Persuasive Discipline

Using Power Messages and Suggestions to Influence Children Toward Positive Behavior

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Contents

Persuasion Techniques

Language and communication are the keys to successful discipline. The language patterns a parent or teacher uses when disciplining children influence behavior. When we control the messages we send to children, we control the way children feel and think about our messages; when we control the way children feel and think about our messages, we control their behavior. Carefully chosen words and crafted messages can actively create the mental images and mood needed in children to move them away from noncompliance and oppositional behavior and closer to comply with what we asked them to do. When we persuade children to behave, we control their behavior through language, using influence rather than power and domination. Effective persuasive discipline means that we are able to communicate using just the right words to get the positive outcome we intended. Persuasive discipline contains specific language patterns and ways of talking to children to shift the emotional state of the child so that we influence and promote positive behavioral change.

Persuasion Technique 1: Assume That What You Want is True

If you talk and act as if what you want is true, your child will believe you. When we assume something, we send the message to the child that he or she already wants to do what we are asking; for example, asking, “Do you want carrots or celery?” assumes that the child wants and will eat one of these two vegetables.

Persuasion Technique 2: Use Positive Directions

When we use positive directions, we get higher compliance than when we use negative directions. Negative directions tell children what not to do; “Don’t make noises,” or “Don’t hit your little brother” are examples of negative directions. On the other hand, positive directions tell children what they need to do to comply. Work in changing the negative directions you give children into positive directions. Shapiro (1994) recommends that we write down the negative directions we typically say in one column, and then, in a second column, we change those statements into directions that tell the child, in a very specific way, what he or she should be doing instead. Always describe what you want in positive terms; for example, “Talk in a quiet voice” rather than “Stop shouting.”

Persuasion Technique 3: Point Out an Acceptable Alternative

Positive directions guide the child towards a more appropriate behavior or alternative. Shapiro provides the following examples, “Making noises at the table disturbs other people during dinner. If you need to make noises, you can excuse yourself from the table and go outside for five minutes,” and “When you hit your little brother you will have to go to time-out. Try hitting this pillow when you are angry.” According to Schaefer (1994), when we point out an acceptable alternative, the child will be more likely to change the inappropriate behavior because he knows what he should do in addition to what not to do.

Persuasion Technique 4: Use More "Start" Messages and Fewer "Stop" Messages

It is easier to start doing something than to stop doing something. Apply this principle when you discipline children; instead of telling the child what to stop doing, tell the child what to start doing. For example, we can turn a statement like, "Stop playing with that toy" into "Please, hand me the toy." A teacher or parent skilled in persuasive discipline is able to suggest alternative ways of behaving rather than constantly saying, "No" or "Stop that."

Persuasion Technique5: Replace the Word "Start" with the Word "Continue"

It is even easier to continue doing an activity that is already in progress than to start doing something new. You will find less resistance to your request or command when you replace the word "start" with the word "continue." For example, rather than saying, "Justin, start doing your homework" or "Justin, start reading your book," say, "Justin, continue doing your homework" or "Justin, continue reading your book."

Persuasion Technique 6: State Rules Impersonally

For example, you can say, "The rule *in this class* is no wearing caps in the classroom," or "The rule *in this house* is no pushing your sister" rather than you taking ownership of the rule saying things like, "I want…" or "I expect to see that you…" When we use impersonal wording, we make the conflict between the child and an impersonal rule, not between the child and the adult or between two children (Schaefer, 1994).

Persuasion Technique 7: Give Alpha Commands

A command is a short authoritative statement that demands instant compliance. Walker and Walker (1991) identify two types of commands:

- *Beta commands* involve vague and multiple directives, given simultaneously, and do not provide a clear criterion for compliance. With a beta command, we do not give the child adequate time and opportunity to comply; in other words, when we give a beta command, we do not tell the child exactly what he needs to do to comply. Beta commands are usually accompanied by excessive verbalizations. Walker and Walker present the following example of a beta command, "Jimmy, your room is always such a mess! Why don't you clean it up instead of waiting for me to do it for you? I'm so tired of always picking up after you!"
- *Alpha commands* involve a clear, direct, and specific statement without additional verbalizations, and they allow a reasonable period of five to fifteen seconds for the child to respond. Alpha commands are short (ten words or less) and they tell the child exactly what to do; for example, "Pick up all the toys from the floor and put them on the shelf."

Beta commands lower the rate of compliance; alpha commands increase compliance. However, both types of commands can escalate into a demand, which is why we should use commands carefully and only if they are necessary to the situation. The authors recommend that, to give alpha commands:

- Use positive, descriptive terms.
- Give only one command at a time, followed with a period to comply.

- Do not argue with the child, and do not reissue the command or give a different command to the child.
- If the child does not comply, repeat the same command, beginning with, "You need to…" and telling a mild consequence.
- If the child complies, give her positive attention and *descriptive praise*, e.g., "Good, you responded promptly to what I asked you to do." We get better result when we move closer to the child to give the command (*close proximity technique*).

Persuasion Technique 8: Give More Requests and Fewer Commands

Do not give a command if a request would do it as well. Always use more requests and suggestions than commands or direct orders. Unlike a command, a request carries no pressure to comply and implies that the child has a choice; in other words, the child has the opportunity of refusing. We state requests in the form of questions accompanied by social conventions such as "Would you please…?" or "I would like you to…" (Walker and Walker, 1991). More specifically, a request is asking; a command is telling. As with commands, you will get better results, if you (Schaefer, 1994):

- Stay close to the child, rather than making your request from a distance.
- Make eye contact.
- Limit yourself to two requests, making the same request only twice, and avoiding making different requests at the same time.
- Turn down your voice volume, using a soft but firm voice.
- Use "start" requests rather than "stop" requests.

- Give a reasonable time for the child to comply to your request (five to fifteen seconds).
- Make a clear, descriptive request, using positive wording; for example, “Please turn off the lights.”
- Reward compliance with a smile and a “Thank You.”

Persuasion Technique 9: Give Choices to the Child

Providing opportunities to make choices is effective in increasing positive behavior and compliance in children. Try to give the child some freedom of choice; for example, “Either play quietly or go upstairs to play.” According to Schaefer (1994), giving choices to children increase their independence and decision-making skills.

Persuasion Technique 10: Use Forced Choices

To make sure the child does the behavior we want, we limit the choices given to the child to only two. We call this technique *forced choices* or *double binds*, because, regardless of what the child chooses to do, she is still complying with the behavior that we want. An example of a forced choice is, “You have two choices; either go to bed right now so that I can read you a story, or you go to bed after the TV show.” You can increase compliance to the preferred option, making it easier for the child to choose the option that you want and harder to choose the less attractive choice. Alternatively, you can make the choice you want more attractive and desirable to the child. In our example, the parent raised the desirability of going to bed “right now” by including in this choice an activity that is valuable to the child; reading her a story. When there are more than two choices available, offer the option you want the child to take either first or last. Other examples of forced choices are:

- *Revealing choices*; for example, “Do you want milk or orange juice with your lunch…and salad… carrots only or with green peas…? What fruit do you want; pear or apple?”
- *Hierarchical choices*; for example, “Do you want the bigger ball or the smaller one?” “How many pages are you going to read before the break; five or ten?”
- *The contrasting choice.* With this choice, you offer first something that has very little chance for the child to choose, making it look as something inevitable. Then you follow with the real alternative; for example, “You can go to bed right now… or you can pick up your toys.”

