

FIRST EDITION

# Teaching Strategies THAT FOSTER CONSTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR

*Using Your Head and Heart*



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Shari Holmes Stokes

# **TEACHING STRATEGIES**

**THAT FOSTER CONSTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR**

**USING YOUR HEAD AND HEART**

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FIRST EDITION

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**SHARI HOLMES STOKES**



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*Your heart will always make itself known  
through your words.*

—A Chinese fortune cookie I received  
while writing the book

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# DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to

## Lois Holmes Stokes

An artist with food, flowers, thread, and harp.

A gentle woman who beautified her home and her community and attended to its inhabitants.

And to

## Charles Warbrook Stokes

A teacher and a preservationist who was as deft with garden hoe as he was with educators.

A gentle man who hummed along with any tune he heard but always did so in harmony.

Thank you both

for appreciating who I was and who I was becoming;

for providing so many good beginnings;

for being such remarkable models of living lightly on the earth and giving generously of time, talents, and tender care to others.

I miss you, Mum and Dad. Time doesn't change that. I hope somehow you know about all this.

Jesse has played keyboard in a rock band; been a musical director for an *a capella* choir and high school and community musicals; played for weddings and a "Haavad" alumni party ("Such a business!"); been in a musical himself; and has taught your great-granddaughters to play piano.

Emma ["Hello, Beautiful!"] is a fine photographer and cinematographer. She has already worked on the taping of three TV shows (with a walk-on in one) and several videos/movies. She has the eye for the beauty of the natural world and structures that you did, and she bought herself a piano so she "shall have music wherever she goes."

Both are bright and creative, kind and gentle people in their own right, and each has a fine sense of humor.

And to

## Stephanie, Greg, and Gavin Stokes

Wrenched from their lives and ours much, much too soon.

Your goodness remains among us. How we wish you were here, too.

This book is also dedicated to

## Bear, The Divine Ms. Em, and Monsieur Le Bubbie Deau

better known to the rest of the world as

## Jack, Emma, and Jesse Alling

For my one chance at existence, I cannot imagine having three better companions.

Here's to you—without, I promise, any of my "jazzy" singing or dancing during the celebration.

Each of you is simply the best

husband, friend, lover, life partner,

daughter,

son,

there could ever be for me!

Thanks for all the love and marvelous moments of lunacy, not to mention the learning you have afforded me.

How very fortunate I am to have had each of you in my life!

Bear, I carry you in my heart and will forever. Grief is my companion, but so are you, deeply and richly.

You live on in wonderful ways in so many people.

Each of us misses you terribly, but I think I do most of all.

# PREFACE

*All people are created equal. Then some become teachers.*

—Anonymous

As a teacher, how fortunate I am to have been afforded the opportunity to hold up a mirror of possibility to another human being and to work with that person to see how far our work together could go, often to be pleased at how far it went—for the other person and for me.

My deep belief is that as teachers we all hold up that mirror of possibility for our students—a possibility of what they can learn, a possibility of who they can become. We can do this for any child, even under the most extreme circumstances. How often have we heard of someone who was in a horrible life situation and yet was able to be resilient and continue to learn and grow because of the efforts of one person, most often a teacher? We can not only help children cope; we can also enhance their capacity to do so. We can also go well beyond that, and within those relationships we can grow as well.

Teaching is challenging. Teaching for me is also the most giving of professions. What I give I am given back tenfold.

I wrote this book to support your efforts in being that mirror through good and difficult times. I also wrote it—and this is, perhaps, most important—because I believe you and I, we all, can do this in a constructive manner. As I come to the close of my writing, I realize that there is yet a third reason. I have written the book I wish I had had when I first started teaching. I needed solid grounding in what was possible and constructive. I also needed a book I could hold on to so I could refer to it when I wanted to refresh my mind about a particular concept or find yet another strategy that would support my efforts. My hope is that this will be a book that addresses your needs.

How have I set this book up to support your efforts in this important work of a teacher? I have done it through the content I share but also the structures I have chosen to use. The content will be described in the Beginning. For now, I would say it is an eclectic combination of all the best approaches I have pulled from what I have observed, the feedback I have received about my teaching, and the research in the fields of psychology, education, and special education. The focus is how to be proactive in preventing unconstructive behavior, how to respond on the spot should such behavior occur, and how to support more intensive or extensive behavior change. Included are any number of resource materials to allow you to go into more depth on particular topics.

The overarching structure is based on what we know from the field fosters the development of a learning community. First we connect—to the degree that we can—under the circumstances of author and reader. We get to know who we are as we begin this journey. Then, in the end, we close our work together. We look back, review what we have accomplished, celebrate our work, and say farewell.

In the chapters between the Beginning and the Closing, I use the structures that research tells us foster any learning experience. I get your brain ready, for example, by previewing the chapter's "agenda," inviting you to set a goal to help you frame your learning, accessing your prior knowledge or experience. I attempt to engage your emotions through a quote, a story, a thought-provoking question. I provide you ways to actively process what we are addressing with Active Learning Applications through the Cognella portal as well as opportunities to analyze and reflect. Woven within are anticipatory sets, story examples, and multiple ways to summarize what we have just addressed. As we begin each chapter, I also address two of the overarching questions of basic learning styles: "What will we address?" (i.e., what will you learn?) and "Why is this important?" Then, during the chapter, we address the other two questions: "How do you do this?" and "What are potential creative applications?"

I use these structures not only to facilitate your learning and memory but also to model for you what I state we as teachers need to do.

I offer many ideas and examples of strategies along the way. I do not do this to overwhelm but to provide ideas for all sorts of different teaching/learning styles. What I offer may not address all your needs nor be supportive of your

work in all situations. I have not gone into depth about specific considerations for working with students who are gifted, who have disabilities, who are gifted and have disabilities, or who are learning English as a second (or third) language. But the principles and processes I offer should hold you in good stead for any child with whom you work.

I hope this book will support your efforts to hold up a mirror of possibility for any student you encounter and to have the empathy, perseverance, and grace to keep on in your work and to celebrate what you and your students are able to accomplish.

