

## *Facilitating Moral Development Through School Climate and Developmental Discipline*

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*A morally supportive management and discipline system must foster the development of students' empathic caring, moral awareness, and moral understanding, while minimizing or avoiding the enticement of desirable behavior through praise, rewards and punishments.*

—Marilyn Watson

In Chapter 4 we looked at how classroom rules help to structure schools as cultural and moral institutions. We also considered how students' concepts of morality and social convention enter into their willingness to comply with school and classroom rules, as well as their evaluations of teachers as legitimate social authorities. In this chapter we will continue to explore how the social life of the classroom can contribute to students' social, emotional, and moral development. Our approach will be guided by attention to the developmental needs of children and adolescents. There are two related issues that we will address in the chapter. The first is the overall social, emotional, and moral climate of the classroom. The second is how teachers and schools address behavioral issues through classroom management and discipline.

### *Establishing a Moral Atmosphere*

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#### **Moral Development and Emotion**

Children's concepts of morality are about fairness and the welfare of others. These moral understandings include feelings and emotions associated with experiences of harm, unfairness, selfishness, and loss, as well as kindness, generosity, and fair treatment. William Arsenio and his colleagues (Arsenio & Lover, 1995) have carefully studied how emotion is included in children's construction of morality and social convention. Experiences of moral transgression are asso-

ciated with “hot” emotions such as sadness, fear, anger, or outrage. Engaging in morally positive action is associated with happiness and a sense of satisfaction. These feelings are incorporated into the schemes that form the child’s moral understanding. One outcome of this developmental process is that variations in the emotional experiences of children can influence their moral orientations. For example, variations in the child’s temperament (Kochanska, 1993), the amount of anger displayed by adults in reactions to children’s transgressions, or the warmth in reaction to children’s prosocial behavior (Cumberland-Li, Eisenberg, Champion, Gershoff, & Fabes, 2003; Emde, Birigen, Clyman, & Openheim, 1991) appear to affect the way in which children construct their basic concepts of the social world and how to react to social situations.

The development of morality in children is supported by environments in which the child experiences emotional warmth and fairness. Growing up in such an environment increases the chance that a child will construct a view of the social world based on “goodwill” (Arsenio & Lover, 1995). This goodwill goes along with the positive feelings and happiness that children experience when they engage in acts of kindness and helping (Eisenberg, 1986). In contrast, children with long-term patterns of victimization and peer rejection tend to establish a pattern of “ill will” distorting the construction of moral reciprocity in support of aggressive actions toward others (Arsenio & Lover, 1995). In summary, a climate of predictability, trust, emotional warmth, and reciprocity are the key elements to establishing a pattern of goodwill (Arsenio & Lover, 1995) conducive to the emergence of the moral self (Noam, 1993).

From the perspective of the classroom teacher, this effect of early emotional experience helps to explain the variations they observe in children’s tendencies to respond to peers in fair and caring, or aggressive ways. It also means that an important element of a teacher’s approach to children’s moral and social growth is the establishment of a classroom climate that maximizes the likelihood that students will experience goodwill during their time at school.

The importance of an emotionally supportive environment has not been lost on proponents of moral education. For some educators the establishment of a caring environment and an overall “ethic of care” is the most essential component of moral education (Noddings, 2002). A child who develops a caring orientation is able to *care for others*, and is also able to *accept care from others*. This requires a school and classroom climate in which students can afford to be emotionally vulnerable, and in which that vulnerability extends to the student’s willingness to risk engagement in acts of kindness and concern for others (Noddings, 2002).

An ethic of care is related to a more general approach to the school and classroom environment around the establishment of relationships based on trust (Watson, 2003). Trust carries with it the emotional connections of care integrated with moral reciprocity and continuity. Thus trust corresponds essentially

to what Arsenio and Lover describe as an “orientation of goodwill.” Trust is basic to the construction of an overall sense of school or classroom community that in turn is one of the primary predictors of prosocial conduct in schools (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997).

### ***The Basic Elements of a Moral Classroom Climate***

The development of trust and self-discipline in schools and classrooms builds on four basic needs of children. These are: autonomy, belonging, competence, and fairness (Nucci & Katsarou, 2004; Watson, 2003).

***Autonomy.*** The need for autonomy is expressed in two ways. The first is through the construction of the personal domain of prerogative and privacy. A child’s sense of him- or herself as an individual with a unique social identity is gained through control over activities, friendship choices, personal expression, and privacy (Nucci, 1996). In the classroom and school setting this translates into providing children some space for decision making both in the social arena and, where appropriate, over academic issues.

The second component of autonomy is the child’s exertion of self-control and self-determination. Moral autonomy refers to a commitment to what is right based on moral judgment rather than social pressure or social convention. It also means doing what is right for one’s own reasons. There are two basic ways in which individuals are motivated to do something. One is to respond to external incentives in the form of punishments and rewards. The second is to engage in actions because of their perceived value to the individual (Deci, 1995). It is obviously much easier for teachers and schools to manipulate external rewards and punishments than it is to somehow connect up with or influence students’ intrinsic reasons for doing something. Yet it is the connection with intrinsic, non-pragmatic motivation (Subbotsky, 1995) that is the most effective and enduring way in which to link moral reasoning with action. Unfortunately, the most common way that children’s moral autonomy is diminished is through teacher efforts at controlling them with rewards and punishments (Deci, 1995). We will return to this issue again in a discussion of consequences for students’ classroom behavior.