We can increase compliance to forced choices by helping the child feel that what she is doing is her own idea; you might say, “What would you rather do, wash the dishes or take out the garbage?” In the classroom, the teacher can ask something like, “When do you prefer to finish the math problems, after silent reading or after lunch?”

Persuasion Technique 11: Ask Leading Questions

Just presenting our main point in the form of a question, rather than as a declarative statement, is extremely influential. Any time we present the leading information in the form of a question, we avoid overwhelming and forcing the child, and we send the message that it is the child’s decision to make. However, we can enhance the persuasive power of questions by asking carefully crafted questions that make the child think in a particular way. Leading questions include either the answer or point we are trying to make, and send the child in the direction that we want. When we ask leading questions, we eliminate all unwanted alternatives and send the child in the direction of the right alternative. Some examples of leading questions follow.

- *Questions that make an assumption*; for example, asking, "How much your reading grade will go up this year?" assumes that the reading grade will go up this year. You are forcing the child to think first and only about the reading grade going up.
- *Questions that link something you said earlier, and it is still in the child's mind, with what you are suggesting now*. For example, "I was really disappointed when we yelled. How do you feel about talking quietly?"
- *Questions that give two options, making one option more desirable*; for example, "Do you prefer reading your book here or at the listening center, which is quieter?"
- *Questions that link the past with the future (cause and effect)*, e.g., "If you go to bed late, what will happen in your math test tomorrow?"
- *Questions that get the child to think of consequences or implications*, e.g., "If you keep getting into trouble each time Eric and you hang out, then what you think will happen the next time the two of you hang out? What happened the last time?"
- *Questions that lead the child to agree with you*. You can accomplish this by saying only what you want the child to consider, avoiding saying what you do not want the child to think about; for example, "Do you agree that we need to discuss this issue?" and "Is it true that you are feeling calmer now that we spoke?"
- *Questions that get the child to do something positive.* To do this, first, name the action, and then, phrase the question in a way that leads the child to compliance, e.g., "Will you wash the dishes?" or "Can you help me move these boxes to the garage?"

- *Questions that lead the child to alternative behaviors*, e.g., "Would you be willing to consider _____?" "Do you mind doing _____ instead?" or "Would you prefer doing something else?"
- *Questions designed to dissuade the child not to do something.* The trick here is making the child think that you are encouraging the behavior, e.g., "I understand you might not want to stop hanging out with Eric, but will you?"
- *Questions that prevent, or get the child not to do the behavior.* Do this by reframing from a negative behavior to a positive behavior (positive framing). For example, "Who else do you want to hang out with?"

Persuasion Technique 12: Manipulate the Size of the Request to Make it Look Smaller or Bigger

You have two ways of doing this:

- *Break down your persuading* (from smaller to bigger). Smaller requests are easier to understand and comply. With this technique, we move the child to make a larger commitment by asking for a smaller commitment first, e.g., asking the child to read only five pages of the book, and after he complies, asking him to finish reading the book. A variation of this technique is asking for something small first, and when the child complies, we ask for something bigger, and finally something even bigger; for example, read five pages, then read the next ten pages, and finally, finish reading the book.
- *Make the bigger request first* (from bigger to smaller). This technique is the opposite of breaking down our persuading. Here, we make the biggest request first, something that

the child may find excessive and will likely refuse, and when the child refuses, we ask for something that requires less effort and feels more reasonable to the child; in other words, we get a "no" first so that we can get a "yes" last. For example, first, you ask the child to read the whole book, and then reducing the request to reading only ten pages. This technique uses the *contrast principle*; by contrast, the second request seems smaller and easier to agree with when compared with the initial request.

Persuasion Technique 13: Buttering Up

Schaefer (1994) describes this technique as doing the child a favor in order to make the child feel obligated to return the favor later on; that is; we reward the child in one area before expecting compliance in another area. For example, you excuse the child from doing one of his daily chores and then you tell the child that in return you want him to study one hour longer.

Persuasion Technique 14: Use Pauses

We can add a pause before or after the key message, suggestion, or command in a sentence or a paragraph to enhance the persuasive power of the message. A pause before a key point increases tension and adds emphasis (e.g., "Would you please… *sit down*"). A pause after the key point lets the key point sink in (e.g., "*Please put the toy on my desk*… before lining up"). Pausing after giving the child a suggestion or command helps the suggestion or command sink in the child's mind.

Persuasion Technique 15: Visualizing

When you want the child to experience a particular emotion, simply get her to recall a time when she experienced the emotion. For example, if you are trying a sad child to feel happy, or an angry child to relax, get the child to visualize a time when she was happy (or relaxed), and then the new feeling will replace the old feeling. Imagining or picturing a different and more positive feeling helps the child shifting into the emotional state that you are creating. To facilitate the shifting to this happier or calmer state, tell the child to remember a time when she experienced happiness or calmness; for example, during story time or a visit to the park. If the child has difficulty remembering, you can suggest a time and start describing the experience. Then ask the child to tell what she is seeing in her mind and what happens next. Keep expanding the child's description to make the visualization more real. When the child recalls the happy or calm memory, the sensation associated with the memory acts like suggestions that shift the child to the new state. The memory evokes the images, and the images evoke the new feeling; in other words, imagining how happy or calm she was then, makes her feel happy or calm now. To strengthen the visualization, pause between images to give the child time to see the movie in her mind. When you pause, take notice and mention to the child the physical signs (facial expression and body language) that signal that the child is moving into the new state.

Persuasion Technique 16: Wondering

Wonder aloud about things you want the child to do, believe, or achieve. Wonder if the child can do it. Wonder about what might have happened or will happen. Wonder about the benefits of doing it. Wonder if the child is already feeling _____ (e.g., calmed and relaxed). Say things like,

"I wonder what will happen when you let go of that _____ (e.g., angry or self-defeating thought)."

Persuasion Technique 17: Use Odd Numbers

This is also known as the *pique technique*. When we include an odd number as part of the request, we are making an unusual request that leads to confusion and even wonder of why we are making such a peculiar request. This extra second of confusion and wonder is what adds persuasive power to the request. For example, "Can you spare 19 cents?" rather than asking for a quarter. With children, for example, tell the child that the toys must be on the shelves at exactly 13 minutes after 2:00, or that you want the lights off and the child in bed at 9:23. The child puts all her attention in the odd time, which distracts her from refusing.

