Moral and character educators working from different philosophical perspectives have generally acknowledged a major role in students’ moral development of the “hidden curriculum” manifested in the interpersonal environment of schools and classrooms. Dewey (1909/1975), for example, argued that the mode of social life and the nature of the school community were far more important factors in students’ moral growth than direct moral instruction. Ryan (1986), from a quite different theoretical perspective, argues that “very little of the moral education that inevitably occurs in the schools is formally recorded in lesson plans, curriculum guides, or behavioral objectives.” Rather, students develop their “conceptions of what being a good person entails” from such aspects of schooling as the rules that are or are not enforced, the rituals and procedures of daily classroom life, the expectations for and consequences of their behavior, and their teachers’ warnings, advice, and manner (p. 228).

During the first half of the twentieth century, classroom instruction in American schools focused on civic and moral virtues as well as academic competencies (Brophy, 2006). However, by the 1970s, Americans lost interest in instruction in virtues and morals in public education and good classroom management was about efficient control of students to optimize academic learning. The earlier view that classroom management and discipline might also serve to support students’ social and moral development had retreated so far into the background that Walter Doyle’s chapter on classroom organization and management for the 1986 *Handbook of Research on Teaching* didn’t even mention potential social or moral outcomes.

Facing increased pressure for higher levels of academic learning, teachers felt the need for easy and efficient classroom control. Efficient and sometimes elaborate control systems, generally guided by behaviorism’s view of children as self-interested and needing to be shaped by extrinsic reinforcers, spread to schools across the country. Lee Cantor’s *Assertive Discipline* (1976) is probably the best known and most influential of these approaches. By 1980, the predominant approach to classroom
management and discipline in American public schools focused on control of students’ behavior by rewards and punishments and traditional citizenship goals had been largely abandoned.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

On a parallel track, alternative approaches to managing children's behavior were generated out of clinical psychology (Dreikurs, 1968; Glasser, 1969; Gordon, 1974). These approaches viewed children as having legitimate needs and their misbehavior the result of choosing misguided means for satisfying those needs. Consistent with developmental/constructivist principles, these approaches stress the importance of understanding the reasons behind student misbehavior, but they are not truly developmental. Students are viewed like adults as rational, capable, and socially oriented. Teachers are advised to remain impersonal, as an analyst might, and help students recognize and solve their own problems. For example, Gordon stresses the importance of demonstrating attention to and concern for a student’s problem by reflecting the student’s statements back, thereby helping the student clarify the problem and find his or her own solution. While respectful of a child’s good will and autonomy, he does not make adjustments for children’s developmental levels, but rather argues that the methods he advocates “are equally useful and applicable for effective teaching of students of all ages” (1974, p. 13).

Glasser’s approach stresses the importance of positive teacher–child relationships and of involving students in class meeting to create class rules and discuss problems. His ten step approach to student misbehavior begins by improving the teacher–student relationship, involves several steps in which the student describes and strives to create a plan to stop the misbehavior, and ends with three successive steps, in-school suspension, home suspension, and finally removal to another institution. Again, there is much in this approach that is consistent with developmental theory—involving students in setting and discussing rules and problems, and allowing students time to think about their behaviors and solve their own problems. However, the lack of a focus on adult guidance is strikingly non-developmental.

The third therapeutic approach developed by Rudolf Dreikurs has a darker view of children and a more controlling role for teachers (Kohn, 1996). Dreikurs stresses four basic goals for student misbehavior; to gain attention, to exert power, to exact revenge, or to gain sympathy by feigning incompetence. Teachers are instructed to build positive relationships in the classroom and to respond to student misbehavior based on one of these four potential causes. Dreikurs believed that students would willingly abandon their inappropriate goals when confronted with them. If they did not, he advised against expiatory punishments, recommending instead what he called natural or logical consequences. However, in Dreikur’s own writing and in the application his principles received in schools, natural and logical consequences are often thinly disguised punishments (Kohn, 1996). For example, a child who tips his chair is made to stand throughout a lesson, and a child who forgets lunch money is made to go without lunch (Dreikurs & Grey, 1968).

There is much about these approaches to appeal to developmentalists—the focus on understanding student needs, the respect for student rationality, the idea that students have within them the power to solve their own problems, and for some the idea
of controlling behavior using natural or logical consequences. But these approaches lack a developmental perspective—a sense of what the developmental tasks are for children of different ages and the appropriate role of adults in assisting the child’s development. Some ideas from these programs have been influential in shaping current developmental approaches to classroom management, for example helping the child understand the causes of his or her misbehavior and problem-solving class meetings (DeVries & Zan, 1994; Kohn, 1996; Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989; Watson & Ecken, 2003). However, the approaches described above often become punitive, especially when dealing with troubled children from stressful environments (Kohn, 1996). Finally, they place little emphasis on the moral development of students.

EDUCATION FOR MORAL AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

In the 1980s there was a resurgence of interest in the school’s role in moral or character education. In response to a Gallup poll, 84% of respondents who had children in public schools favored moral instruction and the United States Secretary of Education called for teachers to help students become good people as well as good students (Ryan, 1986).

The traditional approach to teaching values easily fit with the then predominant direct instruction approach to academic learning and controlling approaches to classroom management (Ryan, 1989). Whether transmitting values or math skills, the educational processes of telling, modeling, practice, and correction would be the same. Likewise, whether motivating learning or good behavior the principles of reward and punishment would apply. Adding character education to the goals of schooling did not require a rethinking of the whole educational endeavor.

Moral educators working in cognitive-developmental or social constructivist paradigms faced many more barriers to implementing their programs in public schools. From the perspective of these educators the mainstream views, 1) of education as the transmission of knowledge, 2) of learning as passive acceptance, and 3) of classroom management and discipline as behavioral control, were wholly unacceptable. Drawing from the work of Piaget (1932/1965), cognitive developmentalists argued that autonomy not obedience and understanding not remembering are the proper aims of education (Copple, Sigel, & Saunders, 1979; DeVries & Zan, 1994; Kamii, 1984; Kohlberg & Meyer, 1972). Also, constructivist educators’ view of children as naturally predisposed toward cooperation and learning was directly contrary to the negative view of children as self-interested and work avoidant that predominated in American public education. Moral or character educators applying developmental, constructivist principles needed to create alternative approaches to teaching, classroom management, and discipline and seek alternative venues to hone their approaches.