Let's begin.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Sometimes our light goes out. But it is blown into flame by an encounter with another human being. Each of us owes the deepest thanks to those who have rekindled this inner light.*

—Albert Schweitzer

Many people have helped. Some have encouraged me to continue to believe what I had to say was useful. Others have arranged opportunities for me to pursue my work or helped in the production of various drafts. During those times, when my light was so dim I barely knew it existed, I had the good fortune to be surrounded by people—young and old—who helped me rekindle my torch. They might have held up a mirror so I was able to see my value or said a word or two that showed deep understanding. Other times it was some well-timed cheerleading or feedback, or a note of thanks for the impact I have had that set my soul on fire yet again.

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If I have omitted a name, it is my memory, not my gratitude, that is lacking. Forgive me, and tell me who you are.

—Shari Stokes

May 1, 2017

## SECTION I

---

# UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS BEHIND BEHAVIOR

*The complexity of our behavior requires a complex set of explanatory ideas.*

—Susan Krauss Whitbourne

Before we can begin to address how we as teachers can support constructive behavior in students, we need to consider the dynamics behind behavior: How does our brain function? What basic needs drive our behavior? What seems to trigger a specific behavior in any given moment—whether that behavior is constructive or unconstructive in our eyes? If a behavior is triggered, what makes it likely that it will occur again under similar circumstances?

Section I provides the conceptual underpinnings that will help us begin to answer these questions. The first chapter in this section offers an overview of the book's perspective. The remaining three chapters provide more details about how we can better understand what drives behavior and, based on this understanding, how we can use this perspective to work with students to support their constructive behavior.

# BEGINNING

## Introductions and Reflections

*The best of a book is not the thought it suggests, just as the charm of music dwells not in the tones but in the echoes of our hearts.*

—Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> If you are someone who enjoys personal connections, then it might be fun for you to know that Holmes was my great grandfather's cousin. Of course, I take no credit for the work he did on the Supreme Court championing free speech with Justice Louis Brandeis, but I am pleased to know that a relative worked hard for people's rights.

# Introduction to the Author

I teach who I am. I write who I am. Therefore, this introduction is here to give you a context in which you can place all the concepts and strategies you'll find in this book.

I frequently begin my work with others with a quote. This quote from George Bernard Shaw seems the right choice for my introduction because it so clearly describes how I feel:

Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.

My great passion in life is ensuring the well-being of children and young adults. Teaching chose me. I have taught people of many different ages. My work began in a demonstration site with 18-month- to 3-year-old children who were challenged by multiple disabilities. Then, in three different elementary schools, I taught a self-contained class for students who were labeled as having learning and behavior difficulties. I hated the labels but loved the children. My teaching experiences have also included working for several years with students in elementary and middle school resource rooms, along with coteaching in general education classrooms. I have tutored adults with disabilities. I have taught in undergraduate and graduate teacher preparation programs at private and public universities. For the last 25 years, I have had the pleasure of working at Fitchburg State College which, in 2010, became Fitchburg State University in Massachusetts in both the Special Education Department and, more recently, the Education Department. I am fortunate to work with a number of extraordinary professionals there at the university and in nearby public schools.

I am not a perfect teacher by any means, but I am definitely a passionate one. Once, when I asked students in an undergraduate course to pick a word to describe themselves, someone chose "almost." He explained that he felt he was almost many things—almost through school, almost a teacher, etc. I would say I, too, feel "almost." I am "almost" the teacher I would like to be. Then again, I will probably "almost" be the teacher I want to be when I am 96. Always, I will be committed to working with others to make a difference in the lives of children and young adults through effective teaching.

My best to you as you make a difference on behalf of the students with whom you work.

# Introduction to the Book

Many years ago, an important finding in the research on learning (Caine & Caine, 1994) explained that people understand and remember more when they are actively engaged in the learning process. I have written this book in a way that enables you to interact with the material. The following are some aspects I hope will make the materials engaging and that will draw you in.

## Quotes

Quotes can crystallize an idea or feeling in a way that gives it an added punch while at the same time validating an idea. Quotes usually evoke emotions. We know from the research on brain functioning (Gregory & Kaufelt, 2015; Immordino-Yang, 2015; Jensen, 2015a; Jensen, 2015b;) that positive emotions facilitate learning and memory. I want to support your emotional engagement. I hope the quotes facilitate this.

Another reason I use quotes is that I want to connect with you. Often after a class or workshop, someone talks with me about a quote I used or shares one of his favorites. If you also like quotes, I encourage you to add yours in the margin. If you have more information about a quote whose source is unknown to me, or if you have one you want to share, I invite you to send it to me.

## Readyng the Brain for Learning

At the beginning of a chapter, there is an overview of the content and an opportunity for you to consider your goals. Within a chapter, there are possibilities to access prior knowledge and experiences and to react to the content. Each time we come to the end of a chapter, there will be an opportunity to review important points and to preview the next chapter. These anticipatory sets and reviews provide an enticement to read and a map to foster your thinking and your retention of the material. The research on learning (R. Hunter, 2014; M. Hunter, 2004; Jensen, 2015a; Jensen, 2015b; Wolfe, 2001) clearly indicates these opportunities are essential to foster understanding and remembering.

## Reflection Opportunities

While I have strong beliefs about the kind of teaching that fosters constructive behavior, I do not have all the answers. What I do have is the deep conviction that each of us has a capacity to change, to grow. Our hope for doing that rests in our ongoing consideration of practice. Throughout each chapter, Reflection Opportunities give you room to consider what you think or your teaching practices.

Each time there is an opportunity for you to access prior knowledge or experience, to reflect, to react to the content, or to summarize what you have read, I have provided space for you to write, if you have chosen a notebook or paper bound version. I understand that writing in a book may not be a match for your learning style/needs or the form of book you have. You might choose to use a large sticky note or a piece of regular paper, if you have an ebook or one that is paper bound. If you have the text in notebook form, you could use paper that has three holes, so you can insert your ideas into the book wherever they belong. I encourage you to do whatever works best for you.

