# POWER IN THE CLASSROOM III: TEACHER COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES AND MESSAGES

This study is the third in a series designed to explore teachers' use of power in managing students' classroom behavior. Although power is a difficult construct to define, Wheeless, Barraclough and Stewart (1983) maintain that it "may be regarded as the perceived bases of control that a person has over another person's behavior that would not have otherwise occurred" (p. 120). While power refers to the capacity or potential to effect behavioral change, power-based strategies refer to the implementation of those power bases. Such implementation relies primarily on verbal or nonverbal messages through which the particular power base is made known to the target (Wheeless et al., 1983). Thus far in this research program, the focus has been on student perceptions of teachers' power bases for effecting behavioral change. Consistent with the literature on power in a variety of contexts, in the classroom teachers communicate particular bases of power to purposively alter student behavior. In this way, power-based strategies are behavior alteration techniques which teachers use to control or modify student actions. If power strategies are not employed, the teacher's ability to enhance student learning may be significantly reduced. That is, the teacher must be perceived to have power "potential" and furthermore, must be able to "implement" that potential to consistently obtain student on-task behaviors in learning situations. Thus, power strategies are critical to teaching effectiveness and classroom management.

In sequence, Study I examined whether teachers and students shared perceptions of the frequency and type of power strategies employed in the classroom (McCroskey & Richmond, 1983). Study II focused on the relationship between the teacher's use of power and students' cognitive and affective learning (Richmond & McCroskey (1984). The present study sought to extend the existing typology of power strategies that teachers use and perceive as effective. The end result of this investigation is a classification of behavior alteration techniques and representative behavior alteration messages which teachers can employ to manage students in the classroom. The research and thinking in the areas of classroom management and power provided directions for this study.

# CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

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Classroom management encompasses teacher behaviors which "produce high levels of student involvement in classroom activities, minimal amounts of student behaviors

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that interfere with the teacher's or students' work, and efficient use of instructional time" (Emmer & Evertson, 1981, p. 342). Teacher behaviors that contribute to the effectively managed classroom include classroom structure, lesson format and learning activities, teacher leadership skills, and a variety of behavior alteration techniques.

In terms of classroom structure, rules and procedures must be specific and clearly defined (Borg & Ascione, 1979); generated by both students and teachers (Spillman, 1980); with sufficient time spent at the beginning of the school year socializing students to rule adoption (Emmer & Evertson, 1980; Evertson & Anderson, 1979). Research on lesson format and learning activities indicates that teacher-led group activities create more on-task behaviors than individual seatwork assignments (Good & Beckerman, 1978); and student-paced activities employing a highly structured programmed format ensures greater task persistence (Kounin & Gump, 1974). Teacher leadership skills that optimize classroom management include prompts (Krantz & Scarth, 1979), positive questioning techniques (Borg & Ascione, 1979), motivational statements, and structured transitions (Arlin, 1979). While all these strategies are important in preventing classroom disruptions by maintaining on-task behaviors, an additional criterial variable for classroom management appears to be those control strategies that teachers employ to change student behaviors. That is, what messages do teachers use to encourage students to comply with their demands?

Most relevant to this project is the research on behavior alteration techniques. These techniques are rooted in operant conditioning or behavior modification approaches to learning. These include the use of token economy, behavioral contracts (Harris, 1972), extinction, reinforcement, time-outs (Shrigley, 1979), incentive systems (Emmer & Evertson, 1981), specification of consequences (Breuning, 1978), and teacher "with-itness" or the ability to immediately identify and desist inappropriate student behaviors (Kounin, 1970). Overall, this research indicates that effective classroom managers should employ behavior alteration techniques that emphasize primarily positive, rather than aversive teacher-controlled contingencies. Teachers often experience difficulty employing such techniques. For instance, implementation of behavior modification techniques requires individual contingency specifications and teacher "with-itness." Such identification and scrutiny become increasingly difficult with large numbers of students.