Kohlberg and his colleagues focused on small, experimental high schools which they organized into “just communities” (Power et al., 1989). Others, for example, Rheta DeVries (DeVries & Zan, 1994), Constance Kamii (1984), and Irving Siegel (Copple et al., 1979), focused on preschool, where the existing views were more compatible. However, the Child Development Project (Brown & Solomon, 1983; Solomon, Battistitch, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000) focused at the elementary level with the goal of working with existing teachers and administrators to craft ways to integrate a moral focus into all aspects of school learning.
THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL DISCIPLINE

During the 1960s and 1970s, social and motivational psychologists working from a variety of theoretical perspectives created a substantial body of research related to children’s moral or prosocial development (e.g., Baumrind, 1967; Hoffman, 1975; Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972; Peck & Havighurst, 1960; Pitkanen-Pulkkinen, 1980; Sroufe, 1983; Staub, 1971, 1975; Stayton, Hogan, & Ainsworth, 1971; Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1979). (See Solomon, Watson, & Battistich 2001 for a review of this research.)

This research along with constructivist developmental theory led developmentally oriented educators to create new approaches to classroom management and discipline. All of these approaches have similar assumptions and goals and all stress the necessity of creating a caring or just community as a first principle. (See Watson & Battistich, 2006 for a detailed description of these community approaches to classroom management.)

For example, once the staff of the Child Development Project realized how extensively children’s behavior in their elementary schools was controlled by rewards and punishments, they began designing an alternative approach to classroom discipline. They argued this approach would need to fulfill four conditions (Watson, Solomon, Battistich, Schaps, and Solomon, 1989).

1. The teacher–child relationships would need to be warm, supportive, and mutually trusting.
2. The classroom would need to be a caring, democratic community in which each child’s needs for competence, autonomy, and belonging are met.
3. Children would need opportunities to discuss and refine their understanding of moral values and how they apply to everyday life in the classroom.
4. To help children act in accordance with prosocial values, teachers would need to use both proactive and reactive control techniques that enhance (or at least do not undermine) the above goals.

What Does It Mean To Be Prosocial Or Morally Competent?

To act morally one must act for moral reasons, e.g., to help another or live up to a moral value. Acting to avoid punishment, gain pleasure, emulate a powerful model, or please authority is not moral action. Therefore, a morally supportive management and discipline system must foster students’ empathic caring and moral awareness, while minimizing or avoiding the enticement of desirable behavior through praise, rewards, and punishments.

Moral competency also requires that one knows how to carry out the actions that are called for by one’s moral values, and have the stamina to act morally in the face of obstacles. Thus, a management and discipline system focused on supporting moral growth will need to focus on teaching the social and emotional competencies required for moral action and help students build moral stamina (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2005). (See Narvaez, 2006 for a description and discussion of a wide range of competencies involved in competent moral action.) Let us turn now to the four necessary components of a developmental approach to classroom management and discipline supportive of moral development.
Warm, Nurturing, and Trusting Teacher–Child Relationships

Arguing for warm, nurturing, trusting teacher–child relationships may seem like arguing for tasty, nutritious school lunches. Who could argue otherwise? However, if one views children as essentially self-interested, a view that undergirds most control oriented management and discipline systems, it would be difficult to feel warm, nurturing, or trusting when children do not behave as we wish. One might feel warm, nurturing, and trusting toward some children, those who behave well, but not toward children who regularly misbehave. As the following comment from a high school student indicates, many classrooms lack warm, nurturing, trusting teacher–child relationships (Watson, 2006).

Tara: It’s like nobody’s really pushing us to do our best. If you don’t understand . . . they’ll think that you’re not understanding on purpose.

Teaching techniques for controlling students is considerably easier than teaching how to build nurturing, trusting relationships. For many teachers, it requires changing their understanding of children, an understanding they have acquired over years of hearing about rewards, reinforcements, and self-interest. However, both developmental theory and research on family socialization practices compel us to undertake this task.

A substantial body of research supports the view that children’s moral development is positively related to warm, nurturing, and autonomy supportive parenting styles. Morally mature children were more likely to have been raised in families where their parents were sensitive to their needs and emotionally involved as opposed to distant. These parents trusted their children, involved them in decision making, and allowed reasonable freedom and responsibility (Solomon et al., 2001). If one assumes that the teacher’s role as an agent for moral growth should be similar to the parent’s role, the research clearly points to the importance of teachers building warm, nurturing, and trusting relationships with students.

The centrality of such relationships to moral development is not only supported by empirical studies. It is consistent with several powerful theoretical perspectives on children’s development. For example, care theorists Gilligan (1982), Kerr (1996), and Noddings (2002) argue that a commitment to care is central to morality and that children learn to become caring by being in caring relationships. Attachment theorists argue that when children are reared in an environment in which their caretakers are available and respond sensitively to their needs, “a disposition for obedience—and indeed a disposition to become socialized—tends to develop” (Stayton et al., 1971, p. 1059). This view of children as developing a cooperative stance to the world based on their cooperative interactions with their caregivers is also consistent with Vygotsky’s view of the child as an apprentice to the adult and Piaget’s view of the role of parent–child cooperation in socialization. For example, in The Moral Judgment of the Child (1932/1965) Piaget says:

There is a spontaneous mutual affection [between parents and children], which from the first prompts the child to acts of generosity, and even of self-sacrifice, to very touching demonstrations which are in no way prescribed. And here no doubt is the starting point for that morality of good…

(p. 195)
From the perspective of Developmental Discipline it is the experience of warm, nurturing, trusting caregiver–child relationships that gives rise to a core aspect of morality, the desire to be caring and cooperative. For many children this desire will already have been kindled in their family. But still, if the classroom is not a caring place, if, for example, students need to compete with each other to obtain teacher attention and favor, then, at the very least, they may find it difficult to behave in caring ways in the classroom. Worse, they may come to think that treating others fairly and kindly applies only at home. They may come to believe that it is justified to shun or tease the students who are less able or who are frequently “disciplined.” Even for initially caring or cooperative students an uncaring classroom is unlikely to further and may even hinder moral development.