## Introduction to the Perspective

I believe that as teachers we do not teach life skills, functional academics, mathematics, English/language arts, art, music, etc. We teach children and young adults. Our subject matter is a medium—a vehicle through which we empower future adults with the skills, information, values, and attitudes to lead rich, productive, meaningful lives that add to, rather than deplete, the world around them. This job is not ours alone; however, while many other people may contribute, our role as teachers is crucial.

Children and young adults are not born knowing how to interact constructively with others, nor how to form a community, nor how to reflect on the effect of their behavior. They need to learn these skills just the way they learn how to do anything else. School is an essential place to learn them; yet in many schools, these skills are not taught. Then, when students make mistakes in their behavior, what will often occur? As Colvin (in Jones & Jones, 2016, p. 287) explains, the usual approach to students' behavior is quite different from the strategies we use when we teach academics. The chart below shows Colvin's (2004) comparison of the two kinds of problems we as teachers encounter in schools and what we often do as a result. As you look at Table B-1, consider the degree to which you believe this is an accurate representation of what occurs in many classrooms.

Table B-1. Procedures for Academic Problems Compared to Social Problems <sup>i</sup>		
Kind of Error	Procedures for Academic Problem	Procedures for Social Problem
Infrequent	Assume student is trying to make correct response	Assume student is not trying to make correct response
	Assume error was accidental	Assume error was deliberate
	Provide assistance (model-lead-test)	Provide negative consequence
	Provide more practice	Practice not required
	Assume student has learned skills and will perform correctly in future	Assume student will make right choice and behave in the future
Frequent (chronic)	Assume student has learned the wrong way	Assume student refuses to cooperate
	Assume student has been taught (inadvertently) the wrong way	Assume student knows what is right and has been told often
	Diagnose the problem	Provide more negative consequences
	Identify misrule or determine more effective manner in which to present the material	Withdraw student from normal context
	Adjust presentation. Focus on rule. Provide feedback. Provide practice and review	Maintain student removal from normal context
	Assume student has been taught skill and will perform correctly in the future	Assume student has "learned" lesson and will behave in future

<sup>i</sup> Colvin, G. (2004). In Jones, V. & Jones, L. (2016). *Comprehensive classroom management* (11th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson, p. 287.

When students make academic mistakes, we help them learn the appropriate way to do whatever they are learning. We need to take the same approach when children behave inappropriately.

We decry the current level of violence in our world, yet people continue to treat children, emotionally and physically, in violent ways—both small and great. There are still classrooms where children are not allowed to move out of their seats for long periods of time, lunchrooms where children are not allowed to talk, and even schools that use corporal punishment. Children are shamed, humiliated, and embarrassed by adults. To make matters worse, this often happens in front of others.

My sense is that when we as adults do this, we do not intend to be mean or hurtful. We simply do not have an alternative strategy to employ. In addition, some of the packaged strategies that teachers might use ask adults to be even more assertive about their rights when dealing with children. Over and over, I see the words *behavior management* when people describe what they believe to be effective teaching strategies. When all this happens, I shout (to myself), "We do not manage behavior. We manage classrooms. Who is nurturing our children? Who is providing structure to help them develop constructive behavior? Who is enabling them to learn from their mistakes, all the while keeping their positive sense of themselves intact?"

My experiences teaching and working with teachers, not to mention my adventures as a mother, have convinced me that children want to be the best they can be. No child wants to behave unconstructively; no young adult wants to act like a so-called jerk. Children are born with the innate capacity and desire to be happy, constructive human beings.

Our responsibility as adults is to foster that process. It is not only that shame, embarrassment, punishment, and humiliation are not helpful—they are harmful, not only to those who are on the receiving end but also to those who employ such practices. These practices are unnecessary. We do not need to manage children. We do not need more power. We need strategies that provide structure and nurture students.

## Introduction to the Approach

The approach I share with you is **proactive and constructive**. Rather than suggesting the use of strategies to suppress inappropriate behavior, this approach supports strategies that help students **learn** positive behavior patterns in the first place or alternatives to replace unconstructive behavior.

The approach I share is **eclectic**. While many people working with students use strategies from one theoretical perspective, I draw on principles and approaches from many different ones, including those that may at first seem to contradict one another. Some of what I draw on may be considered an example of a *behaviorist* approach, while other ideas are considered *psychodynamic*.

The approach I share is **ecological**. To be effective teachers, we need to consider *more* than just what an individual student brings to the learning situation. We need to consider the student *within* a particular environment and *among* the myriad interactions that occur between that student and others. Any learner is part of an **ecosystem**—a set of components that are related to each other for that student at that time. Change one component in the system, and the others are affected. Using this lens, the behavior of any student is seen as the result of the *interaction* between what is inherent in that individual and whatever is in the surrounding environment as well as the nature of that student's social interactions with other human beings.

The approach I share is **comprehensive**. An aspect of the book that may surprise you is the inclusion of so many instructional strategies. I want to be supportive of your competence in all areas because I know that the better we are at facilitating learning, the better our strategies to support constructive behavior will be. These go hand in hand.

The approach I share is **complex**. It is not simple or mechanistic. This approach pervades all aspects of our work. Implementing it takes time, patience, and an ability to reflect on practice, refine, and then try again. I do not say this to scare you. Rather, I warn you because when we try something new, we often get worse before we get better. One moment we may do fine and the next take two giant steps backwards. If you try a strategy that is new for you, you may find yourself getting discouraged or frustrated. The implementation of these strategies is a lifelong process of learning. Like you, I am always trying to get better at doing what I believe is right for students.

While the approach is complex, the book offers a lot of **practical** "how-to's" that describe steps for the processes and give examples of how to apply the steps.

This book is meant to be a **broad but thorough overview** of what I believe is possible in our work with students. I have provided references and resources I find helpful. These can support you if you wish to pursue a particular topic in greater depth.

This is **an approach you can feel good about using**: It is positive and respectful; it is **theoretically sound and fully grounded in research and evidence-based practices; it is effective**.

**Note:** After attempts at different solutions to fostering gender equality, I found the least cumbersome to be the random assignment of male and female pronouns throughout the book. I hope you find it unobtrusive.

## Consideration of You as the Reader

You are unique in all the world. While I may not know you, I support you in your efforts to be the best teacher possible. As you read, consider *your* values and the strategies *you* use while also asking yourself: How can the strategies in this book support my work? How can I use these ideas to help me continually realize my values?