Persuasion Technique 18: Linking

Link something you want with something the child wants; for example, "When you _____ (what you want) then you will get _____ (or this will happen) (what the child wants)." Link the behavior with a consequence that the child does not want, e.g., "If you two keep talking, you will have less computer time." Link a low probability behavior with a strong probability behavior, making it clear that the path to the strong probability behavior is by complying with the low probability behavior (e.g., "After you finish the division problems, you can eat a snack"). Persuasive linking shows the child the path to what he wants, as well as which route to avoid.

Persuasion Technique 19: Use Repetition

Used wisely, repetition has a strong persuasive value. We can repeat key words or key phrases in our message. We can use the same words or the same phrases throughout the message, or we can use different words and phrases; what is important is that the key words or phrases carry the same meaning, and that the message gradually moves the child in the direction we want. There are three basic repetition technique, the third one, the hammer, requires a more advanced level of language sophistication than the first two techniques.

- *The triple technique* helps us emphasize the key message. The triple can be three single words, three phrases, or three complete sentences, but it must be three items that are related, and that fit together to make an impact. The triple can be as simple as repeating the same item three times (e.g., the word "continue" or any other key word repeated three times), or as sophisticated as connecting three key themes. For example, you can say something like, "And now that you are calm, *you feel ready to pay attention to my words*, *think carefully about what really happened*, and *tell me what other option you had to settle this problem*."In this example, each key message in the triple is also a *hidden command* (persuasion technique 21). We can also connect three items in a sequence or three steps to reach a goal. To further connect the triple, we can change our vocal tone (rising or reducing pitch) when we mention each key item or step.
- *The jackhammer technique* is mainly for use during an emergency to freeze and stop a risky behavior. With this technique, we repeat a single word or a short phrase three times and quickly. Steadily, we increase the volume of our voice, for example, "no! No! NO! DON'T HIT HIM! NO! NO!! NO!!!"

- *The hammer technique* helps emphasize a key theme across a number of phrases and sentences. In the following example, a teacher is giving directions to the class; pay attention to the message emphasized, "You will do the reading."

You are *going to read* the first two chapters of the novel. You *can do the reading* in forty five minutes or you *can do it* in an hour. When you find a word that is hard to pronounce, or if you need the meaning of a new word, you can ask your reading partner for help, so I think we are *going to do the reading* faster than we expect. We *must do the reading* as silently as we can, so that we do not interrupt other readers, and remember to summarize the two chapters in your reading log.

Persuasion Technique 20: Use Power Sentences

When we use power sentences, we become more persuasive. Power sentences include at least one of the following elements:

- Power sentences are *short* to make your point with a punch. You can use a phrase, or even a single word, as your whole sentence; for example, "Start now" or "Quiet." With a short sentence, the child gets the whole meaning of the communication in one-step. A longer sentence blends in with the background noise and the child may miss the key message. A short sentence is easy to say, easy to remember, and easy to understand, three key elements in persuasive discipline.
- Power sentences use *modal verbs*, e.g., can, may, could, should, and must. We use modal verbs to make something more or less important, depending on what we want to emphasize in the message. Examples of power sentences using modal verbs are:

- ✓ To find the meaning of the new vocabulary words, you *can* work with your reading partner.
- ✓ Here, you *could* fold these sheets.
- ✓ If you want to finish faster, you *should* help each other.
- ✓ You *must* clean this room in one hour.

- To create interest, *divide the power sentence into two parts*, e.g., "Today we are going to do… (Speech Pause)… something really interesting!" A divided sentence grabs children's attention because they want to know how the sentence is going to end (Nitsche, 2006).
- To maximize persuasive power, *put the main impact at the end* of the sentence (final impact); for example, "You can go to the math center… *now*."

Persuasion Technique 21: Use Power Paragraphs

A power paragraph includes some or all of the following elements:

- *Few sentences.* In a power paragraph, do not use too many sentences; about three or four sentences are enough.
- *Short sentences.* Use a short sentence at the start of the paragraph to grab the child's attention, and another short sentence at the end of the paragraph to summarize and identify the end of the message. Additionally, use short sentences to summarize after a long description or explanation.
- *Sensory language and pictorial descriptions.* When we paint pictures, sounds, and sensations with our words, we gain immediate attention and greater understanding, which

by itself enhances the persuasive power of our message. Using sensory language triggers the child's senses, rather than having the child interpret the message cognitively (by analysis). In addition, once we use a pictorial description, we can create a solution using another picture, e.g., a brick wall (problem) can be scaled by a ladder (solution) (Mahony, 2003). A well-developed sensory message helps the child use all three main sensory modalities: (1) the visual modality by picturing the situation; (2) the auditory modality by talking about what is happening; and (3) the kinesthetic or tactile modality by stating how one is feeling.

- *Power words*. For a greater impact, carefully place one or two power words in the message. Kinds of power words are:

✓ *Identity or belonging words:* you, we, all, friends, team, everybody, together

✓ *Words that create interest and motivate:* love, favorite, interested or interesting, like, curious, discover, enjoy, fantastic, useful, good, challenge, important, wish

✓ *Agreement words:* yes, agree, consider, fair, settled, willing

✓ *Words that regulate behavior:* now, easy, quick, fast, simple, soon, brief or briefly

✓ *Words that inspire confidence and trust:* right, good, sure, certain, secure, guaranteed, positive, reliable, strong

✓ *Safety words:* safe, protect, support, help

- *Final impact.* To maximize the persuasive power of your paragraph or message, put the main point at the end; for example, "To solve the word problems you need to do _____ and _____."

Persuasion Technique 22: Use Hidden Commands

With this technique, we hide the command within the longer sentence; the other words in the sentence distract the child away from any resistance to the command. We emphasize our hidden command by changing the tone of our voice, more specifically; we can change the tone of our voice when we indicate the action (verb) that we want. Examples of hidden commands:

- *The I wonder command;* for example, "I wonder if you could organize your closet in 45 minutes."
- *The doubt command.* With this command, we sound uncertain that the child is able or willing to perform the action; for example, "Can you reach that top shelf? Great! Could you help me put these boxes away?"
- *The assumption command;* here, we act and talk as if the child is going to obey the command. For example, "After you organize your closet, do you want a glass of milk?" "Here, empty these grocery bags and I will start fixing the dinner"; "Which end of these sheets you will fold?" "How many pages are you going to read before lunch?"

Persuasion Technique 23: Use Suggestions

We make a suggestion when we guide the child to consider an idea or thought; for example, "You might want to consider this…" or "Maybe if you try it this way…" Schaefer (1994) identifies two main types of suggestions:

- *Indirect suggestion;* for example, "From what I hear, you feel that the best way to settle this is to let Cindy know that she needs to ask you before she borrows your markers." An indirect suggestion simply strengthens an idea that is already present in the child's mind.

- *Positive suggestion* is the act of attributing to the child a positive quality even when there is only minimal evidence that the child actually has the attribute or quality. We inspire the child to behave in a positive way by suggesting that he is already behaving that way to some degree. Some examples:

✓ You seem much stronger than you have ever been, so I know you are going to be very brave.