However, some students arrive at school never having experienced the kind of sensitive, nurturing relationships that allowed them to view others as caring, themselves as worthy of care, and relationships as cooperative (Sroufe, 1988, 1996). These are also the students most likely to cause difficulties in the classroom. Depending on the nature of their earlier experiences, they are likely to have poor social skills, lower impulse control, and greater dependency needs, or to be particularly aggressive and defiant (Cohn, 1990; Howes & Hamilton, 1992; Pianta, Nimetz, & Bennett, 1997; Sroufe, 1983, 1988, 1996; Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986). These children will be mistrustful of their teachers and if teachers view them as capable but self-interested, it will be difficult to like them, let alone form warm, trusting relationships. But without such a relationship these students will not have a basis for building a moral world view—a view of relationships as cooperative and reciprocal.

What’s Involved in Forming Caring Teacher–Child Relationships? A caring relationship requires not only that the caregiver be reasonably successful in meeting the legitimate needs of the one cared for, but also that the one cared for perceive the caring intent (Noddings, 2002). With Developmental Discipline teachers are helped to view students as wanting to learn and wanting to have mutually caring relationships, but often needing help in doing so. This will be easier if teachers begin the year with a focus on getting to know each student personally and, because many students will be mistrustful of their teachers, on conveying to each student that they like and care about them. Instead of a focus on being in control or “not smiling ‘til Christmas,” teachers are advised to do nice things for students, seriously engage their issues and concerns, share their own experiences and stories, and bring fun and humor into the classroom.

Building a Caring, Just, Democratic Learning Community

In addition to a trusting teacher–child relationship, a classroom that supports students’ moral development must meet other student needs. Studies of human motivation demonstrate that to flourish children need to experience not only a sense of belonging—that they are loved—but also a sense of competence—that they are capable and seen as capable by others—and a sense of autonomy—that their actions are consistent with what they want or believe they should do (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Nicholls, 1989; White, 1959).

In cognitive developmental theory, the ideal adult–child relationship supportive of moral growth “is characterized by mutual respect and cooperation” in an environment where children have the possibility to interact with one another and to regulate their behavior voluntarily (DeVries, Zan, Hildebrandt, Edmiasto, & Sales, 2002, p. 17). Dewey (1916/1966) and Kohlberg and his colleagues (Power et al., 1989) stress the power of
participation in a democratic or just community for fostering moral development and a commitment to democratic ideals. In social-constructivist theory, children are viewed as biologically predisposed to seek cooperative relationships with more accomplished others (adults) around meaningful tasks within their community (Vygotsky, 1968). Through these collaborative interactions “the child acquires the ‘plane of consciousness’ of the natal society and is socialized, acculturated, made human” (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 30).

Thus, a constructivist developmental approach to classroom management and discipline needs to involve students in actually creating and maintaining their learning community. They will need ways to influence decisions that affect the community and opportunities to take responsibility for the community. Teachers will need to provide for student choice and explanations for externally imposed rules or requirements. They will need to help students develop the skills of friendship and self-regulation. Thus, Developmental Discipline involves some form of collaborative learning—opportunities for students to learn and work together in fair and caring ways under the guidance of the teacher. It also involves explicit teaching of strategies to resolve conflicts fairly, class meetings for influencing community decisions and life, and class jobs or responsibilities. Teachers are also advised to limit competition, focusing instead on each student’s accomplishments while encouraging students to help one another.

Providing Opportunities to Discuss and Think about Moral Values

Developmental theory and research (Berkowitz, Gibbs, & Broughton, 1980; Blatt & Kohlberg, 1975; Nucci, 2001; Oser, 1986) and studies of the family practices of morally mature children (Peck & Havighurst, 1960; Pitkanen-Pulkkinen, 1980; Walker & Taylor, 1991) indicate a positive influence on children’s moral development of moral discourse. Care theory also stresses the importance of morally relevant conversations to students’ positive development (Noddings, 2005). Such conversations can happen as part of the study of literature and history, in response to individual student actions or questions, and in class meetings to make decisions or reflect on class experiences. For example, in the CDP program such conversations often occur at the beginning and end of collaborative learning activities as students are asked to reflect on and discuss ways to treat one another fairly and kindly and their level of success at doing so (Developmental Studies Center, 1997; Watson, Solomon, Dasho, Shwartz, & Kendzior, 1994).

Ways We Want Our Class to Be. Instead of specific lists of do’s and don’ts such as “Keep your hands and feet to yourself” or “Listen when the teacher is talking,” most developmental approaches to discipline and classroom management engage students in deciding rules based in moral principles. Learning to Trust (Watson & Ecken, 2003) at the elementary level and Moral Classrooms/Moral Children (DeVries & Zan, 1994) at the preschool level describe different but related processes for devising class rules through discussion, careful questioning, and guiding by the teacher. In the Just Community (Power et al., 1989) high school students have opportunities for moral discussion in small student advisories and discuss and make all the rules for the school in whole school meetings along with faculty. Teachers can influence the decisions through the power of moral persuasion, but not the power of authority.

Even very young children understand the moral principle of reciprocity and possess such basic moral knowledge as it’s wrong to hurt another without reason or to treat people unfairly (Nucci & Turiel, 1978). Thus, they will describe a moral classroom when
invited to seriously reflect on how they want their class to be. When children are helped
to devise general rules and procedures in these ways, moral concepts such as kindness,
fairness, and respect are partly defined by the specific examples and become class guide-
lines replacing the more traditional lists of specific required behaviors. It becomes clearer
to students that when teachers find it necessary to enforce rules, they are exercising moral
authority not just the authority of their position.