## REFLECTION OPPORTUNITIES

The reflection in Activity A to this Beginning section of the text gives you an opportunity to consider what you value. Write your answers in the space provided, or on a separate piece of paper, if needed, using just single words or phrases. There are **no** right or wrong answers. This is *not* a time to analyze or criticize. Just write as quickly as possible, because speed kills the critic in your brain. I placed the reflection in Activity A following this section so that when we revisit your values later in the book, you can easily find it.

Our philosophy and the values inherent in it are the underpinnings of our decision-making and therefore determine the strategies we use with students. Before we go any further, answer questions to reflect on some philosophical assumptions you bring to your work. I also placed this reflection in an activity following this Beginning section (Reflection B) so that when we revisit these beliefs later in the book, you can find the reflection readily.

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## Final Thoughts

The Beginning portion of this book addresses important aspects of our work together. I wanted to introduce myself so that you might understand the basis for what I share with you. The second aspect of this introduction is the nature of the book's contents. My hope is that providing you an overview will foster your connection to the material. The third focus of the introduction is you. I wanted you to reflect on who you are as you read the book. Much of what we gain from any learning situation rests on what we bring. Offering you the opportunity to consider who you are as the basis for your responses to the book's contents brings this to a more conscious level for you.

## Looking Forward: Preview of the Rest of the Book

In Section I, you will read four chapters that provide a conceptual underpinning of basic human needs, how we provide structure and nurture students to meet those needs, and the ecological perspective to working constructively with students. With these concepts as our basis, in the first two chapters of Section II, our focus shifts to the teaching strategies we utilize to prepare the learning environment and establish the community of learners. In the final two chapters of Section II, we consider strategies for sustaining a learning community. Section III addresses the question: What if the strategies we use to establish and sustain a learning community are not enough? Four chapters in this section give us an opportunity to look at how we can support positive behavior change over the long term. The Closing facilitates our drawing our work to an end. In our Introductions and Reflections, we took time to join together. In our Closing we take time, as we need to do in the final portion of any learning experience, to look back and to bring our work together to a close.

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## Figure Credits

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## ACTIVITY A

### BEGINNING REFLECTION A: WHO ARE YOU? QUESTIONS

On a separate piece of paper that you can keep in a readily available place, write the title "Beginning Reflection A" at the top. Below that write "Who Am I?" Below that write your answers to each of these questions. **Tip:** I encourage you to use key words from the question in each answer, so when you return, what you have written will be readily understood.

1. What positive words describe you as a person?
2. Why did you want to become a teacher?
3. At this point, what are your dreams for your work as a teacher?
4. As a teacher, what would be a nightmare for you?
5. What are your strengths, special skills, talents, and abilities as a teacher?
6. When you look back, which teacher do you remember as being a support to you as a person? What did s/he do or say that you found nurturing?
7. Think of people who have taught you how to do something in a way that you found positive. What did that person do that was constructive?
8. When you finish working with students, what do you hope the students will remember about learning with you?
9. Long after students leave you, what do you hope they will remember about what you taught them?
10. Long after students leave you, what do you hope they remember about you?

### WHO ARE YOU? ANALYSIS

Your hopes and dreams (questions 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, and 10) are those aspects of teaching that are particularly important to you—values to maintain or to work towards. Your nightmare (#4), on the other hand, includes those aspects of teaching you hope will not happen. Nightmares are aspects of your life you want to work against—to prevent, if at all possible. The nature of the nurturing (#6) and structure (#7) that you found helpful also speaks to what you value.

### WHAT YOU VALUE AS A TEACHER

Extract what you value from your analysis. Below your answers to "Beginning Reflection A: Who am I?" write "What I value as a teacher" and summarize your values—what is important to you, including what

you want to avoid as a teacher. As you write, if other values come to mind, include those, too. Remember: there are no right or wrong items.

## YOUR TOOLS TO HELP YOU REALIZE YOUR VALUES

Some of the tools you have to help you make your dreams a reality and prevent your nightmare can be found in the positive words you used to describe yourself (#1) and the skills, talents, and abilities you identified (#4). Below your writing on what you value, write the title "Tools to Help Me Integrate What I Value Into My Teaching." Then list your tools.

## ACTIVITY B

### MY PHILOSOPHY REGARDING THE NATURE OF BEHAVIOR AND BEHAVIOR CHANGE: QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

#### *What I Believe about the Nature of Human Behavior*

Write what you believe about the nature of human behavior on a piece of paper that you label "Beginning Reflection B: What I Believe about the Nature of Human Behavior." As with your responses to Beginning Reflection A keep this in a readily available place until we use it later in the text. Again, I encourage you to use key words from each question in your answer, so when you return, what you have written will be readily understood.

1. Do I believe that all teachers would pretty much agree with me what constitutes appropriate behavior, or do I think it varies from teacher to teacher?
2. Is there such a thing as "good" behavior? If so, what would I consider to be "good" behavior?
3. Is there such a thing as "bad" behavior? If so, what would I consider to be "bad" behavior?
4. Is there such a thing as a "good" student? If so, what characteristics would a "good" student have?
5. Is there such a thing as a "bad" student? If so, what characteristics would a "bad" student have?
6. Is it always possible to change behavior, or are there some children who are just "bad" or who are "all bad"?
7. In what ways, if any, do a student's cultural background and values affect her/his behavior?
8. In what ways, if any, might my cultural background and values affect my perspective about a student's behavior?

## *What I Believe about Behavior Change Support*

Now write the title "What I Believe about Behavior Change Support", and below that your twelve answers.