✓ Ricky and you are best friends, so I know you want to settle this issue with him.

✓ At heart, you are really an orderly child. You want to keep your things neat and orderly so that you can find them.

✓ You do not give up easily, so you are going to try hard and do your best.

Positive suggestions work best when the quality that we attribute to the child is not too discrepant from the child's character and ability; in other words, the child is able to perform the behavior or skill that we are attributing him. In the following example, the teacher is using positive suggestions to reduce the tantrum behavior in a kindergartner:

You are really getting bigger and bigger, and smarter and smarter every day. Soon you will be so very big that the tantrums will go away. Maybe it will be next week; perhaps you will be so big by tomorrow, or maybe the next day, that, when another child bothers you, you will say to yourself, 'No, I won't get mad. I'm not going to have a tantrum today because I'm a big girl now.' You just stay calm. Big girls do not have tantrums. That is just what little kids do. You say to yourself, 'I am going to be a big girl,' and you stay out of trouble. Yes sweetheart, you are getting big and smart, and soon the tantrums will disappear… the tantrums will go away… just go away…

Persuasion Technique 24: Establish Rapport

The more children think you are a friend, the more they will like you and will be willing to listen to what you have to say. As a stranger, our influence is limited, but as a trusted friend, who knows how much we can accomplish. Our persuasion is a lot easier when the child trusts and likes us. Gaining and maintaining rapport is the ability to elicit responses in the child. Like dancing partners, people in rapport mirror and match each other in posture and gesture (complementary body language). The key to rapport is to adopt an overall state (mood and attitude) that is similar to the child's mood and attitude. By gently imitating key behaviors and similar body movements; that is, finding ways to be alike, we can easily establish rapport with a troubled, angry, or noncompliant child (Vaknin, 2008; O'Connor and Seymour, 2002). Some examples are:

- matching breathing (rate and depth) to breathe in unison
- mirroring gestures like hand and foot movements
- matching voice (blending and harmonizing), i.e., speed, volume, or rhythm
- mirroring the general style of movement; for example, how fast, how much gesturing, and how open or closed (e.g., arms and/or legs crossed)
- matching the head tilt
- mirroring the child's posture, e.g., leaning forward, straight up, or leaning back
- adopting the same basic stance or sitting position; for example, resting on the same arm (your right to the child's left) to get a similar alignment and the same distribution of body weight

- exchange matches; that is, we use a different body part, but we match the rhythm; for example, making a motion such as finger tapping to match the rhythm of the child's breathing. We can match the child's breathing pattern by moving a leg or hand up and down accordingly. Alternatively, we can match arm movements with hand movements, and body movements with head movements

Persuasion Technique 25: Use Mirroring and Exchanged Matching

With mirroring and exchanged matching, we are creating rapport, which is at the heart of influencing and persuading children. By gently mirroring or matching certain key behaviors, we are producing an emotional state similar to the child's emotional state, significantly increasing our changes to elicit responses; that is, to persuade the child.

- *Mirroring* is the process of copying the child's body language (facial expression, gestures, breathing, posture, or movement) and voice (sounds, speed, volume, or rhythm). We can execute our mirroring exactly at the same time or slightly delayed, and without giving the appearance of copying the child. This is why it is recommended that we mirror only some key movements and at selected times; for example, if the child crosses his arms, we do the same; if the child frowns, we frown; if the child talks fast, we talk fast.
- *Exchanged matching* is a form of mirroring. With this neuro-linguistic technique we synchronize body language and/or voice but without directly copying the child. For example, if the child crosses his arms, we cross our legs; if the child scratches his head, we rub one arm; if the child coughs, we clear our throat; if the child talks fast, we move fast; if the child is fidgety, we sway our body. We can also use a different body part to

match rhythm; for example, we can match a fast breathing pattern by moving one leg accordingly.

Persuasion Technique 26: Use a Matched Vocabulary or Matched Speech

According to Mahony (2003), we increase rapport and mutual understanding when we use the child preferred representational system or language predicates (visual, auditory, and kinesthetic or tactile). In simpler words, we increase rapport when we "speak the child's language." Predicates are sensory-based words and phrases; that is, predicates are messages that directly link to our senses and emotions, not to our brain (reason and analysis). We are often unaware that the words and sentences we use are biased toward one preferred sensory representational system, and that we can communicate better with children by simply speaking to them using their own (not ours!) preferred sensory vocabulary. From Mahony (2003) and O'Connor and Seymour (2002) we get the following examples of sensory-based vocabulary:

Visual

I see what you mean

It is clear as a day to me

It appears to me

In my mind's eye

In view of your actions or behavior

The future looks bright

Take a look at yourself

Get this clear

I am looking closely at this idea

Watch your language!

Watch my lips

Let me draw you a picture

Auditory

Turn a deaf ear

Rings a bell

Pay attention to what I am saying

You just don't listen

Do I have to spell it out for you?

Music to my ears

I hear you loud and clear

To tell you the truth

In other words

Are we on the same wavelength?

Let me put it another way

State your case

Kinesthetic

It feels to me that…

You are a pain in the neck

I feel it in my bones

Don’t push your luck

Control yourself

Hang in there!

Hold on a second

Haven’t you grasped it yet?

Going to pieces

It feels all wrong

Let us start from scratch

I can’t put my finger on it

- An example of *mismatched speech* is:

Child: I can *see* it in my mind. I know I’m going to fail the spelling test (visual predicate).

Parent: *Hold on a second* (kinesthetic predicate). You studied *hard* (kinesthetic) and you know those spelling words.

- Examples of *matched speech* are:

Child: I just can’t *grasp* what I have to do with this graph (kinesthetic predicate).

Teacher: Oh, what do you *feel* is the problem (kinesthetic predicate)? (Mahony, 2003)

Child: I’ll curse if I *feel* like it (kinesthetic predicate)!

Counselor: *Control yourself.* Cursing *stops* at this very moment (kinesthetic predicates).

Persuasive Technique 27: Pace and Lead

From the neuro-linguistic literature, we get the pacing and leading technique (Vaknin, 2008; Nitsche, 2006; O' Connor and Seymour, 2002). This technique consists of four steps: *mirroring* or matching the child's posture, gestures, word choice, voice, or breathing. We mirror the child to establish *rapport*, which is the second step. The third step is *pacing*; that is, moving along with the child for a while and at the same speed before we try the fourth and last step, *leading*, where we lead the child into the mental and/or emotional state that we want, so that the child is receptive to our persuading and we are better able to help. More specifically, in the pacing step, we are bonding with the child and cementing rapport through mirroring; in the leading step, we shift our physiology and attitude so that the child shifts her physiology and attitude. Leading is not going to work without well-established rapport, so we need to take our time bridging and bonding with the child at the pacing level before attempting to lead the child.