**Control Techniques—Structure, Guidance, and Responses to Misbehavior**

In any classroom, sheer numbers of children as well as their levels of immaturity make it
necessary for teachers to exert control. While Developmental Discipline is not primarily
about control, how teachers achieve control is important and can be a powerful force
for moral development. How students respond to their teachers' efforts at control will
depend in large part on the quality of the teacher–student relationship—hence Devel-
opmental Discipline's initial focus on relationship building. When students view the
teacher as responsive to their needs, they are more likely to respond to control efforts in a
cooperative spirit. Teachers and students will be able to achieve what Piaget (1932/1965)
and others have called a cooperative approach to discipline—an approach that will lead
to an autonomous morality (DeVries et.al., 2002; Kamii, 1984). Conversely, how and
how much teachers exercise control will affect the student–teacher relationship. In the
sections that follow, the principle control techniques consistent with Developmental
 Discipline are described and discussed.

**Indirect Control.** Shaping the environment to interfere with potential misbehavior or
facilitate desirable behavior can make classroom life easier for everyone. How teachers
design the environment will depend on their learning goals and the behaviors they want
to facilitate or prevent. For example, seating students in rows makes it harder for them
to talk and observe one another's work, while seating students in table groups encour-
ages conversation and work sharing. Assigning partners for group work helps to assure
that all students have opportunities to work with and build friendly relationships with
one another, while allowing students to choose work partners honors autonomy. T each-
ers may make these decisions themselves, for example, to help students easily sit in a
circle for class meetings a kindergarten teacher might place a circle of tape on the floor
or arrange seating such that more distractible students are in areas with fewer distrac-
tions. Alternatively, teachers might engage the students in drawing up a set of guidelines
that will help the classroom run more smoothly. For example, a second grade teacher
might use a series of class meetings to devise and assess the effectiveness of guidelines for
leaving the classroom to use the restroom.

Involving students in determining the guidelines and structures that, once established,
will exert control is ideal from a developmental perspective. When students are involved in
creating structures that facilitate the smooth functioning of the classroom their autonomy
is honored and they are helped to understand why the rules and structures are necessary.
In *Moral Classroom/Moral Children*, DeVries and Zan (1994), provide several examples
of ways to involve students in decisions about nearly all the rules or procedures in pre-
school classrooms. For example, if a teacher wants to begin the year with a rule limiting the
number of students in the block areas, the teacher can alert the students to the problem she
is anticipating by asking the students if the whole class can fit in the block center at the same
time. Then he or she can guide the students in answering the question, “What guidelines do
we need so everyone can have a fair turn with blocks?” (p. 129).
However, for efficiency teachers will often need to take full control in some areas in order to make room for autonomous learning in others. While acknowledging that taking full control, even indirect control, robs students of both autonomy and opportunities to learn, the judicious use of teacher determined structures, rules, and procedures designed to lessen problems and facilitate the teacher’s goals and objectives is fully consistent with Developmental Discipline. Fortunately, elementary school children are quite willing to grant teachers the power to regulate a fair number of school and classroom procedures (Nucci, 2001). It is important, however, that teachers offer explanations for the structures if they are questioned, be willing to change them if students present good reasons for so doing, and organize their classrooms to assure that students have meaningful opportunities to act autonomously and solve non-trivial problems on their own.

Hopefully the following examples of teachers’ choices in situations in which indirect control might or might not be used illustrate the range of possibilities consistent with a developmental approach to discipline. In the first example, a teacher in an inner-city second–third grade class carefully chooses the children who sit at each of the five tables, changing table groups every month. For academic tasks involving partners, this teacher assigns partners either randomly or based on her judgment of optimal pairings for the given activity. When students groan about not being able to work with their preferred friends or try to trade partners, the teacher acknowledges that they might be disappointed not to get to work with their best friends, but that her goal for the class is for them to learn to work with everybody and to see that everybody in the class is worth getting to know. To facilitate tenuous partnerships, she teaches the students how to greet a partner in a friendly way even if they are disappointed, and works hard to facilitate successful interactions of partnerships when the initial interactions seemed tentative or unfriendly.

Because this is a situation where the students really did mind not having the autonomy to make their own choices, the teacher needed to work hard at establishing this ground rule and used a good deal of humor before the students accepted the teacher’s control. The following vignette illustrates one of the humorous ways this teacher made her exercise of control more palatable.

With some students, if they don’t get exactly who they want to work with, they’ll say, “I’m not working with them!” So what I’ve been doing when I introduce a partner activity is to say, “Now, we’re going to work with partners in this activity, and I don’t care if you get Captain Hook for a partner, If you get Captain Hook, I want you to say, ‘I’m glad to be hooked up with you, let’s get to work.’” And then I’ll go on and say some other goofy stuff. “If you get a boa constrictor for a partner, say, ‘Give me a hug, and let’s go to work.’”

Well, this week we were going to get new partners for working with the book Chicken Sunday. Just as I got ready to name the partners, Rebecca announced, “And remember, Mrs. Ecken, if you get a tiger, say you’re glad to be with that tiger and just work with him.” And then three or four others piped up with different animals.

(Watson & Ecken, 2003, p. 65)

There is no guarantee that this choice was the right choice for this class. The teacher was guided by her goals—helping her students respect and get along with everyone in the class, creating a caring community, and encouraging respect for individual
differences—and her ongoing observations of her students. As the vignette shows, the students did stop resisting and appeared to accept the validity of the teacher’s goals. Further confirmation of the teacher’s choice came several years later when these students were interviewed in high school. One student attributed his current ability to work with others to his experiences in the class and several others spontaneously recalled their good feelings toward all their classmates.

John: ... Today I can work with almost anybody. I think it helped me in my life by working with other people in groups.
Tara: ... Everybody knew everybody.... Everybody was like in one big group because everybody knew each other.