***Belonging.*** The need for belonging is built into human beings from the time we are born. Our first expression of this need for belonging is in the attachment we establish as infants with our caregiver, usually our mother. Attachment theory argues that the quality of the mother-infant relationship plays a critical role in a child’s capacity to love and trust (Ainsworth, 1973; Bolby, 1958; Sroufe, 1983). The need for belonging does not end in early childhood, but extends throughout the lifespan. Classroom teachers cannot be expected to replace parents and family as basic sources of love and belonging. However, the classroom and school can go a long way toward supporting children’s sense

of connection and their beliefs about their own self-worth and the trustworthiness of others.

**Competence.** The need for competence is expressed in children's curiosity and efforts to solve puzzles, master skills, and get along with others. Competence is enhanced when students succeed at academic tasks and when they are successful in making friends and sustaining relationships. Moral education does not occur in a vacuum. It is connected to the entirety of the academic and social life of the classroom.

**Fairness.** Fairness is what links autonomy, belonging, and competence to morality. Children construct their sense of fairness in early childhood and employ their understanding of fairness to evaluate teachers and schools as valid institutions. Fairness emerges in relationships based on reciprocity. Children expect and seek fairness from adult authority (Laupa & Turiel, 1986). Teachers who treat students with respect receive respect in return. Students are quite sensitive to teacher displays of unfairness. For example, children are aware of discrimination based on gender and race at early ages and by third grade are able to form expectations that a teacher who was discriminatory in one context is likely to show preferential treatment toward members of a particular gender or race in other situations (Brown & Bigler, 2004). Finally, as we saw in Chapter 4, children and adolescents expect schools and teachers to protect them from harm and exploitation by other students. This protector role of teachers extends from basic safety on the playground to the fair treatment of students through classroom procedures and grading of students' work (Hansen, 1996).

## Moral Development and the Social-Emotional Climate

### ***Early Childhood (Preschool Through Grade 2)***

A climate of acceptance and warmth toward students is an essential element of moral education at any grade level. However, these elements are expressed differently toward students at different ages. Because young children are in the early phase of integrating feelings within their moral and personal schemas, classrooms need to be characterized by positive emotion. Young children are particularly open to warmth from adults and particularly susceptible to the negative effects of adult displays of anger (Cumberland-Li, et al., 2003; Katz & Gottman, 1991). In early childhood classrooms, it is important that teachers be even tempered and refrain from emotional outbursts or shouting at children. The desire that young children have for emotionally calm environments accounts for the immense popularity of television characters such as Barney and Mr. Rogers whose soporific manners bore most adults and older children.

In a broader sense, it is essential that school be perceived as a benign environment in which children are safe from harm and exploitation by others. We want to do whatever possible to enable young children to construct a view of the world as benevolent and fair so that they might construct an orientation of goodwill toward others. This would be particularly important for young children whose experiences outside of school may be less than benign, and which may contribute to an experience of ill will and a consequent tendency to act in terms of self-interest rather than fairness.

### ***Middle Childhood and Early Adolescence (Grades 3–8)***

The climate of acceptance and warmth that characterized the good preschool is also essential at the elementary and middle school levels. Children at this age range are less dependent on adults, but still look to them for emotional support and social stability. Because the formal academic curriculum now assumes greater importance, one critical arena in which teachers determine the emotional climate is through their approach to academic instruction. A positive climate for social and moral growth is enhanced by academic experiences that foster peer interaction and discussion within a setting that allows for people to make mistakes without the risk of being made to look “dumb.” This means that children should be encouraged to ask questions and to risk making mistakes in the process of learning. The key element for the teacher is to convey to students that mistakes are necessary to learning, and that children need to make mistakes if they are to grow. In doing so, the teacher establishes a social context in which differences among people in ability and interest are not used as criteria for inclusion or exclusion from academic activity. In a subtle, experiential way, students are being exposed to a social world in which issues of equity and equal treatment are being integrated. Although this is an important feature of teaching at all ages, it is especially important for children in middle childhood and early adolescence.

A central issue of middle childhood and early adolescence is how the self appears relative to the competencies of others (Nicholls, 1984, 1989). In a focus group that we conducted with fifth-grade children, we learned that the primary source of conflicts at school was peer exclusion. The instigators of the conflicts were said by both boys and girls to be children who were not well liked because of their lack of social skills (shy, nerdy), their inability to perform well in team sports (kickball), or their tendency to pick fights (bullies). An interesting side-light of these discussions was the spontaneous tendency of the children to recognize that it was the act of exclusion that was the primary problem, and not just the characteristics of the children who instigated the fights or arguments that followed.

Being made to look dumb in class or being made the outsider on the playground is not simply a problem of peer culture, but of the school and its values.

Schools can enhance the sense of inclusion through the judicious use of cooperative modes of teaching (Aronson & Patnoe, 1997). They can reduce the harmful effects of peer competition and comparison through recreational forms of team sports (e.g., American Youth Soccer Organization–style soccer) that focus on participation, skill enhancement, and camaraderie rather than loss or victory (Shields & Bredemeier, 2008). Finally, they can refrain from engaging in practices that magnify peer comparisons, such as posting lists of children who have displayed “good character” (Character Counts Coalition, 1993). Such practices do not serve to enhance the values schools wish to promote, but on the contrary exacerbate tendencies toward invidious social comparison—one of the truly negative features of this developmental period.