In pacing and leading, first we mirror selected gestures and key behavior to match how the child is feeling. Then we gradually change the mirrored behavior (e.g., breathing pace and body language) to a more positive and resourceful state, moving the child into this new state. Next, we provide three examples of how to shift an angry and agitated child into a more positive and calmer state using the pacing and leading technique.

- Synchronize your rate of breathing to become faster, then gradually slow it down, so that the child's breathing becomes deeper and slower; a physiology aligned with calmness.
- Mirror the child by frowning, crossing your arms, leaning backwards, and keeping your palms closed (closed body posture). Gradually, shift to an open and inviting posture; that is, relax your face, unfold your arms, lean forward, open your palms, and move closer to the child.

- Do a *mood matching* (Mahony, 2003), matching the energy the child puts into his anger. The author recommends that, at the beginning of this procedure, you display your "energy level" as high as the child's energy level, but not higher. However, you display your energy as a positive emotion such as concern or interest. Then, lead the child towards a calmer state by progressively shifting your energy levels downwards; for example, displaying a quieter tone of voice, and showing smaller and slower body movements.

Persuasion Technique 28: The Voice Regulation Technique

From Nitsche (2006) we get the voice regulation technique. Most of the time, teachers and parents feel that we need to talk more and louder to get children listen to what we say, and to get children do what we want them to do. However, it is possible for us to regulate (increasing or decreasing) the volume of children's voices by manipulating the volume of our own voice. For example, to quiet a loud, angry child, follow the next steps:

1. Your first words need to be louder than the child's words. This creates a surprise element, and the child will become still.
2. Speech pause. By pausing and being silent, we show the child what we expect from her.
3. Start whispering. This causes the child to become more attentive and to listen more closely.
4. Continue speaking and switch back from whispering to using your regular voice.

With this technique, we use very few words, and we show the child the behavior that we want from her (*show; do not tell technique*). In the next examples, Nitsche (2006) adapted the same voice regulation technique for use with a noisy class:

1. If the class sees you as you come into the classroom, do not say a word. Freeze your posture and establish eye contact. Maintain this posture and resist the temptation of talking. You are leading the class to be silent by being silent yourself. If the class does not notice you, you need to use your voice or a loud noise to get them to see you. In this case, use the next alternative.
2. Hold your body straight and freeze your posture. Keep your feet parallel to one another and pointing forward, making sure that your weight is balanced evenly on both feet. Stretch out one hand in front of you and hold it parallel to the floor; the hand is also frozen. Say, "GOOD MORNING LADIES (voice louder than the volume of the class) (speech pause) and gentlemen (almost whispering). We will begin now!" You begin this last sentence still whispering and then you glide up to your normal voice volume.

Persuasion Technique 29: Use Discipline Anchors

An anchor is a stimulus that always elicits the same reaction. The reaction can be either an action (can be observed), or it can take the form of a change in a mental (attitude) or emotional (feeling) state. An anchor can be anything we want; for example, a freeze posture, holding up one arm and saying "Stop!" pointing at one ear to signal the child to listen, counting down from five to one, putting on a green hat to signal story time, or clapping. When we repeatedly and systematically give the same signal connected to an event, concept, or idea, the signal and the event become connected or anchored with one another. The anchor creates a state of positive expectation (e.g., putting on a green hat creates the expectation "It's story time!"), resulting in a change of inner state; for example, from restless to attentive. Anchors then are reflexes; automatic reactions that we create without using words or using very few words; and the more we use a particular anchor,

the faster children respond to that anchor (Nitsche, 2006). We know that we created an effective anchor when we see children responding the way we want without the use of words.

Persuasion Technique 30: Use Space Anchors

A technique that is equally powerful at school and at home is to set up several space anchors on different spots in the room. (Nitsche, 2006), or in different rooms if the child is at home. When we step into one of these space anchors children know, without words, what is happening next. Nitsche recommends for teachers to set up the following space anchors (parents can adapt at home using fewer anchors):

- *The Scolding Space.* Freeze your posture, walk to the spot, stand stiffly, and finally look at the offender without saying a single word.
- *The Attention Anchor* is a spot where the teacher stands at the beginning of a lesson to get the class attention; for example, next to the classroom door. To gain attention during the lesson, you need to use a second attention spot; for example, in front and middle of the classroom.
- *The Teaching Spot* is the place in the classroom where the teacher communicates facts. As you walk, slowly and dramatically, towards this spot, children will look upon and become more attentive.
- *The Storytelling Spot.* Put on a green hat, or any other visual signal, and walk towards this spot. Once there, share your story or current event.
- *The Silence Spot* is where you step to signal total silence.

- *The Hot Tips Spot.* Make a big "X" with masking tape on the floor in front of the room. Explain to children that every time you step into this spot, you expect to see that they assume the *hot tips posture*; that is, leaning forward with their eyes wide opened and listening attentively. On the hot tips spot you share only key information. Once the children are in the hot tips posture, you dramatically whisper the hot tip.
- *The Discipline Anchor* should be next to where you post the classroom rules. Each time you discipline the class or a particular child, stand inside this spot. Nitsche (2006) warns that we never stand on the discipline anchor while doing a different activity. In addition, when disciplining, we need to put down everything associated with teaching, like books or chalk, or with any other activity. It is also important that you breathe calmly. Inside this anchor, say no more than one sentence or phrase; for example, a simple command like "You need to _____." Then, step out of the discipline anchor and continue teaching or interacting with the child as if nothing had happened. Outside the discipline anchor, make sure that your posture is relaxed, and that you are breathing fluidly; also, smile to the offender to signal to the child, "I discipline your behavior but I like you as a person." As Nitsche says, "A smile is the shortest distance between two people." (p. 175)

It is important that we keep each anchor "clean" from one another. For example, if we have a homework anchor, we always use the exact same spot to deliver homework, and we do not use the spot for any other activity. Alternatively, if we use a green hat to signal story time, we do not use the same hat to signal, "Get on line." Another way we can contaminate an anchor is when we send incongruent signals to children; for example, we are already standing inside the silence spot but we keep talking, or we gesture the "lower your voices" signal (hand palm down and lowered

by degrees), but we raise our voice and yell. If we use them correctly; that is, systematically and "clean," anchors can become a powerful persuasive technique.

Persuasion Technique 31: Get a Commitment from the Child

Children are more likely to modify behavior if they give their word and commit themselves, so, after making your request always close your request by asking, "Will you do it?"

Concluding Comments

The language patterns or messages we use define us and define the way we relate with our children or students. Modifying what we say and the way we say it can do wonders in the way children behave. In addition, when we feel confident that we can influence and persuade children, we project our confidence and we are able to change behavior. When disciplining children, be confident in everything you say and do. Talk with confidence and conviction; show confidence in your actions too. Believe in your ability to influence and persuade your children or your students. Your confidence is catching, and you will be able to lead children in developing a healthy and confident self-image, making your discipline more likely to succeed. The persuasive language patterns and ways of talking presented in this guide not only influence children toward positive behavior, but also help improving the overall atmosphere between the child and the adult. Persuasive language is behavioral language; when we command persuasive language, we control behavior.