In the second class, a suburban fifth–sixth grade class, the teacher allowed the students to choose with whom they sit and work during collaborative activities. No problems seemed to emerge until January when the class had a meeting to assess how they were doing at creating the kind of classroom they said they wanted—a classroom defined by friendship, kindness, and respect. Midway through the meeting, students began to talk about having their feelings hurt, being teased, and of not being able to trust some of the other students in the class. One student offered the explanation that some of the students don’t really know one another that well. Another suggested that the teacher should change seating more often and another threw out a suggestion to the class, saying “Hey, you guys, I’ve got a suggestion. How about when Mrs. Lewis lets us change our seats, instead of choosing our special friends, we choose someone we don’t know that well.” The class agreed and the students had solved the problem autonomously.

The heavier as well as the lighter use of control are consistent with Developmental Discipline. Teachers need to make judgments about how much control to exercise based on what they believe about their students’ capabilities, the risks and or time involved in not exercising control, and their own particular learning goals. Cognitive developmental and motivation theory and research both point to the importance of autonomy and would seem to imply that less adult control is better. However, as Erikson (1950/1963) argues, it is the adult’s role to provide children with “gradual and well-guided experience of the autonomy of free choice” (p. 252). Higher levels of parental control are correlated with moral maturity if that control is seen by children as having been in their best interests (Pitkanen-Pulkkinen, 1980) or necessary for safety (Baldwin, Baldwin, & Cole, 1990).

Proactive Control. Proactive control is akin to scaffolding in academics. As students are about to engage in an activity that will place high demands on their social, emotional, or moral skills, the teacher seeks to prime those skills by, for example, reminding students of the skills that will be needed or asking the students to think in advance how they will solve some of the problems likely to arise. CDP’s approach to cooperative learning provides a good example of proactive control (Developmental Studies Center, 1997; Watson et al., 1994). Before students set out to work on a collaborative project the teacher either reminds them of the interpersonal problems they might encounter or asks the students to think of potential problems and solutions. If needed, relevant social or moral competencies can be taught before the students begin work.

Alerting students to potential social/moral issues likely to be involved in a given activity and teaching relevant skills is a powerful form of instruction in the social/moral
domain. Students have immediate opportunities to practice the skills in the context of authentic learning activities. Such scaffolding can provide students with social/moral success experiences that not only sharpen their skills but also help them see themselves as good people and their classroom as a caring community.

As with indirect control, how much is open to the students to figure out on their own will depend on the teacher’s estimate of how much help the students will need to be reasonably successful. One can engage in too much proactive control as well as too little. Too much wastes time, deprives students of the challenge of figuring problems out for themselves, and can imply that the teacher lacks trust in the students’ abilities. Too little can cause students to experience unnecessary pain and frustration, undermine classroom relationships, limit learning, and lead students to feel guilty or inept. The goal is not to eliminate all problems, should that even be possible, but to provide enough help to assure that students achieve reasonable success and do not flounder unproductively.

Rewards and Praise. Rewards and praise are frequently used by teachers as a form of proactive control. It’s a basic principle of behavioral theory that organisms tend to repeat behaviors that are followed by positive outcomes. One way for teachers to prevent misbehavior is to reward or praise behaviors that are inconsistent with the undesirable behaviors they want to eliminate. This sounds like a great form of control, good behaviors are reinforced, misbehaviors are reduced, and nice things happen to students. Numerous character education and management approaches have been developed around the “catch them being good” concept.

While developmental educators disagree on whether rewards and praise have any place in a developmental, constructivist approach to classroom management and discipline, there is general agreement that using praise and rewards proactively to encourage good behavior will undermine a teacher’s effectiveness as a moral educator. Enticing students to behave in desired ways by the promise of rewards deprives students of the opportunity to act for their own reasons. Because autonomy is a basic human need, manipulative rewards designed to control behavior risk undermining the teacher–student relationship and lessening the desire to perform the rewarded behavior for intrinsic reasons (Kohn, 1993; Lepper & Greene, 1978).

Equally important from the perspective of moral education, such praise deprives students of the opportunity to behave in positive ways because they understand that those ways are more considerate or fair. Moral actions must be done for moral reasons. Promising rewards undermines autonomy and prevents students from acting for moral or prosocial reasons.

Some developmental educators argue that rewards and praise, even praise that is meant to show appreciation or approval of a student’s behavior, have no place in moral education. For example, Kohn (1993, 2005) and DeVries and Zan (1994) both argue that praise is counterproductive because it substitutes an authority’s judgment for the student’s own. Kohn argues that “what’s most striking about a positive judgment is that it’s a judgment (2005, p. 155). Similarly, DeVries and Zan (1994) state that when a child does something positive, “the constructivist teacher does not praise the behavior” (p. 32). In the place of praise Kohn (2005) suggests various forms of encouragement such as describing the student’s action, pointing out the positive effects of the action on others, and asking the student to reflect on or tell about his or her action or accomplishment.

Other developmentally oriented educators view non-manipulative praise to be consistent with developmental theory (Nucci, 2003; Watson & Ecken, 2003). Praise that is
meant to validate, inform, or celebrate a child’s accomplishment is consistent with a sociocultural view of development in that it can serve to provide children with knowledge of their culture and provide a bonding experience of shared joy.

**Desists—Responding to Misbehavior.** From a developmental perspective, children naturally want to understand their world and form mutually caring relationships but are still developing the competencies needed to succeed. From this perspective, student misbehaviors are mistakes and mistakes are opportunities for learning. In an appropriate learning environment mistakes indicate the zone of proximal development or ZPD—the area where adult guidance is most likely to help the child advance to a higher plane. It follows from social constructivist theory that teachers’ responses to misbehaviors can powerfully affect moral learning.

Research in family socialization also supports the potential for disciplinary responses in moral learning and development (Solomon et al., 2001). Hoffman (2000) offers two reasons why parental disciplinary actions are important for children’s moral development: such encounters are frequent, at least for children between two and ten, and they provide parents with highly salient opportunities to teach the misbehaving child how to respond morally in a moral encounter.