### ***Adolescence (High School)***

The social climate of the high school should continue to underscore the basic elements of safety and of academic and social participation discussed in regard to earlier grade levels. Integrated participation of students is particularly important at the high school level in order to offset the tendencies toward segregation into cliques and crowds that characterize peer relations at this age. While this self-selection serves the purposes of identity formation, it also works toward exacerbating the problems of social exclusion that emerge during earlier developmental periods (Horn, 2003). Although it should not be the goal of schools to interfere with students’ friendship networks or associations (elements of the personal domain), school should promote a broader sense of community in which students of diverse interests and abilities interact with one another.

This is of particular relevance for students who may be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered (GLBT). In many schools the climate for gay and lesbian youth is negative. Students who are thought to be gay or lesbian frequently report hearing negative comments from other students and school staff, and a high number of students report that they are harassed on a daily basis by other students because of their sexual orientation (Bochenek & Brown, 2001; Rivers & D’Augelli, 2001; Russell, Franz, & Driscoll, 2001). This type of victimization can lead to multiple negative developmental outcomes for youth including such things as depression, substance abuse, and suicide (D’Augelli, 1998). Recent work by Stacey Horn (2006) has shown that there are some positive factors in adolescents’ views about homosexual peers that could be used as the basis to offset this negative situation. What she has discovered is that a large majority of those high school students who have objections to homosexuality also believe that it is wrong to tease or harass fellow students simply because they are gay or lesbian. This rather positive finding, which she has replicated in several settings, indicates that adolescents, including those who hold negative views of homosexuality, are open to moral arguments that would deter peer harassment and teasing of GLBT classmates. Schools can build on this latent tolerance by doing such

things as allowing students to construct Gay-Straight alliances in which heterosexual and homosexual students collaboratively work to improve school climate (Horn & Nucci, 2006). Efforts by schools to support students' moral inclinations against harming fellow students do not require teachers to alter their basic views of homosexuality. However, such efforts do call on teachers to act as moral exemplars of fairness and compassion.

One obstacle to constructing community in American high schools (and in some middle schools) is their sheer size. The advantage of these larger schools with populations in excess of 800 students is that they can offer a much richer curriculum and broader array of extracurricular activities. The disadvantage of larger schools is that on a percentage basis, there is actually less student participation in a given activity and less student participation in such things as sports, school newspaper, and theater, overall.

A number of strategies have been devised to offset the social costs of the large comprehensive high school. What these approaches share in common is the goal of breaking down the total population of the school into smaller, socially diverse units within which students can generate a sense of community. In general these strategies use a common set of courses (e.g., English, history) or a class period (e.g., home room) as a way of identifying "houses" or communities within the school. Teachers and students in a given house remain together for at least one academic year and may use specified times throughout the year to collectively address or discuss social issues. The most well-researched of these school within a school programs are the "Just Community Schools" developed by Lawrence Kohlberg and his colleagues (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989). Published reports indicate that this approach is quite effective in reducing student misconduct and contributes to students' moral development.

A more eclectic recent revival of the school within a school is being attempted on a reasonably large scale within the Chicago Public School system through the Small Schools Workshop originally operated by the University of Illinois at Chicago and now a national organization located at the College of Education of the University of South Florida (Klonsky, 2007). A small school in this approach has a population of 250–400 students. This project and others, such as the Just Community Schools, are pointing the way toward practical approaches for reducing the population of the comprehensive high school into human-scale, diverse social communities. Unlike the Just Community Schools these more eclectic attempts to break down the size of the comprehensive high school are not based on a specific theoretical orientation toward moral development. Nonetheless, research done on the effectiveness of *small* high schools indicates that they contribute to improvements in attendance and graduation rates, sense of community and belongingness, reduction in violence and disruptive behavior, higher academic achievement, and increased teacher satisfaction (Small Schools Workshop Web site: <http://www.smallschoolsworkshop.org/info3.html>).

## ***Facilitating Moral and Social Development Through Discipline***

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Establishing an overall school and classroom moral climate extends beyond the emotional tone of the school to include methods of classroom management and discipline. All approaches to classroom management have two goals in common: control and efficiency. With variations in underlying theory and recommended practices their primary intent is to make academic instruction run smoothly (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). Over the past twenty years, however, developmentally oriented educational researchers have generated approaches to classroom management that have the additional goal of fostering students' social and moral competence (DeVries & Zan, 1994; Nucci, 2006; Watson, 2003). There are some differences in the underlying theories that support the work of these newer developmental approaches. However, they share enough in common that I will borrow from Marilyn Watson (2003) and refer to them collectively as *developmental discipline*.

Developmental discipline is aimed at having the student do what is right for his or her own reasons rather than to receive external rewards or to avoid punishment. The particulars of developmental discipline adjust according to students' age and grade level. There are, however, four central strategies that characterize developmental discipline across grade levels.

1. Focus on building the classroom and school community by:
  - a. Establishing caring, trusting, respectful relationships with each student
  - b. Building respectful, caring relationships among students
2. Teach students the social knowledge and skills they need in order to act in ways that are kind, fair, and responsible.
3. Attend to the antecedents of misbehavior by
  - a. Examining teacher-generated procedures and policies that make student misbehavior likely
  - b. Examining school policies and procedures that make student misbehavior likely
  - c. Examining student needs and motives that are contributing to misbehavior
4. When external control is needed, keep it "light." When possible, choose ways that are noncoercive or punitive. Respond to misbehavior in ways that effectively control or stop the behavior, but that also
  - a. Help the student learn from her or his mistake.
  - b. Minimize the pain or shame that the student will experience.
  - c. Minimize the harm to the student's relationship with the teacher or peers.
  - d. Minimize the student's loss of autonomy or sense of competence.

