

CONTROL IS NOT A FOUR-LETTER WORD



*Establishing Positive Classroom Behavior
for the Year in the First Five Days*

Sarah Clancy-Ballard

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Four-Letter Word!**

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INFORMATION AGE PUBLISHING, INC.
Charlotte, NC • www.infoagepub.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A CIP record for this book is available from the Library of Congress
<http://www.loc.gov>

ISBN: 978-1-68123-926-2 (Paperback)
978-1-68123-927-9 (Hardcover)
978-1-68123-928-6 (ebook)

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Printed in the United States of America

Dedication

I stand on the shoulders of my family, constantly steadied by the hand and heart of my husband of half a century, encouraged by our incredible three children, and immeasurably enriched by our ten grandchildren.

I am also indebted to my dear, dear sister-in-law, Eve Ballard, who has been a driving force behind this endeavor and incredibly generous with her time and suggestions not only in graphic design, but also in all aspects of this publication. In addition, I must recognize a friend, Ellie Blair, who brings me not only encouragement, but extraordinary editing skill and professional expertise in the publication world.

This book is dedicated to them and to my aunt, Elizabeth Ruth Wilson, my precious gadfly, who never allowed me (and many others) to settle for “less” when “more” was possible.

Always she asked, “How are you giving back to your community?”

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Introduction

IN THE BEGINNING...

The beginning was when I walked into a fourth grade classroom in 1966—shortly after, I was hired to teach. I might have been prepared for many things that hot August morning, but teaching a classroom of diverse little creatures, each somebody’s darling (or should have been), I was not prepared. I was hired on a Friday. A teacher had resigned during preplanning, and I started on a Monday, with a provisional certificate. My classroom was part of the original educational facility built in the 1940s and was comprised of three rooms, a small hall and a storage closet. Due to population increase, the newer building had filled and this little building of three rooms was pressed back into service. I thanked God daily for the two veteran teachers who were on either side of my room. It was only through their kindness and expertise that I made it through that first year without having a nervous breakdown. However, on some days, it seemed like a breakdown might be preferable to another day of school.

I quickly realized the most important things I learned, while attending Converse College, were how to improvise (Thank you, Mr. Parker, Acting 101); how to speak correctly and communicate with a group of children (Ms. Sherman, Public Speaking and Children’s Theatre) and how to organize (Mr. Nesbit, Directing 201, 202). I mention these courses for all of you who do not realize that whatever your training, up to this point, some of

the relative areas of learning may come from a class that does not have EDU attached to it. Be *open* and *creative* and stay that way.

Some of you may be new college graduates who decided to go into a state or federal program that rewards you for taking positions in places where there are almost no certified teachers. It waives certification requirements, pays very little, and may help reduce your student loans. It sounds like a wonderful way to enlist the brains, enthusiasm, and altruistic hearts of young people and give them a chance to get the experience all employers expect you to have. (I still have not figured that one out!) However, many will get through this experience because of energy and good teaching intuition. If you are in this group, I wish you well and tell you that preparation and control are going to be even *more* imperative in this scenario because you are probably going to be fraught with economic and social issues that a veteran teacher would find daunting. I applaud the programs that are reaching into such needy areas. I am deeply saddened by the knowledge that so many of our children are not being reached.

There has long been discussion as to the relevance and/or helpfulness the EDU classes provide. While I believe the origin of this bias lies in the fact that much of the EDU content may not provide the immediate assistance the novice instructor needs. Until actually in the classroom, it may be difficult for the beginning teacher to recognize the application of knowledge learned in the college and university educational classes. Additionally, I believe there are some classic misconceptions about students and the student-teacher relationship . . . going as far back as the troublemakers in *Little House on the Prairie*, or in *21 Jump Street*, *Saved by the Bell*, *My So Called Life*, *Boston Public*, et al.!

It is the goal of this manual to provide a bridge between the college classroom, where you were the *student*, and to your classroom now where you are the *teacher*. For all of you who have always wanted to teach and gone through the teacher preparation program, and/or are simply a natural born teacher (there are a few) and love your job, congratulations! You are doing the most important job in society, except parenting. I wish you years of satisfaction and success.

At any rate, there I was in the middle of a dusty, non-air conditioned room, wood walls, and floors. (Did I mention this was in Georgia where it only gets cool ten minutes every other day in January and February?) One sidewall permitted the door to the hall and some built in cubbies for books with a low table and three little chairs pushed up to the corner. Across the front wall stretched one long, very dusty chalkboard. Three large windows intersected the other wall providing the room's only ventilation and

an open invitation to any insect interested in our activities. The coat hooks across the back wall remained empty the majority of the school year.

The twenty-five desks were in three long rows facing the board. The teacher desk was at the front, facing the children. Looking around the room, I became aware of the fact that I was *not* prepared! I most definitely was not in any way, shape or form, prepared. Another prayer quickly whispered, "Thank you, God, that I have my Irish ancestor's good humor and ability to face life's unexpected blessings which frequently come in the form of disaster. Amen."

Forty years later, I know beyond a shadow of a doubt and in spite of the advice of many textbooks which offer endless lofty solutions to classroom management and academic success, that the bottom line for teacher and student success is preparation (teacher *and* student) and teacher control. The levels of preparedness, which both bring to the classroom, and the depth of commitment the teacher has to control of the class, are key. Now well into my third year of retirement, I still dream of the classroom, at least weekly. Most dreams end in a dilemma resulting from a lack of preparation. Fear of not being prepared is definitely a teacher related neurosis that comes with the territory. With such angst still reverberating in my subconscious I feel compelled to put pen to paper, or finger to keyboard, as the times require, and "share."

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How to Use This Manual

I hope that the information is presented in a clear and logical way. Some people learn best by reading cover to cover. Others fare better by skimming areas of interest as listed under *Contents* that catch their eye. There are a few of you out there who like to sneak a peek at the back to see if there is a sure fire shortcut to *the* answer. (Frankly, that is the type of learner/reader I am and I really understand you.) However, sadly there is *not* just *one*, heaven-sent, miraculous answer. Sorry.

I have kept this text short, but interactive because teachers (or almost teachers) are generally smart, motivated and do not have one extra minute to spend on talking something to death . . . I have tried to avoid the statement, restatement and the elaborated statement. I think it will be worth your time to think and jot down thoughts in the boxes that encourage you to reflect. It will sensitize you to the experience at hand, both yours and the students.

Reading through the whole thing should give you the BIG picture. Referring to specific needs should be easy enough with the table of contents and specific page numbers noted in parenthesis.

Feel free to highlight, an addiction I developed as a teacher, though I still feel a tad guilty “defacing” the written word. Underlining, turning corners of pages or anything else that helps you become “one” with the book is totally encouraged. Unfortunately, sleeping with it under your pillow at

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night will definitely not help. (I tried that a few times as an undergraduate. To no avail.)

I hope that you will let three mantras echo in your head awake and asleep:

Control is *not* a four-letter word.
You must be in control of your class.
Classroom control comes with *preparation*.

Dia dhuit! (God be with you)

ducation is the
most powerful
weapon, which you
can use to change
the world.

—Nelson Mandela

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