#### POWER

In the context of classroom management, power-based strategies contribute to the teacher's ability to maximize student on-task behaviors and to minimize student disruptions that interfere with the learning process. Teacher power differs from typical classroom management strategies referenced in the instructional literature. While classroom structure, teacher leadership skills, lesson format/learning activities, and other classroom variables work *in combination* to orchestrate optimal conditions for learning, even the most effectively designed learning environments may suffer from student disruptions and resistances. These deviances require concurrent teacher attempts to change student behavior.

McCroskey and Richmond (1983), consistent with French & Raven (1968), describe five bases of teacher power in the classroom. In overview, teacher's *coercive* power is based on student perceptions that he/she will be punished by the teacher if

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he/she fails to conform to the teacher's influence attempt. A teacher's *reward* power refers to student expectations that he/she will be rewarded for compliance. *Legitimate* or assigned power is based on student perceptions that the teacher has the right to make demands. *Referent* power is based on the student's desire to comply in order to please or identify with the teacher. Finally, *expert* power is based on the student's willingness to comply because of perceptions of teacher competence in specific areas.

In the previous study in this series cognitive and affective learning were found to be positively related to perceived use of referent and expert power, negatively related to perceived use of coercive and legitimate power, and unrelated to perceived use of reward power (Richmond & McCroskey, 1984).

# **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

What behavior alteration techniques can teachers reasonably and realistically employ in the traditional classroom? While the educational literature overwhelmingly supports numerous positive strategies of student control, actual teachers often find these strategies difficult or impractical to implement (Siggers, 1980). Faced with a classroom which may range in class size from 15 to 40 students, an individual teacher may require numerous and diverse practical strategies for modifying student behavior. The present study was designed to extend the existing list of student behavior alteration techniques available and effective for classroom use. Research Question 1 reflects this concern:

Research Question 1: What types of behavior alteration techniques do teachers perceive they frequently use and find effective in controlling student behavior in the classroom?

While the primary concern of this study focused on types, uses, and effectiveness of student control techniques that are available to teachers in the classroom, additional issues were addressed. Given that students may be resistant to teacher influence attempts or demand a sense of shared influence in classroom management, students may employ similar control techniques on their teachers. Similarly, a transactional view of communication suggests that influence attempts in transactional relationships are evolutionary and reciprocally controlled by interacting dyad members. Therefore,

*Research Question 2:* Do teachers perceive their students employing similar and effective behavior alteration techniques to affect teacher behavior?

Finally, since it has been shown that teachers do employ control strategies in classroom management, the types of strategies selected and their perceived effectiveness may be a function of relevant teacher variables. Therefore,

*Research Question 3:* Are teachers' perceived selection and effectiveness of behavior alteration techniques a function of instructor gender, number of years teaching, grade level taught, or teacher satisfaction with their profession?

## **METHODS**

A substantial body of previous research on compliance-gaining has yielded several typologies of such techniques (c.f. Cody, McLaughlin, & Jordan, 1980; Marwell & Schmitt, 1967; Miller, Boster, Roloff, & Seibold, 1977; and Schenck-Hamlin,

Wiseman, & Georgacarakos, 1982). Phase I was a partial replication of this work. This phase of the research isolated an open-ended pool of behavior alteration techniques and messages representative of those techniques.

A sample of 177 college students enrolled in various communication classes generated individual lists of messages in response to the following instructions: "People try to get other people to do things they may not want to do. The other person usually thinks and often asks, 'Why should I do this?' Give us the most common answers you'd give to this question, such as, 'It'll be good for you,' or 'You will lose a lot if you don't." This open-ended question with the purposeful omission of hypothetical scenarios served to elicit a wide range of responses. Approximately 2,500 messages were generated from this sample.

After individual messages were generated, students were then grouped (group size ranged from 4–7 members; total group N = 39), and asked to discuss and categorize their responses with the following instructions: "The task for your group is to take the statements each individual has come up with and try to put them into categories (i.e., groups of statements that seem to be quite a bit alike). Then, try to give each group of statements a label or name." This procedure allowed subjects to inductively derive categories of control strategies. Approximately 150 categories were generated.