In this chapter we have already addressed many of the elements of establishing a moral classroom community. What we will take up now are some sug-



gestions for how to respond to misbehavior in ways that foster students' moral and social development. We will begin with a discussion of how to handle moral conduct through social problem solving. We will then explore how to appropriately employ positive feedback and consequences for misbehavior.

## **Facilitating Moral Development Through Social Problem Solving**

### ***Early Childhood (Preschool Through Grade 2)***

The great moral achievement accomplished by young children is the construction of an understanding of fair reciprocity. Because young children generate their initial understandings of morality out of their direct experiences in social interactions, the primary contribution that schools make toward young children's moral development is through the framing of these direct moral experiences. Teachers do this by helping children focus on the effects of actions and their reciprocal implications. For example, a teacher might respond to moral transgressions in the following way:

“Mike, Matthew needs some clay. Please give him some.”

“Veronica, Dawn hasn't had a turn on the swings. Please let her have one.”

In both cases, the teacher statements focus on the needs of the other child, and not simply on the power of the adult. But even these domain-appropriate moral statements lack the element of reciprocity. Although they do connect with the young child's concepts of morality, they do not explicitly direct the child's attention to the reciprocal nature of turn-taking or distribution of goods.

There are two ways for a teacher to do this. One is for the teacher to do all the thinking and lay out the reciprocal implications in statements to the children:

“Mike—how would you like it if Matthew had all the clay, and you didn't have any? He needs some too. So please share with him.”

This is a reasonably efficient way for a teacher to handle the situation, and it makes sense in contexts where the teacher's time is at a premium. The teacher's response is domain appropriate, and it lays out the reciprocal nature of morality and moral justification. However, it does not engage the students in active problem solving and is therefore not an optimal way for a teacher to make use of this situation. A better use of this teachable moment is for the teacher to assist the children in conflict resolution.

The value of engaging children in conflict resolution is that it engages the child in recognizing the contradictions that exist between his own initial way of looking at things, and what is necessary for his own needs and those of another person to be met. This is a slow process that is helped along by the child's inevitable experience of being on more than one side of these prototypical childhood disputes. One

day's owner of the clay or the swing is the next day's child on the sidelines. In Piaget's terms, what takes place is the gradual disequilibrium of the child's current way of thinking, and its gradual replacement by a more adequate reequilibrated form that resolves the contradictions arising from the initial way of looking at things.

From this viewpoint, there is an argument that can be made for allowing the children to solve such problems on their own (Killen, 1991; Piaget, 1932). Allowing children to solve their own problems has the advantage that the solutions generated are "owned" by the children, and the process contributes to the child's autonomy and social efficacy. In point of fact, teachers cannot enter into every conflict situation that arises among children, and observational studies have indicated that teachers allow a fair number of social conflicts among preschool and early elementary children to be resolved without adult intervention (Killen, 1991; Nucci & Nucci, 1982b). In many cases young children handle these disputes quite well. Approximately 70% of preschool children's disputes during free play are resolved by the children themselves either through reconciliation by the instigator, or through compromising and bargaining (Killen, 1991).

Although these findings are impressive, the value of allowing children to solve their problems on their own can be overstated. Adults have the developmental advantage of being able to see both sides of a moral dispute in ways that young children cannot. Moreover, children look to adults to provide protection from exploitation and harm, and to help them work through social problems (Killen, 1991; Nucci & Nucci, 1982b; Youniss, 1980). As was stated before, adults impede moral growth when they reduce moral situations to ones of convention and adult power. Adults contribute to moral growth when they engage children in moral reflection. With respect to conflict resolution, adults contribute to young children's moral growth by assisting them in identifying the sources of the conflict, by helping them to consider the perspective of the other, and by helping them to arrive at mutual solutions. This approach also provides children with experiences that counter the tendency to conclude that the use of sheer power and intimidation are the only methods by which one can achieve personal goals.

In the swing set example above, the teacher might begin by first asking the children to describe what the problem is, to hear each other's viewpoint and feelings, and then help them work toward a solution. We can imagine the following interchange described in Nucci (2001, p. 154):

T: Okay what's the problem?

D: Veronica has been on the swings for a long time, and I haven't had a turn.

T: Veronica, what do you have to say to that?

V: I got on the swing first, and I didn't even get to swing yesterday.

T: Dawn, how do you feel about what Veronica just said?

D: Well, this isn't yesterday, and she is making me really mad.

T: Why is that?

D: It isn't fair. She only gets a turn, and I don't!

T: Well, what do you think we should do?

D: We could share. Veronica could let me swing for a little and then I would let her swing some more.

T: Veronica, Dawn is suggesting that you guys share. Is that something that you can do?

V: Maybe . . . but I should get to have more time than her because I got here first!

T: Well, Dawn—how do you feel about that?

D: Okay, but not all day. I need turns too!

T: Okay, why don't you guys give it a try. I bet you can work something out. Call me if you need any help.

