Psychoeducational theories posit that students (and indeed everyone) have needs, that their (mis)behaviours are attempts to meet these needs, and that teachers should strive to create learning environments which best meet these needs. Examples are Dreikurs’ Goal Centered Theory and Glasser’s Choice Theory.

Cognitive behavioural theories advocate the thoughtful, proactive involvement of students in negotiating improved behaviours. This group combines both cognitive and behavioural techniques to collaboratively modify the way students think, feel and thus behave. One example is Kaplan and Carter’s Cognitive Behavioural Theory.

Behavioural theories are highly procedural and focus singularly on modifying observable behaviours. Examples are Skinner’s Applied Behavioural Analysis (as explained by Alberto and Troutman) and Canters’ Assertive Discipline.

The first two theories presented below have their foundation in psychoeducational theories and practices. They are based on the principles of Individual Psychology put by Alfred Adler, an early twentieth-century psychiatrist. Adler’s initial theories have been significantly built upon by later proponents of similar notions, such as Rudolf Dreikurs and William Glasser, whose theories are also discussed below. The term ‘psychoeducational’ describes a number of theories about both classroom and behaviour management. These theories seek to prevent and/or address negative beliefs, thoughts or feelings that students may develop as they attempt to refine their self-perceptions in the light of experience. We will revisit psychoeducational theory in more depth in chapter 2, but here we wish to introduce the specific theories that inform so much classroom management practice in Australian schools.

**Goal Centered Theory (Rudolf Dreikurs)**

Goal Centered Theory (GCT and also known as Democratic Discipline) requires teachers to seek out needs-based explanations for why their students are motivated to misbehave, and to then negotiate alternative ways for these needs to be met. This requires teachers to differentiate individual students from their (mis)behaviours. To implement GCT a teacher must: engage the whole class in discussion about needs satisfaction and behaviour; provide choice, particularly about rules, consequences and academic work; model consistent, considerate and responsible behaviour; provide explicit instructions, expectations and boundaries; build class trust and self-responsibility; use natural and logical consequences, not punishment; and encourage effort, not achievement, as the primary means to meet needs and counter discouragement. Note: In our taxonomy of classroom management theories, GCT would be positioned as the theory most strongly influenced by psychoeducational theory.

**Principles**

- People are social beings with an innate need and desire to belong to social groups. Students’ key social groups are school groups and family groups, and the development of positive relationships in these is central to needs satisfaction.
- Behaviour is ‘orderly and purposeful’ and seeks to achieve social recognition and self-determination. It is primarily informed by an individual’s social influences.
- Classroom misbehaviour occurs when students mistakenly believe that misbehaviours (including inappropriately gaining attention, exercising power, exacting revenge, and/or displaying inadequacy – in that order) lead them to group belonging. Discouragement, arising from failure to meet the need to belong, is the primary cause of misbehaviour.
GCT focuses on student relationships, feelings, thoughts and behaviours.

Prevention of misbehaviour is always preferred to intervention.

Teacher personality and ‘style’ (particularly how they react to student behaviours) strongly influence student behaviour. A teacher, who is democratic rather than permissive or autocratic, has a greater capacity to support students to become personally responsible learners.

Misbehaviour will only improve when students understand their motives and learn alternative and appropriate ways to meet their needs.

Positive practices

Teachers who align to GCT can build positive classroom environments by:

- developing a democratic teaching style and classroom milieu
- establishing and fostering mutual respect and valuing
- identifying and responding to student strengths and abilities
- using generous encouragement to minimise discouragement and meet students’ primary social needs to belong and be valued
- invoking (safe) natural consequences and negotiated logical consequences
- being accommodative and flexible when responding to misbehaviours
- facilitating regular whole-class discussions about rules, consequences, challenges and achievements.

Intervention practices

Teachers who align to GCT can intervene with more challenging students by:

- identifying why individual students are motivated to misbehave; that is, to gain attention, exercise power, exact revenge and/or express inadequacy
- assisting students to understand and acknowledge their misbehaviours and motives
- assisting students to pursue positive rather than mistaken goals to meet their need to belong
- encouraging the discouraged; that is, encouraging a confidence in, commitment to and valuing of positive goals
- encouraging students to acknowledge, value and enact logical consequences to the point of restitution, not punishment
- facilitating regular whole-class discussions about rules, consequences, challenges and achievements.