In the classroom, teachers can play a similar socialization role. If teachers view discipline desists as primarily about teaching or scaffolding, their responses to student misbehavior can support moral development as well as create order and prevent harm. Good discipline from a developmental perspective involves believing that students want to learn and behave well, understanding the causes of students’ failure, providing support based on the presumed causes, and focusing on building student understanding as well as skills. These aspects of good developmental teaching along with the meaning of what it is to be moral have clear implications for how teachers should respond to student misbehavior. The following guidelines for disciplinary interventions follow from or are consistent with developmental theory:

- Because there are many possible causes for misbehavior, **choose desists that address the most likely cause of the misbehavior**, for example, a reminder for momentary inattention; instruction or scaffolding for lack of social/emotional skills; discussion or empathy induction for inconsiderate behavior.
- Because children generally want to learn and do what is right, **attribute to the student(s) the best possible motive consistent with the facts**.
- Because autonomy is a basic human need and moral action must be from internal motives, **minimize the use of power assertion and maximize the autonomy of the misbehaving student(s)**.
- Because good teaching requires a caring, cooperative relationship, **minimize negative consequences to the misbehaving student(s) while focusing on solving the problems creating or created by the misbehavior**.
- Because good teaching aims at fostering understanding, **focus on the harmful effects of the misbehavior and engage students in defining the problem and finding a solution**.
- Because children are developing and depend on the help of “more accomplished others,” **accept the moral authority and responsibility to insure that students are caring, respectful, and fair**.
Potential Causes of Misbehavior. Sometimes students misbehave because of momentary lapses in self-control, inattention to the needs of others, or forgetting established rules or procedures. If no serious harm has resulted, simply calling the student’s attention to what he or she is doing in a tone that implies the student knows better is frequently all that is needed. There is no instruction: the teacher is simply reminding the student to be guided by his or her better self. Such “call outs” are part of just about all discipline systems. The important difference in Developmental Discipline is that these reminders carry no implied negative judgment or threat of impending consequence. In fact, the implied message is one of trust, “I know you wouldn’t be doing that if you were thinking about what you are doing.” These desists can be quite frequent with some students, particularly in the beginning of the year as relationships and procedures are being established. However, if they continue to be frequent, they may point to a different cause, for example, the demands of the environment may be too high or the student may have a high need for attention.

Sometimes teachers themselves are the cause of student misbehavior (Kohn, 1996). Lessons or class meetings which run longer than the students’ ability to attend, academic assignments that are boring or too difficult, competitive classroom structures that pit students against one another, and insufficient support or scaffolding for new or challenging activities will inevitably result in student “misbehavior.” In these instances, the corrections need to be taken by the teacher. When teachers are faced with misbehavior by a large number of students, Developmental Discipline suggests teachers analyze their own behavior for the potential cause. When teachers surmise that they are the cause, they can acknowledge the problem, explain what they believe has been causing the problem, seek student input and advice, and make adjustments in order to create a better learning environment.

Sometimes student misbehavior is caused by their lack of acceptance of school or classroom rules or procedures. For example, some schools or teachers disallow hats, running in the halls, or going up the slide, some have strict dress codes and some have neatness or modesty requirements. Students do not view these as moral issues and, especially by early adolescence, may find such regulations unreasonable or personally intrusive (Nucci, 2001). Usually teachers need to enforce such rules, whether they agree with them or not. They can offer reasons for such rules, but students may not accept the reasons. If the teacher–student relationship is positive, and the number of such rules small, students will usually comply.

If students persist in violating a non-moral rule, the teacher may have to use power to force compliance, but not until he or she has tried to cajole the student into cooperating or talked with the student to find a way for the student to live with the rule. The teacher–student relationship is central to enforcing these rules and a sympathetic, light touch in enforcing them will help build student–teacher relationships.

Even in a well orchestrated classroom environment with engaging and appropriate learning activities and few rules that students find unreasonable, students will misbehave. Potential causes for misbehavior abound: failure to understand the teacher’s directions or expectations, relative lack of self-control or interpersonal skills; relaxed effort; inability to do the academic work; belief by some students that they have to fight for what they need; strong self-interest conflicting with that of others; an interpersonal style that is rude or aggressive. In any given incident, if a simple request, reminder, or support does not stop the behavior, the teacher’s next response needs to be guided by
the presumed cause of the misbehavior—explain directions or rules; teach self-control or interpersonal skills; encourage increased effort; provide extra academic help; deny the applicability of their competitive, aggressive world view; help them see the need to balance their self-interest with the needs of others; help them see the problems caused by their poor behavior; and teach more respectful forms of interaction. A complicated set of possibilities, especially given that few misbehaviors come with a sign identifying their cause.

Time is also an important issue in the classroom. Sometimes there is not time in the moment to follow a simple desist with explanation or instruction. Later, it might be important to provide explanation or talk with students to hear their view or simply reconnect. Sometimes, however, the misbehavior does not stop. At such times, Developmental Discipline advocates that teachers stop the misbehavior while conveying respect, minimizing pain, and allowing as much autonomy as possible. The focus is on solving the problem, not on punishing the student. For example, a student who continues to distract his tablemates during reading may be sent to a quiet part of the room to continue reading.

Even disciplinary encounters around non-moral matters—paying attention, walking in the halls—convey moral information. When teachers treat all students with respect, even when they are misbehaving and even those who usually misbehave, they are living and modeling important moral principles of care and respect. When teachers respect the needs and dignity of misbehaving students, they convey the message that moral obligation extends to all. Their behavior says that it is not alright to harm or treat someone badly even if they are behaving badly. They are providing to misbehaving students the consideration, care, and respect they are asking from them. This will not only increase student trust and respect for the teacher, it will increase respect for other students, even those who misbehave. In a climate of mutual respect it will be easier for students to treat one another kindly, fairly, and with respect. At the very least, students will get more practice in being kind and respectful and feel less justified in scapegoating those students who, for whatever reason, more frequently misbehave.

When misbehaviors pose the possibility of or cause harm they offer powerful opportunities for moral learning. Student–student conflict along with behaviors like teasing, excluding, and threatening harm provide teachers with the opportunity to develop many skills involved in moral understanding and behavior. And because the other students are watching, those who have not caused harm are absorbing some of that learning.