This scenario was loosely based on events commonly observed in our classroom observations, and the discourse format of teacher-child conversations in DeVries and Zan (1994). It illustrates how a teacher can provide a scaffold for children to build their own approach to moral problem solving. The key elements are that the children hear each other's point of view, attend to the harm or fairness issues involved, and offer a mutually satisfying resolution. The key roles for the teacher are to act as an honest broker, to assist in thinking about possible solutions, and to offer support for follow through. This provides a context in which the work is done by the children in an atmosphere of safety and mutual regard.

Naturally, real children do not always engage in cooperative resolutions of conflicts. In such cases, the teacher will need to make a judgment as to whether sufficient harm or injustice is being perpetrated as to warrant a direct intervention by the teacher, or if the issue is one of relatively minor consequence where the children will simply need to deal with the fact that not all situations turn out nicely. For example, if Veronica simply is not interested in sharing, but hasn't really been dominating the swingset, the teacher may simply decide to let things stand as they are. She might say to Dawn, "Well, I am sorry to say that Veronica isn't going to share right now. Perhaps you can come back and use the swings later." One might argue that in doing so, the teacher has rewarded Veronica's "selfishness." This is where a teacher's judgment has to come in. If Veronica does not generally behave in a selfish manner, there is little likelihood that an occasional act of self-interest marks a major shift in "character." It may well be that Veronica has a special desire to swing that day, or that she doesn't particularly like Dawn and is momentarily acting on that dislike. Unless the teacher is clairvoyant, she will have no way of knowing why Veronica has chosen this moment

to act as she has. In this scenario, Veronica's failure to be "nice" may be irrelevant to her level of morality. As for Dawn, she will live to swing another day. In this case, disappointment would not entail moral tragedy, but a practical lesson in human psychology and interpersonal relations. The children's attempt at moral discourse would not have resulted in a solution, but it would raise the underlying issues to a level of consciousness from which both children would stand to benefit.

If, on the other hand, Veronica has dominated the swingset and is simply unreasonable, the teacher would have a moral obligation to protect the rights of the other children and would step in to ensure that Dawn was given a turn. The teacher might also take disciplinary action toward Veronica. We will take up the issue of consequences later in the chapter.

### ***Middle Childhood (Grades 3–6)***

The morality of children by the third or fourth grade of elementary school has the element of reciprocity lacking in the preschool child. However, it is a very literal reciprocity in which fairness requires simply that one not come out on the short end of things. On the plus side, children are now much better able to take into account the needs of the other as well as the self in making moral decisions. On the down side, this tit-for-tat morality has a basic limitation that elementary school teachers will recognize being expressed in the kinds of trouble that elementary school children sometimes get themselves into, and in the instances of insensitivity that children of this age sometimes exhibit.

The social exclusion that our focus group children so readily identified as the primary source of social problems at school is sustained by a morality that views fairness in terms of providing rewards in direct proportion to the quality or amount of one's deeds (Damon, 1977). From this moral orientation, a child who is not a good kickball player is simply not as entitled to play as someone who is a good player. A child who is shy or not socially skilled is less worthy of invitation to a party than someone who is more socially adept. Excluding these children is therefore, not unfair. In addition, there is an element of personal choice involved in that children may view the selection of whom to involve in play or social activity as an aspect of social relations that is a matter of personal prerogative.

Generally, teachers are not involved in helping to resolve these social problems. Unlike the failure to engage in turn-taking, which is an overt act of excluding others from common playground equipment, the decision by children not to include a particular child in their games or activities is often viewed by the teachers as well as the children as a peer matter of choice. On the other hand, children do recognize teachers as having legitimate authority to ensure that school resources (in this case opportunities to play) are distributed in a fair manner. In addition, children expect teachers to protect not simply their physi-

cal safety, but their feelings as well. For a teacher to become involved requires a judgment that a child's exclusion is becoming systematic and, therefore, potentially harmful to the child.

Name calling and fighting are other common examples of moral problems that are compatible with the direct reciprocity morality of middle childhood. One consequence of a morality based on direct reciprocity is that it can lead to the view that any harm requires a commensurate harmful response. This eye-for-an-eye morality leads to a vicious cycle in which, as Martin Luther King put it, all parties end up blind. Virtually every parent and teacher has heard the phrase, "He started it!" as an explanation for name calling or fighting. And, as every parent and teacher knows, the tit-for-tat mentality of children makes efforts to determine "who started it" usually futile.

Domain-appropriate responses to social exclusion and fighting are somewhat different, though in both cases the goal is to direct children to consider the intrinsic moral consequences of their actions. Teachers may do this by engaging in the sorts of domain-concordant feedback described with reference to younger children. In applying this to older children, however, the goal is not simply to get each child to consider the other's perspective, but to help them recognize the limitations that result from strict reciprocity moral reasoning.

Another strategy is to extend the effort at social problem solving described with reference to preschool children by bringing in a peer mediator (Deutsch, 1993). The advantages of engaging a peer mediator to help with conflicts among elementary and middle school children are several. First and foremost, it reduces the tendency for children to see objections to immoral conduct as simply a matter of adult authority. Second, it causes the disputants to see their situation from a third, disinterested vantage point. This third-person perspective moves the issue out of one of direct reciprocity and offers a window into a new way of looking at moral issues. Finally, the act of peer mediation is of benefit to the mediator, who is necessarily engaged in moral discourse and reflection. For example, a study examining the impact of peer mediation on second- through fifth-grade students found that students who had served as peer mediators more often resolved their *own* interpersonal conflicts in ways that took into account the needs of both parties, and were also less likely to ask for adult intervention than children who had not had this mediator experience (Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, Ward, & Magnuson, 1995).