Challenges and criticisms

Some individuals may not be primarily motivated to seek out group belonging. Individuals can and may deny and/or hide their motive/s to misbehave; that is, some younger students are unable to recognise and/or articulate their motives, and some older children are unwilling to do so. On the other hand, teachers may not have the training to recognise complex motives for behaving in particular ways and may make naive judgements. For a classroom (or school) to be a democratic milieu, equity and fairness must prevail, but teachers have a greater duty of care, level of responsibility and accountability than do students. The reasonable engagement of an individual in a democratic milieu requires a reasonable moral competency, but some students may lack this competence. GCT is not compatible with more autocratic approaches to student discipline, and may be very difficult to enact in the face of very challenging students and/or a lack of acceptance.
or support from other school community members. It also lacks a sound base in evidence as to its effectiveness.

Now read the scenarios introduced on page 32. Align yourself to GCT and prepare a hypothetical draft classroom management plan and an intervention plan. This will challenge you – especially if you do not naturally align with this theory.

**Choice Theory (William Glasser)**

Choice Theory is a neo-Adlerian psychoeducational theory based on the notion that all behaviours are an individual’s best attempts to satisfy present and future needs; that is, survival needs, belonging, power, freedom and fun. In the educational context, it is primarily a preventative approach to classroom management which guides teachers to lead (rather than dominate) their students by developing classrooms, and preferably whole-school environments, which align with students’ “quality worlds”; that is, memories of past people, places and events, which together are perceived as the most satisfying and ‘ideal’ life. The pursuit of a quality world in schools and classrooms (and particularly the most pressing unmet need/s at that time) directs and drives student behaviours.

Glasser saw all behaviours as mostly comprising doing, thinking and feeling, and regarded each of these components as subject to individual choice. Glasser emphasised that teachers need to lead students towards needs’ satisfaction through appropriate behavioural choices rather than coercing them to comply with rules. A quality school (and classroom) is one where it is possible and probable that students could satisfy their needs by thinking and feeling and thus doing appropriate behaviours. Note: In our taxonomy of classroom management theories, Choice Theory would be positioned as a theory strongly influenced by psychoeducational theory.

**Principles**

- All student behaviours are directed towards needs satisfaction, principally belonging, control, freedom and fun. These needs are not exclusive and behaviours may satisfy multiple needs to varying degrees at the same time.
- Teachers should ‘lead’ students towards their ‘quality worlds’ where their needs are best satisfied through appropriate behavioural choices, by creating a quality school.
- Choice Theory takes a developmental rather than interventionist (coercive) approach to behaviour management.
- All humans are motivated. Behaviours are cognitively motivated. Only the individual can control where and how this motivation is directed and applied.
- Student boredom, frustration and inappropriate behaviours in schools are a product of learning environments which fail to satisfy basic needs.

**Positive practices**

Teachers who align to Choice Theory can build positive learning environments by:

- recognising and responding to their core responsibility to create a quality school where students’ basic needs can best be met, and respect is central to teacher–student relationships
- adopting a ‘lead’ manager (rather than ‘boss’ manager) role which focuses on facilitating learning. This means some sharing of control over decision making about quality learning content, pedagogy and assessment
- adopting cooperative-learning strategies as a priority pedagogy.
 Intervention practices

Teachers who align to Choice Theory can intervene with more challenging students by:

• acknowledging that the locus of the problem behaviour lies in the school/classroom environment and in the relationship between the student and the teacher
• rebuilding positive relationships between students and teachers – see ‘Positive practices’ above. A restructuring of teaching/learning practices can arrest deteriorating relationships and student behaviours
• rebuilding positive relationships so that the teacher can engage individual students in problem-solving meetings.

Challenges and criticisms

Choice Theory is best implemented in a school-wide context. If individual teachers adopt different approaches students may form confusing and incompatible quality world images. The approach takes considerable time and effort to plan and implement. It focuses on long-term change and therefore short-term and more pressing issues may not be addressed. Choice Theory offers very few options for dealing with the behaviours of very challenging students except the purposeful rebuilding of relationships between staff and students. Like GCT, Choice Theory lacks a strong or systematic research base.