Given the overlap in both messages and categories derived from this sample, the authors of the study, serving as coders, independently and then jointly, derived 18 representative behavior alteration techniques (BATs) or categories. Our coding revealed that each category was best represented by a combination of statements or behavior alteration messages (BAMs). While any individual message alone did not totally represent a given category, messages in configuration provided a meaningful conceptual classification. As expected, the resulting 18 BATs and representative BAMs provided considerable overlap with previously defined compliance-gaining and power strategies, but was not precisely the same as any previous typology (see Table 1).

In Phase 2 an instrument was generated and administered to 204 elementary and secondary teachers enrolled in instructional communication graduate classes. In the first section of the instrument, the behavior alteration techniques (BATs) with numbers rather than names as labels and including representative message groupings (BAMs) were presented for examination. The teachers were asked to indicate on 5-point scales (1 = never, 5 = very often) how often they used each grouping of BAMs to get their students to change their behavior and how effectively such statements were in getting their students to change. Using the same message groupings, the next section requested that the teachers indicate how frequently and how effectively they felt that their students employed such statements in getting their teacher to change his/her behavior. In the final section of the instrument, teachers responded to a 4-item measure of job satisfaction,<sup>1</sup> and indicated the number of years they had been teaching, the grade level they usually teach, and gender. Teacher responses to the entire instrument provided the data for analyses in the present study.

# ANALYSES AND RESULTS

In order to answer each research question, preliminary analyses of the 18 behavior alteration techniques were required to ensure the assumption of independence. That is, since teachers responded to categories of message groupings or statement

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#### TABLE 1

BEHAVIOR ALTERATION TECHNIQUES (BATs) AND MESSAGES (BAMs)

BATs			BAMs							
	1.	Reward from Behavior	You will enjoy it. You will get a reward if you do. It will make you happy. It will help you. You will benefit if you do.							
	2.	Reward from Others	Others will think highly of you if you do. Others will like you if you do. Others will respect you if you do.							
	3.	Punishment from Source	I will punish you if you don't. I will make it miserable for you if you don't. I will continue doing bad things to you if you don't.							
	4.	Referent-Model	This is the way I always do it. People who are like me do it. People you re- spect do it.							
	5.	Legitimate- Higher Authority	Do it, I'm just telling you what I was told. It is a rule, I have to do it and so do you. I don't know why, you just have to do it.							
	6.	Guilt	If you don't, others will be hurt. If you don't others will be unhappy. Others will be harmed if you don't.							
	7.	Reward from Source	I will give you a reward if you do. I will make it beneficial to you if you do. I will continue to reward you if you do.							
	8. 1	Normative Rules	Everyone else does it. We voted, and the majority rules. Society expects you to do it. All of your friends are doing it.							
	9. 1	Personal Respon- sibility	It is your responsibility. It is your obligation. There is no one else that can do it. People are depending on you.							
	10. 1	Expert	From my experience, it is a good idea. From what I have learned, it is what you should do. This has worked for me, it should work for you too.							
	11. 1	Punishment from Behavior	You will lose if you don't. You will be punished if you don't. You will be un- happy if you don't. You will be hurt if you don't.							
	12. 5	Self-Esteem	You will feel good about yourself if you do. You are the best person to do it.							
	13. I	Debt	You owe me one. It's your turn. You promised to do it. I did it the last time.							
	14. I	Personal Relation- ship-Negative	I will dislike you if you don't. I will lose respect for you if you don't. I will think less of you if you don't.							
	15. A	Altrusim	If you do this it will help others. Others will benefit if you do. It will make others happy if you do.							
	16. H	Personal Relation-	I will like you better if you do. I will respect you if you do. I will think more highly of you if you do. I will appreciate you more if you do.							
	17. I	Duty	Your group needs it done. Our group depends on you. Our group will be hurt if you don't.							
	18. I s	Legitimate-Per- sonal Authority	Because I told you to. Just do it. You have to do it, it's required. You don't have a choice.							

configurations instead of individual items for each category, no clear factor solution was expected. In order to substantiate this assumption, each of four sets of data were factored separately: teacher use, teacher effectiveness, student use, and student effectiveness. As expected, no meaningful single or multiple factor solutions were obtained. Correlations among the 18 BATs for each data set further confirmed that the categories, while somewhat related, were best interpreted to be 18 independent dimensions, (average r = .11). Consequently, further tests of the proposed research questions required separate analyses of each BAT.

