowledge and some ownership of the content and processes of the guidance and discipline (or "Curriculum for Social Competence") course, methods instructors could build on that foundation and integrate pertinent knowledge and skills to help students construct an understanding of how to plan to prevent discipline problems, as well as how to plan experiences to meet both social and content goals.

If students are not provided adequate coursework and experience in guidance and management in preservice training, I am concerned that, once on their own in the classroom, they will readily gravitate toward the quick-fix, easy-to-learn, easy-to-implement promises of such packaged programs as Assertive Discipline (Canter & Canter, 1976). It is not difficult to understand the appeal of such deceptively simple solutions. To the very busy fledgling teacher who does not possess a well-woven fabric of knowledge, attitudes, and skills conducive to the teaching of responsibility, self-control, and cooperation, such a package may look like a lifesaver. The arguments against Assertive Discipline's ability to promote such democratic goals are compelling (Curwin & Mendler, 1988b; Gartrell, 1987; Hitz, 1988; Render, Padilla, & Krank, 1989).

Looking Forward

As I approach the start of my second year in the still slightly foreign culture of my new academic home, I look forward to teaching a new special topics elective course on the subject of guiding children's social competence in early childhood. It is my hope and expectation that this course will become a permanent offering. I also look forward to supervising early childhood and elementary student teachers who will enjoy greater background knowledge and skills in guidance and management; in response to student concerns (a responsiveness which I am delighted to be recognizing as a hallmark of my new department) the first of two semester-long practicum experiences is being transformed to focus primarily on guidance and management issues.

My years of experience as a teacher educator are still but few in number, though my limited experiences do suggest to me that by the time many students take responsibility for a classroom, control **does** become more important in their eyes than cooperation, management **does** become more critical than cooperative development of a learning environment, and discipline **does** become more imperative than learning. Fostering and facilitating the peaceful coexistence and interaction of a large group of small humans is no mean task; if classroom management and

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discipline exhibit a primacy in the concerns of fledgling teachers, perhaps it is because knowledge of socioemotional development and skills for fostering socioemotional competence have not been given primacy in programs of teacher education. It may be that teacher education has “lost focus on other issues” precisely because it has not afforded the promotion of social competence its due attention in preservice education programs. Relegating information on guidance and discipline to methods courses may confer second class citizen status on this important topic. If management and guidance strategies are continually, and only, presented to students in the service of facilitating the teaching of content areas in methods classes, I fear that what students may receive is the same limited, superficial information about guidance and management strategies from one methods course to the next. Within the culture of a whole child perspective, the promotion of appropriate competent social conduct and emotional expression become goals of equal stature to the promotion of literacy and scientific reasoning, deserving of the same intensive study in preservice preparation, and deserving as well of attention to the integrated nature of all areas of learning and growth.

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