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Appendix A:

Think Positive to Stay Positive: Teaching Children the Benefits of Using Positive Self-Sentences

According to cognitive psychology, our feelings are in response of our thoughts and beliefs. This school of thought states that our perception of stress comes from our perception, or interpretation, of the situation: we feel threatened and frustrated by the situation (we feel stress) when we think and believe that we cannot cope with the event. That is, we feel stressed and frustrated when we think and believe we do not have the skills and/or resources to succeed. To cope efficiently with failure and frustration, our perception (interpretation of the situation) and attitude are the keys. When we think positively, we expect good and favorable outcomes; and because we expect positive results, we try harder and perseverate. Positive thoughts open our mind to ideas, words, and images that are conducive to resilience and problem solving. Negative thinking and expectations, on the other hand, put us down; we criticize ourselves for our errors, doubt our abilities, and anticipate failure. A negative belief damages our self-confidence, harms our job or school performance, and freezes our skills. Children are not immune to the dangers of a habitual negative thinking pattern. Quite the opposite, in managing academic challenges, children commonly express negative and self-defeating thoughts and beliefs like:

- I'm no good.
- I can't do anything right.
- I messed up again.

- I'm so stupid!
- I'm a moron if I can't do this.
- Nothing works out for me.
- I'm going to do awful.
- I know I'm going to fail this test.
- The other kids think I'm weird.
- Everybody makes fun of me.
- I know something bad is going to happen.

Most children are unaware that they are constantly using this kind of negative or pessimistic self-talking, failing to see the connection between this pattern of negative thoughts and self-verbalizations with low self-confidence and high anxiety. In children, negative or pessimistic thinking correlates with low motivation in school and learned helplessness; the latter is a pattern of giving up when facing challenging or difficult tasks in school, even when they have the ability and skills to deal with the academic task. This is why it is important for teachers and parents to discuss the importance of positive thinking and talking with children, and to help children reverse the negative and anxiety producing thinking and verbalizations they use by substituting them with positive verbalizations.

To train a child in using positive self-sentences, the first step is for the child to become a "*thought detective*," paying attention to her negative thoughts and self-verbalizations and stopping them when they happen (Seligman, Reivich, Jaycox, and Gillham, 1995). Next, the

child substitutes the negative thoughts or verbalizations with positive ones. For example, a negative self-statement like, “I can’t do anything right” can be counterbalanced with a positive self-statement like, “It’s okay if I’m not good at this. I’ll just try my hardest. I’m going to feel fine.” Children need to understand that although we sometimes do things well, we often make mistakes. Mistakes are okay, that is how we learn. It is important for children to recognize their mistakes and make themselves accountable for them; they can feel disappointed in the mistake, but not in themselves. We need to explain to children that, in handling academic challenges, they will feel better when they keep their thoughts, beliefs, expectations, and self-sentences optimistic and positive.

To help children develop positive thinking and positive self-talking; that is, to program positive self-sentences, help them understand that they have two ways of looking at the same situation or event, including problematic events; the optimistic or positive way (partly sunny day), and the pessimistic or negative way (partly cloudy day). Both views (partly sunny day and partly cloudy day) are equally right, but only the positive or optimistic way helps in developing resilience and problem solving skills.

When programming positive self-sentences, the child can practice first aloud and then silently or mentally. The goal is for the child to learn to talk positively, so that he remains positive, makes an effort, and perseverates when coping with challenging academic tasks or troublesome events. For example, when Josh panicked halfway the math test, he cued himself, “Relax,” and used the positive self-statement, “I can handle this. I’m going to be okay.” Then Josh visualized (created a mental movie) himself solving the math problems, calmed and relaxed. After a few seconds of this mental exercise, Josh was able to return to the test and to finish it. The positive self-

statements and visualization that Josh used turned into a positive self-suggestion that encouraged him and helped him see himself as capable in dealing with the math test.

To build and reinforce positive and optimistic thinking in children, be positive and optimistic yourself. Children learn a lot by observing how significant adults, like teachers and parents, deal with problematic events.

Activities to Help Children Develop Positive Self-Sentences

Some things we can do are:

Help the child write a list of five-to-ten positive things about himself or herself. (You may need to suggest some at the beginning.) When the list is ready, have the child practice by saying the list softly a number of times. Discuss events or times when the child can use the list (e.g. when coping with angry feelings or when teased).

Have the child complete an *Inventory of Strengths* where she lists her positive qualities, skills, and efforts. Questions to answer can be:

- What are my strengths?
- When do my strengths help me?
- Where do my strengths help me?
- Do I use my strengths?
- When do I use my strengths?
- Where do I use my strengths?

- How do I use my strengths?

Use the child's answers to customize a set of positive self-statements that she can use to reinforce her self-confidence and stay motivated. Example:

What are my strengths?

I'm good at dance and I'm a strong speller. I'm a kind and considerate child. I like to share with my younger sister. I keep my room neat and organized.

When do my strengths help me?

My dancing skills help me in cheerleading. Because I'm kind and considerate with others, and I like to share, I have many friends in school and in my neighborhood.

Where do my strengths help me?

My spelling ability helps me in creative writing. I love writing stories with interesting characters, and sharing my stories with my friends and my mom. Sometimes, I do not understand the meaning of a long word, so I can use my spelling skills to look up the new word in the dictionary. I get a little bit nervous with math word problems. Because I'm an organized child, I can use that strength to create a plan with organized steps to solve math word problems.

Do I use my strengths?

Sometimes, I forget to use my strengths. I can help myself by writing a checklist, so I know exactly what I need to do to solve a math word problem.

Have the child develop a set of positive statements that he can use to cope with troublesome events. The child can use these self-statements individually; several self-statements combined, or

coupled with other behavioral management interventions such as anger management and/or relaxation. Some examples:

- Things will be fine.
- Things will work out.
- I'm going to be okay.
- I'm upset now, but things will get better.
- I don't like this, but I'll be fine.
- Soon, I'll feel happy again.
- I like myself.
- My friends like me.
- My friends help me feel good.
- When I start to worry, I relax and feel better.
- Worry doesn't help. Is what I do with this problem what matters.
- Worry doesn't help; action does.
- Stop feeling sorry for yourself and do something.
- There's no problem so big that it cannot be solved.
- Nothing will bother me today. I'm going to have fun and learn.

- I won’t give up.
- I can problem solve. And I will.
- When I mess up, I think of all the other things that I do well.
- Sometimes it feels that nothing helps, but this feeling goes away and I feel happy again.
- I believe in myself.
- I believe I have many skills and talents.
- I believe there are many things I can do well.
- Nobody’s perfect. I do the best I can.
- When I try my best, that’s what anyone can ask for.
- Trying my best is what counts.
- I don’t need to do better than others do. Trying my best is what counts.
- I’m sad Anthony doesn’t want to play with me, but other kids will play with me.
- I can think for myself.
- I don’t have to be perfect all the time; it’s okay to make mistakes. That’s how I learn.
- I just have enough skills to (e.g. solve these division problems or spell these words).
- I have enough patience to (e.g. wait for my turn or stay calm).
- Each day I feel better and better about myself.