1. Who do I think has the primary responsibility for controlling student behavior in the classroom?
2. Who do I think should develop the rules in a classroom?
3. In what ways, if any, might my culture affect my response to a student's behavior?
4. As a teacher, do I think I always have a right to change the behavior of one of my students? Why or why not?
5. As a teacher, do I think I always have a responsibility to change the behavior of one of my students? Why or why not?
6. How important do I think individual differences are when I address unconstructive behavior?
7. As a teacher, do I think behavior change support is solely my responsibility? If it is not, then who else should be involved?
8. As a teacher, do I need a student's permission or agreement to proceed with a behavior change support strategy? If so, under what conditions? Do I need a caregiver's permission? If so, under what conditions?
9. What do I believe about the use of rewards to support behavior change? Would I ever use them? If so, under what conditions?
10. What do I believe about the use of punishment to support behavior change? Would I ever use it? If so, under what conditions?
11. Is any strategy appropriate to use when changing a behavior; that is, do the ends justify the means one uses as a teacher? What would I be willing to do to support behavior change? Is there anything I would not be willing to do to address behavior or support behavior change?
12. What, if any, ethical considerations should I have when supporting change in a student's behavior?

# CHAPTER 1

## An Ecological Approach To Supporting Constructive Behavior

*The way we look at a situation will in large measure determine how effectively we can address it.*

—Shari Stokes

## What Will This Chapter Discuss?

We will consider how an ecological approach can help us determine ways to meet the emotional needs of any students. This chapter describes the basic emotional needs and how we can meet these needs by providing structure and nurturing. It also addresses the importance of balancing these two.

## Why Is This Important?

For most people, what is going on in the surrounding environment has an influence on their behavior and their learning. How they act and how much they learn vary widely from learning situation to learning situation. To be effective teachers, we need to consider students as **individuals who bring talents and needs to any learning situation**. We must also consider **more than just the student**: we must consider the student **within a particular environment** and **among the myriad of interactions occurring** between that student and others. To support us in maintaining accurate perceptions of student's needs and in utilizing effective intervention strategies, **we will use this ecological perspective**. We will view any student as having an **ecosystem**: a set of components that are related to each other in space and time. Change one variable in that system, and the others are affected. Using this lens, the behavior of any individual is seen *as the result of the interaction* between the variables within that person and whatever variables are external to that person, including the nature and location of physical objects, instructional strategies, and the behavior of other human beings. When we say "as the result of," we do not mean that the individual is passive—that experiences just happen to her. The person has an active role; she affects the components of the system.

## What Will You Learn?

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to

- ◆ describe the ecological approach and its components:
  - ◆ how what is going on in the environment inside the student's body (neurologically, chemically, emotionally, etc.) affects the student's behavior (physiological environment variables);
  - ◆ how what is in the environment outside the student (the nature of instructional strategies being used, the nature of the student's chair, the room temperature, the sights and sounds in the room) affects the student's behavior (physical environment);
  - ◆ how the student is relating (verbally and nonverbally) to others, how others are relating to the student, and how those factors affect his behavior (psychosocial environment); and
  - ◆ how what this student brings to the learning experience (talents, temperament, disabilities, emotions, mood states, etc.) interacts with the nature of his external environment

variables (temperature, lighting level, instructional strategies) and with the nature of his interactions (verbal and nonverbal) with others, and how all of this affects the student's behavior;

- ◆ compare and contrast the ecological approach to other approaches; and
- ◆ explain the advantages of the ecological approach.

## What Do You Want To Accomplish?

What goals do you have as you study the basic needs of students and consider an ecological approach to addressing those needs and creating a learning environment? Write your responses here or on a piece of paper.

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## ACCESSING PRIOR KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

To prepare for this chapter, think about a time and place when you were not comfortable engaging with the people around you or in the task itself. Take a few minutes to jot down here or elsewhere why you were not comfortable. What did you need that was not available in that situation?

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Now, think about a different time and place when you felt good about yourself, what you were doing, and the people you were doing it with. Take a few minutes to jot down here or elsewhere what you were getting from that situation that helped you feel that way.

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Given my reading, personal experiences, analysis, and reflection for all these years, I have come to believe that as human beings we not only have certain physiological needs for rest, nourishment, and so on. We also have certain basic emotional needs. I believe if we are going to feel open to growing, learning, and furthering our relationships with other people, these emotional needs must be met. In my opinion, the most important are those listed below.

- ◆ A need for **safety** (for both our bodies and the feelings within them): If we don't feel safe in a classroom—if we are worried that the teacher or someone else will hurt us (perhaps grab or hit us) or that someone will hurt our feelings (perhaps berate, expose, or embarrass us)—then we will not be open to learning.
- ◆ A need for **caring and love**: The need to feel cared for includes the need for appropriate affection in words, manner, and touch. Feeling cared for includes the need to be paid attention to and understood. If someone cares for us, she will want to focus on what we say. She will do so because it will be of value for her to understand what we are thinking and feeling. On the other hand, if our teacher or coach does not pay attention to us, value us, try to understand who we are—how we learn, what we think and feel—then how can we feel we have something to bring to the learning situation and the development of positive relationships with others?
- ◆ A need to **belong**: Each of us needs to feel a part of a group, a class, a team, a partnership. We do not have to be *with* the group all the time, but when we are, we do need to feel a part of it, not just *in* it. Moreover, we need to feel that the part we play in the group is important—that we have something to contribute and will gain something from the group. Connection gives meaning to our lives.
- ◆ A need to feel **competent**: This is a need for power in the most positive sense of the word. We need to feel that we not only have something to contribute but also that we are capable of doing what we want to do or what is being asked of us. We can develop our abilities. We can be useful members of society. We are competent human beings.
- ◆ A need for **joy, play, recreation, merriment**: This need goes beyond the physiological need for cognitive and sensory stimulation. It is a need to take pleasure in experience—intellectual or physical—regardless of the nature of the task. We need opportunities to be curious and use our imagination. We need experiences that allow fluidity, dynamism, and spontaneity. These experiences may include whimsy, humor, frivolity. They may include reciprocity with another person. They may include a sense of "I've got it!" They always include being nourished and replenished.

## REFLECTION OPPORTUNITY

What do you think about this list of basic needs? If you were to make a list, how would it be similar to or different from the list I developed? Write your responses to these questions on a separate piece of paper or in the space provided.