The Problem with Punishment. From a developmental perspective, punishment used as an inducement to moral growth is at best ineffective and at worst counterproductive. A punished person may avoid the punished behavior in order to avoid future punishment, but avoiding personal harm is not a moral reason. Thus, the better behavior does not amount to moral growth. Punishment can also cause the punished to focus on the harm done to him or her, lead to resentment of the punisher, and take the focus off of the harm the child caused (Hoffman, 2000). For most children, who generally want to be good but lack the needed skills or understanding, punishment is unnecessary. For oppositional children, those who have little trust and a confrontational stance toward the world, it will likely reinforce their untrusting, defiant stance (Hall & Hall, 2003).

Recognizing that there are times when children’s behavior does need to be controlled, many educators have advocated discipline approaches that feature the use of negative consequences that are logically or naturally related to the misbehavior (e.g., Charney,
Kohn (1996) calls such approaches “punishment lite.” Such consequences may be useful for controlling behaviors that do not cause harm to others, such as forgetting one’s lunch money, or not finishing an academic assignment, but letting a child go without lunch or making a student work through recess are not caring. Logical consequences are not inevitable. They are allowed to happen because the authority figure believes they will cause the misbehaving child some discomfort or harm, and thus teach the child that repeating the behavior will result in more unpleasant consequences. Imposing consequences does not join with the student in an effort to solve the problem. Worse, it carries the message that the punisher does not really care for the child. When a teacher causes one student in the classroom to experience a punitive albeit logical consequence, that student and all the others who are watching have one more reason not to trust in the teacher’s caring. Students who already believe that the world is uncaring will have their mistaken view confirmed.

So what is a developmentally oriented teacher to do when one student or a group of students misbehaves? While some developmentally oriented educators advocate the use of natural or logical consequences (DeVries & Zan, 1994; Hall & Hall, 2003; Nucci, 2003); most of their examples of logical consequences are actually actions taken to solve the problem created by the misbehavior. Such actions might be unpleasant for the child, but any unpleasantness is the unavoidable consequence of solving the problem. That is, the adult’s intention is to solve the problem and sometimes the only way to solve the problem will also cause unpleasantness for the child. For example, Hall and Hall (2003) describe logical consequences as consequences that “restrict privileges only to the extent necessary to protect people’s health and safety, to safeguard property, and to ensure the basic rights of others” (2003, p. 131). In the Just Community the purpose of the Discipline Committee is to bring students who break rules into a conversation so that they can understand more adequately why their behavior presents a problem for the community and can feel the support of members of the community who genuinely want them to remain a part of the group.

(Power et al., 1989, p. 97)

Nucci (personal communication) offers the following example of an ideal logical consequence. A middle school teacher assigned a student who had teased a student with Down’s syndrome to assist in a special education classroom. The special education teacher provided support for the student as he worked with the students. Eventually, the student became an advocate in his school for the handicapped.

From a developmental perspective, for all misbehaviors, the teacher’s goals are to preserve the student–teacher relationship and provide whatever support the student needs to stop misbehaving. With a conception of students as generally wanting to learn and wanting to be in mutually caring relationships, the teacher needs to guess at the possible cause of the misbehavior, take action designed to address the potential cause, and judge the effectiveness of her actions.

When misbehavior causes harm, more can and must be done to maintain a caring, moral community. The teacher needs to focus students on the harm they have caused—a true consequence of their behavior—encourage the students’ empathic response to the other’s distress, and insist that they find a way to repair the harm they caused. As
Oser (2005) argues, truly facing the negative consequences of one’s actions can provide a powerful force for moral growth. The following example from a second–third grade classroom illustrates this point.

The teacher, Laura Ecken, had been working hard to build a trusting and supportive relationship with Tralin, a student with many positive characteristics but who had a history of fighting with and teasing classmates. In this incident, the children are getting ready to leave the cafeteria. Tralin shoves another student, Tyrone, out of line so she would be able to stand near her friend, Ella. When Tyrone complained, Laura believed she could simply fix the problem by telling Tralin to give Tyrone back his place in line and proceeded to move the class out of the cafeteria. Here, in the teacher’s words, is what happened next.

Before we could get all the way outside, she [Tralin] was screaming at Tyrone, “Your mom uses crack cocaine! Your mom’s a crackhead!”

I asked her to just step aside so we could talk. I asked her why she had called his mother that, and she said, “Because she is and he lied on me and said I pushed him out of the line and I didn’t touch him.”

I said, “You know, Tralin, you’re lying to yourself. I saw you push him out of the line. You wanted to be with Ella and so you shoved him out of the way.

“Your mom I’m not going to allow that, and I’m not going to allow you to call his mother names. Can you imagine how painful it is for Tyrone to know that about his mother, to suffer all the pain from that, and then to have to be at school and have you make his pain even worse? That’s just not right.”

I said, “You know, you said some ugly things to Tyrone and I think it’d probably be best to take care of that.”

She just looked at me, so I said, “When you have a plan, just find me and let me know, but I think that you should take care of it before the day’s over.”

About an hour later Tralin came up to me and kind of stood there, so I asked her if she had a plan. She said, “I need to tell him that I’m sorry and that I didn’t mean any of it. I was just mad and that’s why I said it.”

I asked her if she wanted him to come out in the hall so she could tell him that privately, and she said, “Yeah, but first I need a drink.”

I told her, “Listen, you go get a drink and I’ll tell Tyrone you want to talk to him in the hall.”

When Tyrone came back in, he was happy and so was Tralin.

(Watson & Ecken, 2003, pp. 162–163)

In this example, the best possible motives consistent with the facts are none too good. Tralin pushed Tyrone out of line because she wanted to be by Ella and when the teacher did not allow this Tralin was angry and wanted to hurt Tyrone because she blamed him for her plight. When Tralin denies having pushed Tyrone out of line, the teacher tells her that she is lying to herself and confronts her with the consequences of her ugly words to Tyrone. She helps Tralin see Tyrone’s perspective and think about how hard his life must be. She calls upon fairness, and then tells Tralin that she should try in some way to repair the harm she has caused. These are real consequences for Tralin, but they are not designed to inflict discomfort on her. They are designed to induce empathy and moral feelings and provide Tralin with a way to right a moral wrong. The teacher also
shows respect and confidence in Tralin by letting her figure out a way to make reparation. This is the kind of moral instruction that has both the power to arouse moral desire through the student’s empathic response, increase moral sensitivity by helping Tralin really see what she has done, provide moral knowledge by telling her what a moral person who has caused harm does, and allows Tralin to repair her moral standing with Tyrone and the community.