Question 1 focused on what types of BATs teachers report they use and find effective in controlling student behavior in the classroom. For a BAT to be included as those frequently used by teachers, two criteria were imposed: mean responses must be above 3.0 and frequency of subject score of 4 or 5 must be above 60%. This procedure ensured that representative categories illustrated at least above occasional use by an overwhelming majority of teachers. Based on these criteria, 7 BATs were obtained: 1) reward from behavior, 2) reward from source, 3) personal responsibility, 4) expert, 5) self-esteem, 6) altruism, and 7) duty (see Table 2).

The same 7 BATs obtained with teacher use also resulted for teacher effectiveness

(see Table 2). That is, teachers perceived that the BATs they used were the same BATs they perceived as effective ( $\bar{X} > 3.0$ , 4–5 frequency >60%). Pearson r correlations between each obtained category of teacher use and effectiveness indicated a significant positive relationship for all seven BATs (p < .0001; see Table 2)

Question 2 focused on what types of BATs teachers perceived their students to use and find effective in controlling their teacher's behavior in the classroom. Imposing a similar criterion ( $\bar{X} < 3.0$ , frequency of 1 or 2 scores > 60%), teachers reported that their students infrequently used any of the proposed BATs nor was a BAT perceived as effective when it was employed.

Question 3 was concerned with four potential predictors of those behavior alteration techniques perceived used and effective in controlling student behavior: gender, number of years teaching, grade level usually taught, and teacher job satisfaction. In order to test these relationships, the 7 obtained BATs that teachers self-reported they use and find effective in controlling student behavior served as separate dependent variables. Individual AOV's indicated that overall, no meaningful results were obtained. Only three of the tests were significant at the .05 level across all analyses: female teachers perceived the duty BAT to be more effective than males ( $R^2 = .02$ ); more satisfied teachers employed the *altruism* BAT more often than less satisfied teachers ( $R^2 = .03$ ); and teachers in grades K-6 employed the reward from source BAT more often than teachers from other grade levels  $(R^2 = .06)$ . Based on repeated tests as well as low variance obtained with those variables determined to be significant, these results may not be meaningful. Based on the results of this study then, teacher perceived use and effectiveness of any given behavior alteration technique does not appear to be a function of the variables examined.

# DISCUSSION

The primary goal of this study, a third in a series of programmed research, was to identify behavior alteration techniques (BATs) employed in classroom management. While Studies I and II relied on the bases of power from French and Raven's (1968) typology, Study III was designed to explore teachers' perceived use of power by extending the existing list of power strategies applicable to the classroom. Consistent

		BAT Use				BAT Effectiveness				Use & Effectiveness
Category	Item	x	S.D.	f	% of total	x	S.D.	f	% of total	Correlation*
Reward from Behavior	1	3.41	.94	174	85.30	3.29	.83	179	88.18	.64
Reward from Source	7	3.01	1.17	142	69.61	3.26	1.09	165	82.09	.80
Personal Responsibility	9	3.53	1.04	178	87.26	3.27	.91	175	86.21	.62
Expert	10	3.21	1.12	158	77.45	3.08	1.01	157	77.72	.76
Self-Esteem	12	3.95	.95	191	93.63	3.88	.85	193	95.07	.69
Altruism	15	3.20	1.01	153	75.00	3.18	.89	165	81.64	.64
Duty	17	3.06	1.00	153	75.00	3.07	.91	162	80.20	.65

TABLE 2

MEANS AND CORRELATIONS OF TEACHERS' BAT USE AND EFFECTIVENESS (N = 204)

\*All correlations are significant at p < .0001.

f-frequency of 4-5 response.

with the objective of this study, findings suggest that previous strategies need to be recast into classroom-relevant BATs. Teachers self-reported the use and applicability of 7 BATs for classroom management.