- Slowly, I learn to become more (e.g. patient, calmed, or self-confident).
- One-step at a time will get me there.
- When I try hard, I can (e.g. get better grades, solve this problem, or behave).
- I have the right attitude and now I'm learning to (e.g. make new friends, get better grades, or get along with others).
- I'm okay. I know as much as anyone else.
- It's okay. I usually do quite well.
- When I get a wrong answer, it is not the end of the world. Having a wrong answer just means that I need to use a different strategy to solve this problem.
    - I'm not going to die because I got a 60 on this spelling test. Next time, I'll try harder.
- Being called (e.g. fatso or weird) doesn't mean that I'm not okay. I'm pretty good at (child's skill, talent, or ability).
- I can still feel good about myself even if other kids say I'm (e.g. fat). I'm pretty good at (child's skill, talent, or ability).
- When kids call me names I think of all the things that I do well.

Do not underestimate the power of positive thinking and in using positive self-messages in improving children's behavior. We can strongly influence and direct children to behave in a particular way by manipulating the way children think about themselves and their environment. Remain confident in your ability and power in influencing and inspiring your children.

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Appendix B:

Child Guidance Skills for Teachers: Relaxation Techniques for Angry and Troubled Students

Teachers and parents can help an anger-prone child understand the difference between a stressed state and a relaxed state, so that the child recognizes the physical stress signals and applies relaxation strategies. We can explain to the child that, in a stressed, worried, or angry state, he will feel the tightening and hardening of body parts like the fists, clench, neck, jaws, and stomach. In a relaxed state, the body loosens and feels less tight. With a relaxed body, the child is better able to think, plan, and problem solve.

Once the child recognizes the difference between stress and relaxation, you can teach the child a basic relaxation strategy. To start, talk in a low tone of voice, speaking softly and gently. Dimming the lights and keeping a quiet environment helps the child concentrate only on your voice.

BREATHING EXERCISES

Breathing exercises are important in training children how to relax. Children can practice relaxation breathing in their chairs, seated on the floor, lying down, or even standing. It is preferable if their eyes are closed, but they can keep the eyes open. Some breathing exercises that we can teach an anger-prone child are:

1. To teach the child to breathe rhythmically --rhythmical up and down of the abdomen-- tell her to *"breathe with the waves"* in a slow, measured pace.

2. Teach the child to count her breaths slowly from one to ten, focusing on the numbers.

3. Teach the child to take big, slow, deep breaths.

4. Teach *deep breathing* by inhaling deeply and exhaling very slowly.

5. Tell the child to take a deep breath and to hold it for about ten seconds, then to let the air out.

6. Show the child how to inhale deeply through the nostrils and to exhale slowly through the nose or mouth.

7. Say, "Take a deep breath through your nose and slowly let it out. Take another deep breath... Now, pay attention to your body swaying softly… gently… like the ocean waves… Making you feel loose and relaxed."

8. Deepen the relaxation feeling by counting aloud from one to five, or from one to ten, with a three-second interval between numbers. With each number you say, the child inhales; when the child breathes out, you suggest that her body is loosening and that she is feeling more and more relaxed.

9. Instruct the child to sit comfortably and say, "Can you pay attention to your breathing? How it comes in… and how it goes out again… In… out… in… out… And as you notice your breathing, begin counting your breath each time you breathe in… Counting to ten; then begin again with one… If your mind wanders, and all our minds wander, gently bring it back to one and start counting again" (Mahony, 2003).

10. Have the child concentrate by counting while inhaling and thinking the word "relax" while exhaling. The child goes to ten and back down to one in a continuous cycle.

USING CUED RELAXATION

Once the child knows relaxation breathing, we can use a word or a signal to cue the child in using relaxation breathing and self-calming statements to relax and to gain self-control. Schaefer (1994) recommends the following procedure to *establish a cue word association*:

1. Have the child pay attention to his breathing while he whispers the cue word with each exhalation.

2. For the first five pairings (exhales-cue word), the teacher or parent repeats aloud the cue word, matching the child's exhalations.

3. The child continues independently for fifteen more pairings.

4. Give the child one minute to allow him to notice the general feelings associated with relaxation.

5. Have the child practice the pairing twenty more times.

Schaefer recommends that anger-prone children practice both relaxation exercises and cue word associations on a daily basis.

Two known techniques are breathing-cued relaxation and cue-controlled relaxation. In *breathing-cued relaxation,* the child takes three-to-four deep breaths and relaxes on each breath out. In *cue-controlled relaxation,* the child breathes in and out repeating slowly a self-calming word or phrase like "relax," "chill," "control," "calm down," "cool it," or "take it easy."

We can combine deep breathing with a cue word such as “relax” or “one.” The child takes a deep breath, holds it, and then exhales slowly. Exhaling, the child concentrates on the cue word, loosening the body from head to toe.

Bedell and Lennox (1997) recommend using *slow breathing*. With this technique, the child takes ten diaphragmatic breaths in sixty seconds; inhaling for three seconds while mentally counting (1,2,3) and exhaling for three seconds counting (3,2,1). After each six-second breaths, the child says to herself “relax.” This repetition by itself promotes relaxation, and the word “relax” triggers the relaxed state associated with breathing out.

MUSCLE TENSION TECHNIQUES

For deeper relaxation, we can teach children the *muscle tension-muscle release technique*; concentrating in areas like the neck, shoulders, arms, hands, thighs, and legs. One at a time, have the child tense each muscle for five seconds while she concentrates on the tension feeling. Then, the child releases the tension, enjoying the feeling of relaxation. The teacher or parent can lead the child, saying things like, “I wonder if you allow yourself to enjoy how naturally and easily your (shoulders, legs, etc.) get loose and relax”; “It is so nice to notice how much better you feel when you are relaxed than when you are all tight.” Alternatively, “It seems to me that you are ready to let go the (anger or tension)… It feels so good to let go… That’s how you want to feel… nice and loose… and relaxed.”

With a younger child, we can use the *robot/rag doll technique*. Tell the child to tense up all the muscles in his body and visualize himself as a stiff robot. Have the child hold this tense state for about fifteen seconds. Then, tell the child to release all the tension and picture a rag doll with all

his muscles very floppy and loose. Hold this relaxation state for about fifteen seconds. Continue practicing until the child knows how to relax (Bloomquist, 1996).