Hoffman (2000) refers to this form of disciplinary response as induction. Induction takes different forms depending on the situation, but essentially it involves empathy, moral reasoning, and moral instruction. It can also be accompanied by genuine moral outrage and power assertion. When students understand that their teacher’s goal is to help and protect them, they are more open to learning and less likely to resent the teacher’s power assertion or the discomfort they may experience in the process. I had the opportunity to interview Tralin at the end of her sophomore year in high school. When she said that Laura Ecken’s class was different from her other classes, I asked her to tell me how it was different. Prominent in her description was the way Laura responded to student misbehavior.

[In my current classes], You did what you did, you got in trouble ... next day come back, act like nothing happened.... Just start all over again. And Mrs. Ecken, if we got in trouble ... she’ll give us a chance to think about it ... How could we change the situation differently? What could we have done to make it better?

When teachers need to take controlling actions in order to create a caring and productive learning environment, they try to honor the child’s good will by providing some autonomy and the message that the student is still part of the community. To help students see such disciplinary actions as efforts to solve problems rather than punishments, teachers can either explain these procedures or ideally generate with the students non-punitive ways teachers can solve problems of student misbehavior (DeVries & Zan, 1994; Nucci, 2003). During calm moments, when their self-interest is not immediately pulling them toward misbehavior, students know they should work hard and be kind and fair and they understand the teacher’s responsibility for maintaining order.

THE GOOD ENOUGH TEACHER

A developmental approach to discipline and classroom management is not easy. First, it’s not easy to like students who don’t work hard, bully other children, defy authority, or continually clamor for attention. It’s easier when we view such children as vulnerable and desperately seeking to belong and succeed in a world they perceive as uncaring, but it is still hard. With such children, teachers will need to call upon their capacity for “professional caring,” to act as if they liked the students even when they don’t (Noddings, 2002). While forming mutually caring relationships with all students is the goal of teachers using Developmental Discipline, it is good enough to treat all students as if we liked them when we cannot make ourselves actually like them.

A developmental approach to discipline requires that teachers balance many needs and goals. It is often difficult to know the best course of action. For example, elementary teacher Donene Polson describes allowing a student freedom to put little effort into a poetry unit, knowing that the student would discover the problem when he displayed
his poor work to the class. However, the student’s embarrassment at showing his work led Donene to plan “to hold conferences more frequently . . . to support students in managing their time and responsibilities” (Polson, 2001, p. 126). While treating all students with care is the moral obligation of teachers, the good enough teacher will sometimes make decisions that are not optimal. It is good enough to care enough to reflect and learn from one’s mistakes. Consider the following anecdote from another elementary classroom.

Yolanda and Martin were hitting each other with the pillows. They do that often and I’m just constantly reminding them. I know it was a fun thing, but I said to her “Every single day I need to talk to you both about this. I think that reminding you isn’t working, so tomorrow I want you to stay in and we’re going to write about why it’s important that you just put these cushions away and come right back out when lessons are over.” Yolanda got upset about that: I think she saw it as a punishment.

When she got back to her table group I saw her say something to Tyrone. His mouth dropped open and he said “She’s gonna get you fired! She’s going to the office as soon as the bell rings and tell ’em you’ve been cussin’ at her. We’re gonna have a new teacher tomorrow.”

I was upset. So, in front of the kids, I said to Yolanda, “No, now we’re not going to have threats in the classroom. We’re going to walk to the office right now and talk to them about this.” I added, “Yolanda, have I ever used a cuss word with you or to you?”

She said “No.”

I said, “Well, you know that and the class knows that, so your plan wouldn’t work.” I probably could have left it at that, but I was concerned with letting these kids know that they can’t pull this kind of stuff.

Anyway, after I did all that, I thought later that I was wrong. I asked myself, “Did you wreck your relationship with this child in one incident?”

So, the next day, when she came in I said, “You know, I made a really big mistake with you yesterday. I dragged you off to the office before I really even sat down and talked with you. I’m really sorry about that, and it won’t happen again.”

And she said, in a second, “I’m really sorry for what I said.”

I said, “Yolanda, I know you were upset because I asked you not to go out the next day. I understand that sometimes when we’re upset we say things that we shouldn’t. And from now on, we’re just going to work through things.” And she just hugged me.

It is not always possible to do the right thing to best support a student’s moral and academic development and maintain a caring, productive, learning community. Good enough teachers genuinely try and when they fail, reflect, apologize, and go on trying.

**SUMMARY**

Moral and character educators have long understood the influence on moral development of the “hidden curriculum” embodied in teachers’ discipline and classroom management systems. The predominant approaches to classroom management and discipline in American public schools rely on adult power to control student behavior
through reward and punishment. Developmentally oriented moral educators devised an alternative approach to school and classroom discipline, Developmental Discipline. It differs from traditional discipline in its goals, view of children, methods, and its source of power.

Unlike traditional discipline, Developmental Discipline explicitly aims to foster the moral and social development of students and rather than rewards and punishments, it employs explanation; reflection; reminders; teaching social, emotional, and moral competencies; empathy induction; and reparation. In Developmental Discipline, the source of power comes from the trusting and mutually caring relationship between teacher and children and children's intrinsic desire to learn and form caring relationships.

With its focus on relationship building, explanation and shared control, a well-functioning classroom will take longer to establish using Developmental Discipline. In a climate of extreme pressure for rapid academic learning, teachers may find it difficult to devote the needed time. Effective moral or character education requires that they do so.

**NOTE**

1. This term is a variation on a term “good enough parent” used by Bellethim (1987) in support of less than perfect parenting.

**REFERENCES**