1. Reward from Behavior. Based on the configuration of BAMs (see Table 1, Item #1), this BAT promotes teacher attempts to elicit specific student behaviors by suggesting that such behaviors will be inherently rewarding. Employment of this strategy points out to the student that rewarding consequences are derived directly from engaging in the new behavior. This "try it, you'll like it" approach is likely in situations where students are reluctant to engage in innovative behavior which represents deviations from older ways of doing things. It would seem to be particularly relevant when students are resistant to the "new teacher" or a new learning experience.

2. Reward from Source. The BAMs that reflect this BAT (see Table 1, Item #7) combine into another reward-type appeal. Teachers who use this BAT offer direct rewards for student compliance. It should be noted that this BAT most closely resembles French and Raven's (1968) reward power. That is, the students expect to be rewarded by the teacher for complying with the teacher's influence attempt. Illustrations of this BAT would be found in learning environments where the teacher promises A marks on assignments and special tokens for "good" behavior.

3. Personal Responsibility. BAMs within this category suggest that compliance is derived from the students' sense of responsibility (see Table 1, Item #9). That is, as members of the class, students must share in assuming the responsibilities of the class. Teachers who employ this BAT direct appeals that emphasize the student's unique abilities in relation to other class members. By pointing out that "there's no one else who can do it," the student is obliged to comply in order to meet peer expectations and demands.

4. Expert. Like French and Raven's (1968) notion of expert power, the BAMs that reflect this BAT indicate that students perceive the teacher to be knowledgeable in specific areas (see Table 1, Item #10). Compliance requires the perception that the teacher is qualified to request the particular behavior in question. This BAT would probably be demonstrated when the teacher dictates the "best way" to solve a math problem; outline an oral report; shoot a basket or offers other procedural guidance as a function of his/her expertise.

5. Self-Esteem. Similar to BATs 1 and 2, BAMs that represent this BAT focus on student rewards for compliance (see Table 1, Item #12). In this case, the source of reward is the students' self-esteem. The teacher who employs this BAT appeals to the student's sense of self-worth relative to a given task. The teacher's assertion that "you're good at it" encourages student compliance by positively reinforcing particular student qualities demonstrated through performance.

6. Altruism. Similar to the "personal responsibility" BAT, the BAMs that reflect this BAT appeal to the student's awareness and commitment to other members of the class (see Table 1, Item #15). Altruism differs from the former BAT, however, by omitting reference to the student's special performance qualities. Instead, this BAT suggests that others will be happier or that others will benefit through the student's compliance. By appealing to a student's concern for the welfare of others in the class, the teacher discourages egocentrism and encourages an unselfish support for others. This BAT would surface during teacher attempts to motivate students to help each other in the learning process.

7. Duty. The BAMs that constitute this BAT further extend the student's

recognition and commitment to class members represented by both the "personal responsibility" and "altruism" BATs (see Table 1, Item #17). Defining the student as a group member, the student has certain responsibilities to behave appropriately. Without his/her compliance, the rest of the class cannot achieve. Such group interdependence requires that each student has a duty to cooperate so that everyone succeeds. The teacher who uses this appeal promotes a team spirit, asserting that "we're all in this together." The "duty" BAT is probably evidenced during the teacher's coordination of group projects and team competitions.

Further interpretation of the 7 BATs served to illustrate their uniqueness and applicability in classroom management. The BATs teachers report they use and find effective in the classroom do *not* reflect punishment-oriented techniques nor do they rely exclusively on direct, individual appeals. Our results suggest: (1) Teachers perceive they employ primarily positive reward-type BATs. Despite teachers' "preference" to employ punishing strategies to control student behavior (Siggers, 1980), either teachers are unwilling to report they use punishment or they actually avoid using such strategies; (2) Teachers report they frequently use the student's "audience" to effect change. While teachers report using directed individual appeals (i.e., reward from behavior, reward from source, expert, and self-esteem), they also report relying on mediated appeals or "student audience effects." Personal responsibility, altruism, and duty all gain compliance by calling attention to the student's "public." That is, the student is reminded of a responsibility to and interdependence with the other class members. Thus by implication, the class pressures the student to alter his/her behavior.