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As we look at these basic needs more closely, we see they share two important characteristics. The first characteristic is that **these needs are not hierarchical** in their nature: they are all equally important. However, while they are equally important, every individual will prioritize them differently based on his or her own life experience. For example, if many important people in one's life have died, one may feel more alone than one would choose. In many situations, one may have a stronger desire to belong—to be part of a partnership, team, or group—than someone else might. Certainly, one will still need to have the other four needs met, but the desire to feel that sense of belonging will be more intense than what others might feel.

The second characteristic of basic needs is that **all five needs are interdependent**. If one of the needs is not met, that affects the degree to which the others are met. Indeed, interdependency may be the litmus test for any need being a basic one. Let me offer an example to illustrate this last characteristic: If I do not feel emotionally safe in a class for an extended period of time, then I will likely feel that my teacher does not care enough about me to grasp my discomfort and help me feel safer. I feel a bit lost, isolated. This is not a learning community within which I feel that I belong. Because I feel unsafe, any sense of efficaciousness is much lower than what I might typically feel. Clearly, under such conditions there is no joy. If one need is to be met, then all other needs must be reasonably met.

## How Do We Meet Basic Emotional Needs?

If basic emotional needs are to be met *and* students are going to learn subject matter and skills while also learning positive, useful behavior patterns, what must we the adults do in these situations? How do we foster learning?

We foster learning by **nurturing** children and providing them with **structure**. Children and young adults need both nurturing and structure if they are to develop into emotionally healthy, happy, and productive adults.

When we nurture, we send an important, powerful message to the other person: "I care about you. I willingly care for and support you in the ways you need." This is a message of *unconditional positive feelings* towards

another—unconditional because the message is based on how we feel about the person, *not* what the person does or says. We nurture someone when she makes mistakes because nurturing is not based on perfection. (Besides, making mistakes is a normal, necessary part of growth. Mistakes are useful lessons.) We nurture someone when he behaves in a way that we feel is inappropriate. People express this sentiment by saying “I like you, but I don’t like what you are doing”, or “I care deeply for you; that hasn’t changed—I just feel very angry about what you did.” On the other hand, nurturing someone does not mean never setting limits. As we will discuss, limit setting provides structure.

Children are not born loving themselves or others. If we nurture them—if they see our unconditional care and support for them—they can come to care for themselves unconditionally. Sadly, the opposite is also true: if what is mirrored in our eyes is disgust or shame, or if we refuse to nurture a child, then she will likely find it difficult to love herself or others. There are many individuals who do harm to themselves or other people because they never learned to care. No one nurtured them.

Again, the *unconditional* nature of this caring is important. When we love ourselves, there should be no strings attached. This is not a love based on being better than someone else. Nor should these good feelings exist only when we are doing everything right. *Really* loving ourselves means being able to make mistakes. (Of course, there are extremes in behavior that are not the kinds of mistakes we are describing here.)

Another part of this message is the importance of patience and tolerance. We may not be able to do something the way we would like to right away. It’s all right to take time to learn. A third part of this self-love is the message that we can learn from our experiences. We can be open to and make healthy, productive decisions based on both the positive *and* the constructive negative feedback we gain from the experiences that come our way.

When children are very young, we principally nurture through care. The younger the child, the more we respond as soon as we determine what she needs. As a child matures, our care becomes more of an offer—she can accept or reject this care freely. Also, as children mature and are more able to take care of themselves, our care turns to what might more appropriately be called support.

Is nurturing enough? No, it isn’t. Structure is also needed. Without structure, there would be chaos. If being nurtured gives us positive power, then being given structure helps us learn the appropriate boundaries for our power. Structure also sets expectations and standards for our behavior. Structure helps us learn the positive consequences of what we do. Appropriate structure also helps us learn from the negative consequences. We learn how to avoid making the same mistakes over and over again. With appropriate external structure, a person develops internal structure and self-discipline.

Structure includes not only rules for how to get along in life. It also includes the skills needed to be successful at what we do, to function independently. Being successful requires many skills. We need to be able to size up a situation to determine what is required to negotiate it successfully; to establish one or more goals; to determine options; to make choices; to start, carry through, and complete one or more tasks; to evaluate what we have accomplished; and to fine-tune our actions if changes are necessary.

## How Do We Balance Nurturing and Structure?

These days, we hear a lot about the need for more discipline. Is structure more important than nurturing? No. With too much nurturing and too little structure, a child may be smothered by care and become

unable to fend positively for himself. Another consequence could be that the child or young adult will not have the right boundaries. She might be too thin-skinned or overstep other people's personal boundaries much too often. In contrast, too little nurturing and too much structure could create a child who is joyless and lacking in spontaneity. She might be anxious because there are so many rules but not enough support for all that needs to be accomplished. Another result might be that a student becomes extremely uncomfortable without explicit rules and procedures. He might be a perfectionist who only feels good about himself when everything is done "perfectly" according to "all the rules." Nurturance and structure contribute in different but equally important ways to addressing basic emotional needs, and so they must be appropriately balanced.

## **Nurturing and Providing Structure to Create a Sense of Safety**

Being **nurtured** sends the message "You are safe with me. I will not hurt your body or your feelings. You will feel the ease of both mental and physical well-being. I will teach you with material that is appropriate for your developmental level and your learning style." Providing **structure** teaches students how to care for themselves, how to keep themselves safe. It also teaches them how to show that they care about the well-being of others and respect their safety. "Today's learning target is 'I can deal with teasing.' We will talk about what we say when someone teases us."

## **Nurturing and Providing Structure to Create a Sense of Love**

Being **nurtured** communicates "I care about you. I'm here to support you." Nurturing encourages students to feel worthy. It provides a model for how to care for themselves and others. Being nurtured also sends the message "I like you and respect you for who you are as an individual, not for what you do. I will take the time to get to know you as an individual." Being given **structure** tells students that someone cares enough to teach them the concepts, skills, habits, rules, and boundaries that will enable them to be successful in life.

## **Nurturing and Providing Structure to Create a Sense of Belonging**

Being **nurtured** tells students "You are one of us; you are an important member of this partnership, group, team, class." Being given **structure** teaches them how to effectively collaborate and function interdependently with others. "In our morning meeting today, we will practice listening respectfully. Let's make a list of how we show others that we are listening to what they are saying."