### ***Adolescence (Grades 7–12)***

The rate at which teachers respond to children's moral transgressions begins to decline by the time children enter the fifth grade. By seventh grade, teachers and other school personnel are rarely respondents to children's moral transgressions (Nucci & Nucci, 1982b). The lack of adult response observed at the seventh-grade level was in part a function of the reduction in rates of moral

transgressions that involved overt acts of aggression and squabbles over such things as playground equipment. Most of the moral transgressions observed at the seventh-grade level were in the form of name calling or other forms of psychological harm (Nucci & Nucci, 1982b). Teachers provide relatively low response rates to such transgressions at all age levels including preschool (Killen, 1991), leaving such issues up to processes of peer interaction. Commensurate with the observed decline in adult response rate, older children and adolescents tend to seek out adult intervention for moral interactions at much lower rates than do young children (Nucci & Nucci, 1982b).

At both the junior and senior high school levels, school authorities appear to respond only to severe breaches of moral conduct such as fighting and theft. In most schools, this means that teachers and other school personnel have little direct input into the moral interactions of the vast majority of their students. The contributions that traditional junior and senior high schools make to students' moral growth are through the degree to which conventional norms are fairly applied, the degree of respect and mutuality that exists between teachers and students, and the degree of openness and interaction that exists in the discourse over academic subject matter. In other words, the contribution of junior and senior high school faculty and administrators to students' moral growth (beyond moral elements of the academic curriculum) is through these general structural features of the school and classroom rather than any form of direct teacher involvement in student moral interactions.

Objections to this traditional perspective have been raised by those who argue that it is only through direct social experience that students can develop as moral beings, and that academic discourse is insufficient without a direct linkage to students' actual lives (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989). The primary proponents of this point of view are the advocates of democratic education (Lind, 1996; Oser & Veugelers, 2003) and the Just Community school (Power, et al., 1989). What these approaches share in common are mechanisms by which students come together as a community to openly discuss the moral issues they are confronting within the school context (e.g., thefts, student exclusion or isolation, sexual conduct, racism), in order to arrive at a rational moral consensus (cf. Habermas, 1991; Oser & Veugelers, 2003) for how such issues should be resolved. Often these resolutions involve the construction of shared moral norms, which are then used to guide the conduct of members of the Just Community (Power et al., 1989).

In order for these "just communities" to work, schools must give instructional time on a regular (weekly) basis for students to hold these town hall-style meetings. They must also give to the students and their community advisors the authority to alter, add to, or abolish existing school rules that affect these "quality of life" issues for students. Students are not empowered to change the basic academic framework of the school, but rather those norms that pertain to prob-

lematic areas of their moral interactions. Despite evidence that such just communities result in behavioral and cognitive moral growth, few schools in the United States have adopted this holistic approach.

The value of working with high school students to help solve moral problems is being highlighted in a recent controversial effort to reduce gang-related violence in the Chicago public schools. Many inner city high schools are plagued with violent fights instigated by gang affiliations. In the past, the typical response of Chicago Public School authorities has been to call in police and attempt to quell violence through force and punishment. In 2003 there were 8,900 arrests of students for participation in fights. In 2006 the rate of such arrests dropped by nearly 20% (*Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 19, 2006). This drop in the arrest rate is directly attributable to a policy adopted by some high schools in which fights are quickly quelled by school staff, and gang leaders are brought in by the school principal to gain an understanding of the causes of the fight. Rather than arrest or expel the students involved in the fight, the principal engages in discussion with the students along with a parent or guardian. Generally, there are consequences, but not incarceration. Discussions with gang leaders often lead to information that permits the administrator to alert neighborhood police to head off any escalation outside the school.

This is an extreme situation at the end point of experiences in which some students have long since lost their sense of trust. A school principal involved in this new approach acknowledges the difficulty of the task brought on by his commitment to negotiation over suppression. However, he is convinced that his school is safer than when he resorted to simply handing the problem over to police. In his words, “You never give up your building . . . and you don’t let it fester. This is my reality, and I can’t make it go away by hiding from it. We owe it to these children to do everything we can to help them” (*Chicago Tribune*, 2006).

### **Facilitating Social Development Through the Judicious Use of Consequences**

As was evident in the example of gang-related fighting, there are some situations in which consequences for misconduct are clearly called for. The goal of all effective classroom management is to anticipate problems and to avoid the need for consequences. In Chapter 4 we discussed the wisdom of eliminating unneeded classroom conventions that are guaranteed to generate high levels of noncompliance. Managing the antecedents to misbehavior would also include attention to the academic demands of the classroom that might tax the ability of a student to stay on task. This can be as simple as making sure that all students have access to materials at their reading level to providing synopses of longer readings that would exceed the ability of attention deficit disordered students to complete. However, even when a teacher attends to students’ needs for at-

tention and power, and does all that is reasonable to address academics and school norms, children will still misbehave. This should come as no great surprise to teachers who, having brilliantly taught an academic lesson, will nevertheless see mistakes on tests. Social development is no exception to the simple fact that making mistakes is part of the process of growth and development.