Important to our research program, the 7 BATs are consistent with findings on teachers' use of power in the classroom. In Studies I and II, McCroskey and Richmond (1983) and Richmond and McCroskey (1984) reported that both students and teachers perceive that teachers use primarily reward, expert, and referent power in controlling student behavior. Similarly, reward from behavior, reward from source, and self-esteem BATs emphasize positive consequences for compliance, corresponding with the French and Raven (1968) reward power base. However, McCroskey and Richmond (1983) limited the definition of reward power by identifying the teacher as the only source of reward. Only one of our BATs reflected this confining perspective—reward from source. The other two reward-oriented BATs employed by teachers emphasize the student's behavior as an additional source of reward (e.g., "It will make you happy") and the value of intrinsic reward (e.g., "You'll feel good about yourself if you do it").

The expert BAT teachers reported using and finding effective is similar to the expert based power identified in both Studies I and II (McCroskey and Richmond, 1983; Richmond & McCroskey, 1984). Finally referent power closely approximates our altruism, duty, and personal responsibility BATs. While previously defined referent power is direct and teacher-based, these BATs posit a mediated, audience basis for referent power. That is, the student complies as a function of his/her desire to please or identify with peers rather than with teachers.

Efforts to determine whether teachers perceive their students employing similar BATs on their teachers were disappointing, but not altogether surprising. Results indicated that teachers did not perceive their students to frequently use any of the BATs nor were the BATs perceived as effective when students occasionally employed them. Perhaps teachers fail to recognize strategic attempts to control their own behavior or simply disregard such attempts. Additionally, the BAMs represen-

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tative of each BAT may not be applicable to student strategies to manipulate teachers. Student influence efforts may represent resistance to teacher influence. Such resistance-type BATs may differ in kind from teacher-initiated BATs.

Although a number of teacher variables might influence a teacher's selection and perceived effectiveness of BATs employed in the classroom, those examined in this study do not appear to be relevant. Results indicated that instructor gender, years taught, level of instruction and satisfaction with the teaching profession were not meaningful predictors of these particular BATs. Perhaps differential perceptions of BAT use and effectiveness rely on teacher characteristics that are more appropriately related to their ability to assertively communicate control or student concern (e.g., communication apprehension, assertiveness, teacher communication concern, immediacy).

Developmentally, we would expect students to respond differentially to BATs across grade levels. Consistent with this thinking, Brophy (1983) and Brophy and Evertson (1978) suggest that the relative emphasis or appropriateness of classroom management techniques should vary as a function of student intellectual or social development. Yet, in this study teachers' self-reported use of BATs in the classroom was not a function of the grade level taught. The BATs generated for this study may be strategies that are employed across all grade levels. Certainly the BAMs that configure together to represent each BAT reflect this universality in classroom management. Another reason for no differences among grade levels may be found in the wording of each BAM. Teacher recall of the differential use of BATs may require the inclusion of actual messages teachers reported they use in the classroom. This possibility will be explored in subsequent studies in this series.

## NOTE

<sup>1</sup>The items on this measure were: 1) In general, how often do you think things between you and your students are going well? Never, Seldom, Sometimes, Usually, Always 2) Have you ever considered quitting teaching? Never, Seldom, Sometimes, Usually, Always 3) Everything considered, how satisfying has teaching been for you? Very Satisfying, Satisfying, Somewhat Satisfying, Somewhat Dissatisfying, Dissatisfying, Very Dissatisfying 4) If you had your life to live over, do you think you would go into teaching as a profession? Definitely, Probably, Possibly, Probably Not, Definitely Not. Preliminary analysis indicated item one did not correlate highly with the remaining items. Subsequent analyses were conducted with and without this item separately. Alpha reliability of the 4-item measure is .55, of the 3-item measure is .73. The 3-item results are reported below.

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