## **Nurturing and Providing Structure to Create a Sense of Efficacy**

Being **nurtured** says "You can; you are capable." Being provided **structure** says "This is how to do it." Being given **structure** teaches students the skills to be capable, as an individual *and* in their work and play with others.

## Nurturing and Providing Structure to Create a Sense of Joy, of Well-Being

Being **nurtured** says "We have an innate desire to be happy. Look for delight in what you do. Find things that give you joy. All labor and no enjoyment is not a good balance in everyday life." Being given **structure** teaches students how to nourish themselves alone and in a reciprocal fashion with another person.

If your learning style is helped by material presented in chart form, Table 1-1 below provides this.

<b>Table 1-1. How Nurturance and Structure Address Basic Needs</b>		
<b>Basic Need</b>	<b>How Nurturance Addresses the Basic Need</b>	<b>How Structure Addresses the Basic Need</b>
<b>Safety (emotional, physical, cognitive)</b>	Being <b>nurtured</b> sends the message, "You can be assured that you are safe with me. I will not hurt your body or your feelings nor will I ask you to take actions that will harm you. I will present material to you that is high challenge, but not too hard nor more than you can learn at one time."	Receiving <b>structure</b> tells us how important it is to respect our own safety and that of others. Being given structure teaches us how to keep ourselves safe and how to respect the safety of others.
<b>Love</b>	Being <b>nurtured</b> communicates, "I care for you. I respect you. I'm here to support you." Nurturing encourages us to feel worthy. It provides a model for us to care for ourselves and for others.	Receiving <b>structure</b> says that someone cares enough to teach us the skills, habits, rules, boundaries that will enable us to be successful in life. Being given structure provides us examples/models for how one cares for oneself and others.
<b>Belonging</b>	Being <b>nurtured</b> tells us, "You are one of us; you are an important member of this partnership, group, team, class. We need you."	Receiving <b>structure</b> tells us that being a part of a group takes skill. Being given structure teaches us how to function interdependently with those around us.
<b>Efficacy</b>	Being <b>nurtured</b> says, "You can, you are capable."	Receiving <b>structure</b> says, "This is how to do it." Being provided structure teaches us the skills to be capable both as an individual and with others.
<b>Joy</b>	Being <b>nurtured</b> says, "Look for delight in what you do. Find things that give you joy. Labor without enjoyment is not emotionally helpful in everyday life. We all need fun. We all need to have times in which we enjoy what we are doing."	Receiving <b>structure</b> communicates to us that joy can go hand in hand with learning and living. Being provided structure teaches us how to nourish ourselves and how to nourish others in a reciprocal fashion.
<b>In Summary:</b>	<b>Nurturance</b> supports who we <i>are</i> as an individual. <b>Nurturance</b> helps us to <i>feel</i> good about being us, about being alive.	<b>Structure</b> supports what we do. Structure gives us the skills with which we can lead fulfilling lives.

If children and young adults are to learn, we as teachers must create classroom environments that are conducive to learning. People are most open to learning when their emotional needs are being met. To meet basic emotional needs, we must nurture and provide structure in an appropriate balance. A summary of these ideas in mathematical formula would look this:

**EFFECTIVE TEACHING =**  
*providing nurturance (care and support) + structure (reasonable, slightly challenging expectations, opportunities to learn ideas/skills, and constructive feedback)*

To teach effectively—to nurture *and* provide structure—is a complex process. We can certainly do it, but do not let anyone ever tell you that teaching is either simple or easy. It takes time to build up the strategies. Why? **No two of us are alike.** While all people have certain emotional needs, how these are realized varies widely from person to person. Think of the children in any family you know. Are they all alike? Even identical twins are not really identical. So it is when we think about teaching children and young adults: no two students are alike. There are certainly some strategies that will be helpful for most children, but even then, the degree of helpfulness can vary from one student to another.

## An Ecological Approach to Nurturing and Providing Structure

How do we both nurture and provide structure? Our ecological perspective will help. Before we begin, I want to set the stage.



### REFLECTION OPPORTUNITY

Does your behavior change when you are in different learning environments? On a separate piece of paper or in the following space briefly describe an example. Explain why you think this change happened.

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There are many approaches to teaching and learning. Before exploring the ecological approach, we will briefly consider a few others to analyze how they are like the ecological approach and how they are different from it.

Many approaches to working with the behavior of children and young adults focus principally on one environment of a student's existence, while others focus on two. For example, the **medical approach** to intervention focuses principally on the physiological environment of the student. Mood states, extreme aggression, and attention deficit disorders are viewed as the result of a chemical imbalance that affects thinking and behavior. Diagnosis is done through discussion, written assessments such as personality or other inventories, checklists and reports of behavior, and possibly the completion of medical tests such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI). Internal states are inferred from information about behavior and thinking patterns gleaned from the student and, perhaps, information from others. Intervention is then done medically. For example, a pharmaceutical drug might be prescribed to help a student address depression or attention deficit disorder.

A group of approaches that have as their foci variables in the physiological *and* psychosocial environments are derived from **humanistic psychology and** the work of Maslow (1968), Rogers (1969, 1983), Purkey (1970), and Gordon (1991), to name a few. Sometimes these approaches are called **psychodynamic**. Information is gathered by a teacher or a counselor through interview, observation, and perhaps survey instruments to determine what the child is thinking and feeling, the sources of conflict or tension, the student's internal needs, and the nature of the student's interactions with significant other people. This information is used to develop an intervention in both the student's physiological environment (where variables such as emotions lie) and the psychosocial environment (in which human interaction variables exist). The intervention might consist of counseling or therapy. Humanistic interventions might also be implemented in the classroom's psychosocial environment and include, for example, strategies that address the nature of the teacher-student interaction or activities such as class or small-group discussions on certain topics and role play.

The third example, the **behaviorist approach**, looks at a student's verbal and nonverbal behavior (variables in the psychosocial environment) and intervenes in the external (physical) environment by using variables in the teacher's instructional strategies. These might include cues to encourage a certain student behavior to occur, followed by reinforcement after the behavior occurs to encourage it to occur again under similar circumstances. What cannot be observed is not considered. B. F. Skinner (1968, 1983), who espoused this approach, believed that behavior was a response to external events or stimuli: if one looked at student behavior and determined what events triggered it and what the consequences were for that behavior *from the perspective of the individual*, one could determine the variable(s) in the environment that needed to be manipulated to change the behavior. He did not use the term "physical environment," but that is where interventions occur for behaviorists.