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Appendix C:

How Children Learn: Understanding Motivation

Psycho-educational teachers use *theories of motivation* to develop patterns of interacting with students that enhance children's effort and their willingness to achieve in academic related tasks. According to Tollefson (2000), at a very young age, children begin to develop implicit theories about whether they can be successful in school. The author adds that, once the theories are developed, students' classroom behaviors reflect their personal, implicit theories about the variables that produce success or failure in the classroom. Authors in the field of *school achievement* and *motivation* agree that students with higher achievement expectations, that is, children who believe they are going to do well in school, earn higher grades than the grades earned by students with similar ability but lower expectations, or children who believe they are going to fail in school. (See for example, Eccles, Wigfield, and Schiefele, 1998; Tollefson, 2000.) Teachers need knowledge in motivation concepts, principles, and theories so that we can foster our students' interest and engagement in the learning process. In addition, teachers need to understand how these motivational concepts and theories relate to our day-to-day classroom experience, so that we can depend on this knowledge when we are dealing with apathetic and unmotivated students, with children with low self-confidence, and/or students who lack behavioral self-control. Knowledge in theories of classroom motivation should guide teachers' instructional decisions and lesson planning.

An unmotivated and apathetic student is one of our most common classroom problems. These are not necessarily children with habitually disruptive classroom behaviors, and not all students with recurrent behavior problems are unmotivated or have low self-confidence. Being able to

discriminate the difference between these two distinct populations is important, so that we can customize our interventions according to each individual child's socio-emotional needs. On the other hand, some habitually disruptive students are also children with low motivation and/or with low self-confidence, and we are not going to be effective in modifying these students' disruptive behaviors until we skillfully intervene at both the thinking and feeling levels, at the same time that we are attempting to modify their dysfunctional behaviors.

Definition of Motivation

In the general sense, we can define motivation as the amount of effort an individual puts toward achieving a goal. Motivation guides us in the *selection, direction,* and *continuation* of our behavior, which explains motivation as an internal process that comes from within the person. In the earlier days, the concept of students' motivation seemed to be equal with *achievement motivation*, defined primarily in terms of the *intensity*, *direction*, and *duration* of behavior. Embedded within this definition is the notion that, to show their motivation, students do what the teacher wants them to do, and they do it consistently over an extended period. This definition never explained adequately the student that simply did not engage in an academic task not because the child lacked general motivation, but because the child had little or no interest in that particular task. Most recently, the focus changed from *duration*, or engaged time, to *quality of task engagement.* Measuring how much time students spend on task tells us very little about their *thinking*, that is, what they are attending to, how they are processing information, how they are reacting to their performance, and how they are interpreting feedback (Ames, 1990). The author concludes that, what really matters is the quality of engaged time, not the quantity or duration.

Extrinsic versus Intrinsic Motivation

In terms of the direction of behavior, it is more important that teachers analyze and understand students' *goals* or reasons for learning. For example, there is a huge difference between a student that is completing a math task so that he can earn a token (*extrinsic motivation),* and the child that is *intrinsically motivated* to improve his current math skills so that he can learn and/or develop higher-level skills. Extrinsically motivated students are responding to external factors such as rewards or pressure to do well (e.g. grades). Intrinsically motivated children feel motivated by internal factors, in other words, these students enjoy learning and developing their academic skills. Intrinsically motivated children believe that learning is fun, positive, and is the right thing for them to do. We know that students are internally motivated when they actively seek out and participate in academic tasks without the need of external rewards. There is a strong consensus in the motivation literature that intrinsic motivation is the stronger motivator. Teachers and parents do well in minimizing extrinsic motivation, focusing at helping children feel good about learning and helping children understand that they should engage in learning for their own personal, internal reasons, e.g. interest in mastering a topic or a skill. To develop interest in wanting to know more about a specific topic a good strategy is to reinforce in children the attitude, "I don't know if I like this until I try it." For students with learning or behavior difficulties, initially, a combination of intrinsic rewards inherent in the learning task and a carefully planned external reward system may be necessary to maintain the child engaged in the task over longer and/or difficult periods of learning.

Goal Setting

According to Ames, to reinforce intrinsic motivation, we need to understand children's *thought patterns,* including the *goals*, *beliefs*, and *attitudes* that are involved in how students approach

learning situations, engage in the process of learning, and respond to their learning experiences. Goal setting takes center stage in all major theories of motivation. Goals give *direction* and *purpose*; simply setting a goal may lead to progress in the desired direction, and understanding why we want the goal encourages spending time and effort. In other words, improvement towards the goal by itself increases intrinsic motivation. As long as students develop goals and spend time and effort in achieving their goals, they are by definition, internally motivated. As we said earlier, motivation is an internally regulated process; because motivation comes from within the individual, one person cannot directly motivate another person. However, with the help of theories of motivation, teachers indirectly can motivate children, *creating the classroom atmosphere and learning conditions that influence students in wanting to learn*. Teachers and students should aim at reaching *learning* or *mastery goals*, placing the primary emphasis both in improving current skills and in developing higher-level skills, minimizing *performance* or *achievement goals*, or the motivation to earn higher grades or any other extrinsic reward. Once students develop mastery goals, each time we see a child ready to quit a task, we can encourage him to sub-vocalize or think about various mastery-related reasons for wanting to complete the task, for example, satisfying his curiosity, developing competence, becoming more knowledgeable about the topic, or increasing his feelings of autonomy (Wolters, 2003).

Teacher's Self-Efficacy

A related concept in the field of student's motivation is the concept of *teacher's efficacy*. Ames (1990) defines teacher's efficacy as being able to develop goals, beliefs, and attitudes in students that sustain children's long-term involvement, and contribute to quality involvement in learning. Efficient teachers not only want their students to achieve academically, but also want students to value the process of learning and improvement of their academic skills, to put effort in

developing and applying their skills, and in developing a long-term commitment in learning. In other words, for efficient teachers, students' motivation by itself is a goal and outcome of education (Ames, 1990). Efficient teachers actively work in creating the classroom atmosphere and conditions that enhance students' engagement in learning and their motivation to develop and achieve their academic goals over a long period. When dealing with students with learning or behavior problems, efficient teachers are both therapeutic and inspirational, encouraging students in feeling challenged, not overwhelmed or threatened, by academic demands and coaching children in developing and reaching higher academic and/or behavioral goals.

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About the Author

Carmen Y. Reyes, MSE, has more than twenty years of experience as a self-contained special education teacher, resource room teacher, and educational diagnostician. Carmen has taught at all grade levels, from kindergarten to post secondary. Carmen is an expert in the application of behavior management strategies, and in teaching students with learning or behavior problems. Her classroom background, in New York City and her native Puerto Rico, includes ten years teaching emotionally disturbed/behaviorally disordered children and four years teaching students with a learning disability or mental retardation. Carmen has a bachelor's degree in psychology (University of Puerto Rico) and a master's degree in special education with a specialization in emotional disorders (Long Island University, Brooklyn: NY). She also has extensive graduate training in psychology (30+ credits). Carmen is the author of 40+ books and articles in psycho-education and in alternative teaching techniques for low-achieving students. To preview her books (You can sample the first 45% of the books free) and read the complete collection of articles, visit Carmen's blog, ***The Psycho-Educational Teacher***.

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