### ***Supporting Positive Behavior***

One way to avoid discipline problems in the classroom is to provide feedback that supports children's positive behavior. This feedback can come in the form of tangible rewards, but most often comes in the form of adult praise. Although the use of positive feedback and rewards can help sustain and guide a child's developing morality, an overreliance on rewards and positive adult feedback can backfire and actually undermine the child's moral motivation (Deci, 1995). The limitations of external reinforcement are most readily apparent with the case of offering children tangible rewards for their good behavior. There is a substantial research literature indicating that providing external rewards to children, such as gold stars or stickers, reduces their tendency to spontaneously engage in the rewarded behavior. In other words, children shift from engaging in the behaviors for their own intrinsic reasons, toward doing things simply for the "money."

Marilyn Watson (2003) strenuously argues that any use of rewards is antithetical to her conception of developmental discipline. I would argue in contrast that one can distinguish between the use of rewards that serve to *validate* what the student is already motivated to do, and the use of rewards as a means of "shaping" the student's behavior to conform to the wishes of adults (Deci, 1995). For example, a student who has consistently treated classmates with kindness and generosity might well respond to a "citizenship" award as reflecting social validation for her actions, rather than as an effort to shape her behavior. On the other hand, the routine awarding of pins or other emblems and the weekly public listing of the names of students who have displayed "virtue" or "character," as advocated by some neo-traditionalist programs (cf., Character Counts), exemplify how *not* to support children's positive behavior (Kohn, 1997). In such cases, the rewards become overt sources of competition, and commodities in and of themselves. They may temporarily serve to mold and shape students' conduct, but they also undermine the very motives such programs seek to instill.

Similarly, in providing praise to a student, we need to differentiate positive statements that validate children and encourage their efforts at moral action from "controlling praise" that serves the adult's desire to "mold and shape" the student. Controlling praise focuses attention on the child rather than the child's actions, is nonspecific in content, and often employs terms that are superlative in nature. Examples of such praise are: "Allison, you are such a good girl"; "Jack, you are the nicest child I have had in class in years." The effect of controlling praise is to give the child a momentary boost in self-esteem, but at the cost of



setting the bar at an unrealistically high level. Is it realistic to assume that Allison and Jack are always going to be so superlatively well behaved? Second, the feedback to the child says little about what it is that warranted being labeled “such a good girl” or “the nicest child in years.” Any reasons that the children might have had for doing the behaviors that won them their accolades are lost in the focus on the evaluations of the children themselves. Thus, one risk associated with controlling praise is that it moves the desire to engage in a behavior from intrinsic valuing of the action to an ego-oriented focus on one’s own perceived social status (Nicholls, 1989). The moral self that is constructed on this basis may be superficially oriented toward behaving morally, but not for moral reasons. The child who needs to always be “such a good boy” in order to fit social expectations is not operating out of moral motivation, but in order to sustain external approval.

In contrast, praise that takes the form of encouragement uses moderate language and focuses on the specifics of the action. Such praise lets the student know that his actions are appreciated, and also indicates that it is the actions that are being evaluated, and not the child himself. Examples of validating praise would be: “Tatiana, that was a kind thing that you just did. I am sure that Marcy appreciated the time you spent with her when she wasn’t feeling well.” “Mike, thanks for helping clean up the room. It makes everything better for everyone. I really appreciate it.” Encouraging praise is especially effective as a response to what we might refer to as “everyday acts of character.” In the previous example, Mike might have been one of the children who never helped with cleanup time. For him to have done so might well have taken considerable personal effort. Acknowledgment from the teacher in the form of thanks would let him know that his efforts were recognized and his contribution validated. The teacher might even add a word of encouragement to “keep up the good work.” Of course, a behaviorist might justifiably argue that such positive feedback is serving to shape Mike’s positive social behavior. There is no reason to quibble over this point. The key elements are whether the teacher acts out of a genuine sense of appreciation, and whether Mike interprets the statement as validating his own efforts. In any case, praise should be used *sparingly* and directed at specific acts rather than at the characteristics of children.

### ***Responding to Misbehavior***

An essential aspect of all learning is making mistakes. It would be nice to believe that moral education is a matter of guiding children down the “right” path, but the fiction of “error-free” learning has even less to do with morality than other aspects of education. Although children are rarely, if ever, motivated to purposefully make mistakes in academic areas, the very nature of moral misconduct is that it often involves actions that are counter to what the child knows to be the “right” thing to do. Correcting errors in the moral area is not simply a matter

of pointing out mistakes, but also helping the child to choose to act in ways that are not always concordant with his or her immediate desires. What Piaget (1962) referred to as a “conflict of will” is what is at stake, and not simply a question of the “objectively” right thing to do.

Helping the child to choose to want to do the right thing is in part a function of teachers’ disciplinary responses to children’s misbehavior. Consequences provided to students in response to their misbehavior should not take the form of expiatory punishments designed solely to inflict discomfort or cost to the student (DeVries & Zan, 1994). A classic example of an expiatory punishment is spanking. A classic example from school would be detention. Expiatory punishments are to be avoided because they do not provide the student with any reason beyond the pragmatic goals of punishment avoidance as a motivation for action. Because students associate expiatory punishments with the person meting them out, rather than with their own misconduct, such punishments invite revenge and provide students with a sense that they have the right to retaliate. In other words, the morality of the situation becomes turned on its head as the student, guilty of misconduct, now becomes in his or her own mind the aggrieved party. An example that some readers might relate to would be getting “grounded” by your parents for some misbehavior. My university students can invariably recall examples from adolescence when this happened to them. To a person, they have difficulty even remembering the specifics of their misbehavior. However, they have no problem whatsoever in conjuring up the sense of outrage they felt toward their parents at the time. Frequent use of expiatory punishment by a teacher transforms the emotional climate of the classroom into an environment of “ill will” that supports students’ self-protective and “selfish” motivations.