**None of these approaches takes an ecological perspective.** None look at variables in *all three* environments. None consider the *interaction of variables in all three* in the provision of nurturance and structure to support constructive behavior in children and young adults. None look at variables in all three environments when collecting information, when analyzing the data, and when designing an intervention to support change.

## Why Should We Use the Ecological Approach?

What is going on in the surrounding environment influences students' behavior. How they act and how much they learn varies widely from learning situation to learning situation. To be effective teachers, we need to consider students as **individuals who bring talents and needs to any learning situation**. We

must also consider **more than just the student**—we must consider the student **within a particular environment** and **among the myriad of interactions occurring** between that student and others.

There are three aspects of the student's ecosystem that are important to consider in any learning situation. We will call these aspects **environments**. They are the **physiological**, the **physical**, and the **psychosocial** environments. Let us examine what is included in each.

**The physiological environment includes those variables that exist within the individual:**

- ◆ brain functioning, including all that is stored in the brain's memory;
- ◆ health factors such as nutrition, stamina, temporary illnesses, and chronic conditions;
- ◆ natural abilities and learning needs such as temperament, learning style, intelligences, and disabilities;
- ◆ neurobiological conditions such as attention deficit disorders;
- ◆ mood disorders such as depression and bipolar disorder;
- ◆ toxic substances such as lead and certain drugs; and
- ◆ affective variables, including the feelings and internal mood states of the child.

**The physical environment includes variables in a classroom or in the physical world outside the student that do not include personal interaction:**

- ◆ the nature, location, and arrangement of the furniture, equipment, and objects;
- ◆ the nature of the lighting, the level of the temperature, the noise level, and the displays around the room; and
- ◆ the nature of instructional strategies and materials.

**The psychosocial environment includes variables that exist within the verbal and nonverbal interaction of the student and other people** (words used, tone of voice, facial expressions, hand movements and other body language) and the student's internal interactions (e.g., talking to himself).

To be able to teach and support the development of constructive behavior—to be able to provide structure and to nurture—we need to look at the student *not only* as an individual but *as an individual who has an ecosystem*. How the variables in our ecosystem affect each of us varies from individual to individual. Any student has his own ecosystem, but he is simultaneously a part of a much larger ecosystem that includes everyone else (with his or her own ecosystem) in the learning situation at any one time.

Using the ecological perspective requires us to ask four key questions as we develop our perception of a student, her needs, what is affecting her—what might be contributing to the level of her learning and to the nature of her behavior.

The first three questions relate to variables in each of the environments.

1. **Physiological environment variables:** What is going on in the environment inside the student's body (neurologically, chemically, emotionally, etc.), and how are these internal variables affecting him and, thereby, affecting the student's behavior?
2. **Physical environment variables:** What is the environment outside the student like (the nature of instructional strategies being used, the nature of the student's chair, the room temperature,

the sights and sounds in the room), and how are these external variables affecting the student and, thereby, affecting his behavior?

3. Psychosocial environment variables: How is the student relating (verbally and nonverbally) to others? How are others relating to the student? How are these interactions affecting him and, thereby, affecting his behavior?

The fourth question addresses the interconnectedness of the three environments:

4. How does what this student brings to the learning experience (variables in his internal environment such as talents, temperament, disabilities, emotions, mood states, etc.) interact with the nature of his external environment variables (temperature, lighting level, instructional strategies) and the nature of his interactions (verbal and nonverbal) with others? How do all these interactions among variables have an impact on the student's behavior?

We will look at behavior in a context. Therefore, *all four questions need to be asked* if an ecological approach to assessing need, to responding, and to evaluating the results is to be effectively carried out.

## What Are the Advantages of the Ecological Approach?

Viewing behavior within a context provides three advantages. The first occurs during the **data collection** and **assessment** phases of the behavior change support process. If we gather and analyze information about variables in *all three environments*, we are more likely to discover useful information about patterns of variables that may contribute to the occurrence of the behavior. Also, we are more likely to gain information that will allow us to conceptualize the whole picture of how these variables might interact.

The second advantage occurs when we **design** our intervention—our instructional strategy. If we consider what changes are needed in variables in *all three environments*, we are more likely to be successful in addressing the student's needs.

The third advantage occurs during the **implementation of our strategy**. If we address variables in *all three environments*, we are much more likely to effect the changes necessary to support the student's development of constructive behavior.



## Application Activity: Addressing Basic Needs within an Ecological Approach

### PART I: THINKING ABOUT THE ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE FOR CONSIDERING BASIC NEEDS

Take a few minutes to review the ideas in the chapter. Then, write your answers below or on elsewhere to the following questions in the space provided or elsewhere.

1. Can you remember one way in which the ecological approach is different from the others?

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2. In what ways, if any, is this approach different from what you have been using so far?

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3. In what ways, if any, is this approach similar to what you have been using so far?

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### PART II: THINKING ABOUT BASIC NEEDS

**Directions** Research indicates that drawing a picture of something helps us remember a concept. In the following space or on a separate page, if needed, draw a picture that represents each of the five basic needs. Don't worry about artistry; just enjoy coming up with an image that speaks to you and helps you understand and remember something you've learned.



## Final Thoughts

We began by looking at basic needs of students. We talked about how teachers nurture and provide structure to meet those basic needs. We also considered the ecological perspective, one way to conceptualize what might be affecting a student's behavior at any given moment. We said that with the knowledge of basic needs and the ecological perspective, we can effectively nurture and provide structure and thus support constructive behavior. We also discussed how the ecological approach includes elements of other approaches as well as how it is different. We concluded that the differences of the ecological approach offer advantages over others.

## Looking Forward

In the next three chapters, we will consider the three environments that exist for any individual: the physiological, the physical, and the psychosocial environment. We will examine specific variables contained within each environment to determine how they might affect variables in the other environments and affect learning and behavior.

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