Instead, sanctions should take the form of logical consequences connected in a meaningful way with the nature of the transgression (DeVries & Zan, 1994). Logical consequences include such things as restitution, depriving the transgressor of the thing misused, and exclusion. Because of the nonarbitrary, reciprocal nature of morality, it is somewhat easier to envision logical consequences for moral transgressions than for violations of social conventions. For example, if a child takes something away from another child, a logical consequence would be for the child to have to replace it. However, even conventions, once in place, have a logic associated with their function. A student who talks disruptively during story time might be asked by the teacher to leave the story area until he or she is able to rejoin the group and sit quietly. If this sanction is coupled with a domain-appropriate statement of the rule or social organizational function of the norm, the student is likely to see the connection between the sanction and the misbehavior. An indefinite or extended expulsion from the story area, however, would shift the consequence away from the behavior, and become an arbitrary, expiatory punishment rather than a logical consequence (DeVries & Zan, 1994).

Teachers can increase the likelihood that students will accept the logical consequences of misbehavior by engaging them in group discussions about patterns of misbehavior occurring in the classroom, and seeking their advice on how to avoid or reduce such problems in the future (Battistich et al., 1997; DeVries & Zan, 1994). In Chapter 4 we discussed the use of group discussions as a way of engaging children in the consideration of what rules should be in place to regulate or help guide students' conduct. In this case, the discussion concerns what to do about behaviors that the children agree are problematic. Through group discussion, the teacher can guide students, especially in elementary and middle school, to generate ideas about what would constitute appropriate logical consequences. Part of the teacher's role is to help the children focus on prevention of misbehavior. By engaging children in such discourse, the consequences of misconduct are moved from a top-down, adult-imposed act of power, to autonomously constructed, logical outcomes reflecting values shared by the children.

Finally, an ethical response to students' misconduct must allow for student reentry and acceptance into the social group. Once the logical consequence has been met, the child must have the opportunity to move forward as a class member. Otherwise, the logical consequence is transformed into expiatory punishment with all the negative ramifications already discussed. This is a fairly easy requirement to meet when it comes to typical transgressions of social convention. It is not always so easy when the transgression involves moral consequences to other classmates. Although the teacher may be willing to move forward, the students may be unwilling to risk interactions with someone who had caused them pain or injustice. In such cases, as with an aggressive child, the teacher needs to help the transgressor understand the connections between aggressive conduct and the responses of his or her classmates. The teacher must also help the other students to recognize that they would not want to be permanently excluded either. This requires patience and persistence on the teacher's part and is helped or hindered by the overall moral and emotional climate of the school and classroom.

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## Summary

Schools and classrooms contribute to students' moral development through the nature of the overall social and emotional climate. This includes the way in which teachers and schools address behavioral issues through classroom management and discipline.

Paying attention to the emotional climate of classrooms is important because children incorporate emotional experiences within their social cognitive schemes.

Variations in the emotional experiences of children can affect their moral orientations. The development of morality in children is supported by experiences of emotional warmth and fairness. Children who grow up in such environments tend to construct a view of the world based on goodwill. A child who maintains an orientation of goodwill feels emotionally secure and expects the world to operate according to basic moral standards of fairness. Children who maintain this orientation are more likely to engage in prosocial behavior. A moral classroom climate is one that fosters this tendency toward goodwill. The elements of a moral classroom climate address the following four needs: autonomy, belonging, competence, and fairness.

In early childhood it is especially important to construct a classroom climate characterized by positive emotion. In middle childhood students are less dependent on adults. However, they become more susceptible to social comparison and peer exclusion. A positive moral climate reduces competition and increases opportunities for peer collaborative learning and social problem solving. In adolescence the challenge is to offset the negative impact of student cliques and tendencies toward alienation. Large high schools pose special challenges for the creation of moral community. The Just Community School and the Small Schools movement are efforts to address this challenge through “schools within schools.”

A positive moral atmosphere is complemented by behavioral management in the form of *developmental discipline*. In addition to the goals of control and efficiency common to all approaches to behavioral management, developmental discipline includes the additional goal of fostering students’ social and moral competence. Developmental discipline engages students’ intrinsic motivation to do what is right for their own reasons. Developmental discipline deemphasizes the use of external rewards and punishments to shape behavior. Conflicts and misbehavior are addressed primarily through social problem solving. Teacher discourse provides suggestions and scaffolding to support students’ efforts to resolve disputes and arrive at fair solutions.

Teacher feedback in support of positive behavior avoids the use of external rewards such as gold stars or certificates of recognition for good conduct or character because such external rewards reduce intrinsic moral motivation. Moral action and compliance with school conventions is aided by teachers’ judicious use of positive feedback in the form of validations that use moderate language referring to specific behavior and not the characteristics of the student.

Responses to misbehavior should minimize the use of consequences when alternative problem-solving methods are available. When consequences are to be employed they should be “light” and in the form of logical consequences that are connected in a meaningful way to the nature of the transgression.