Cognitive behavioural theory (e.g. Joseph Kaplan & Jane Carter)

Cognitive behavioural theory (CBT) seeks to develop student self-management skills to the point of (behavioural) independence. Competent self-management increases student motivation to comply with instruction and directions, and gives the student ‘portable’ and readily generalisable metacognitive skills. These skills can also enhance the efficacy of other behavioural interventions. CBT is mostly used for students with more challenging behaviours, particularly those exhibiting low self-esteem, disruptive behaviour and underachievement, but has also proved facilitative in improving a range of regular academic skills through student ‘self-talk’. CBT advocates also argue that cognitive skills enhanced through CBT training can improve an individual’s mental health. Note: In our taxonomy of classroom management theories, CBT would be positioned as a theory strongly influenced by both psychoeducational theory and behaviourist theory.

Principles

• Individuals have the capacity for both good and bad and make choices about their behaviour.
• Individuals are self-directed and not just passive responders to external influences.
• Behavioural choices are influenced by consequences and social context, values, motivation, problem-solving skills, self-organisational skills and interpretation of feedback from others.
• Discipline is both managerial (creating order for learning) and educational (developing self-discipline as internalised compliance).
• Motivation is highly correlated to success.
• CBT focuses on developing students’ independent cognitive skills in managing behavioural problems – it aims to support students to control their own thinking and feelings so that they can better appraise what they want, are doing and thinking.
• Successful social and academic engagement is dependent upon multiple interrelated variables including emotions, beliefs, abilities and skills, so problems within any one variable impacts others.
• The development of constructive thinking habits helps individuals to (re)gain control over their emotions and behaviours, and can reduce stress and improve mental health.

Positive practices
Teachers who align to CBT can build positive learning environments by:
• proactively and explicitly teaching students constructive thinking skills and habits relevant to their behavioural and academic self-management; that is helping them to understand their thinking processes and develop their self-control skills
• actively collaborating with students in the selection of behavioural goals and due process
• earning and giving respect in order to maximise authority without coercion
• building a facilitative learning environment (rather than just controlling students) where students can be guided and encouraged to learn to manage themselves
• concentrating on student motivation by building expectations of success, individual appreciation of the value of success, and a social (classroom) milieu which values success
• employing behavioural strategies, such as rewards and punishment, but only as secondary to social reinforcement.

Intervention practices
Teachers who align to CBT can intervene with more challenging students by:
• identifying students who might best benefit from this more intensive intervention; that is, students who evidence an internalised motivation to improve poor social skills, anger management skills and/or attention deficits
• conducting an initial analysis to ascertain which skills and strategies are needed for success, identifying student skill deficits and implementing a training program to teach these skills. These programs may focus on motivational process deficits and/or self-regulation process deficits
• implementing cognitive training, which usually involves skill demonstration, then rehearsal, then opportunities for in situ skill transfer, accompanied by negotiated reinforcement for rehearsal and application
• ensuring that these interventions include activities designed to enhance the transfer and generalisation of the new skill/s.

Challenges and criticisms
Some critics argue that there is some logical tension between the cognitive and the behavioural elements of CBT interventions given that a primary goal is to improve student motivation with an internal locus of control. The use of external controls in the form of rewards and punishments may be conflictual, and for some, unethical. The relative lack of emphasis on emotions as motivating factors may act against student engagement in CBT interventions. Furthermore, the research base evidencing the efficacy of cognitive training in overcoming cognitive skill deficits is conflicting. Finally, some critics argue that CBT-based interventions are mostly suited to more cognitively mature children and adolescents.
**Assertive Discipline (Lee & Marlene Canter)**

Assertive Discipline involves establishing a ‘discipline plan’ to maintain ‘order’ to facilitate the best teaching and learning. This requires clear limits and rules to be set and taught. The teacher is expected to adopt an assertive style while at the same time remaining approachable and supportive. Compliance should be rewarded with formal recognition and incentives. Non-compliant disruptive behaviour invokes enforcement of rules with a hierarchy of sanctions. Individual plans may be negotiated with the support of the school executive and parents, but individual counselling should only occur outside of class time. Classroom rewards and sanctions do not necessarily equate to those which apply outside the classroom. Note: In our taxonomy of classroom management theories, Assertive Discipline would be positioned as a theory strongly influenced by behaviourist theory.

**Principles**
- Children need clear behavioural limits and adults to exercise control over them, so teachers must be assertive and exercise their rightful duty to control students. External control teaches children to develop self-discipline.
- Assertive Discipline is based on an explicit classroom discipline plan, sanctioned by the school executive, but not dependent on school-wide plans.
- Classroom order requires clear behavioural limit setting, and then rewards and sanctions for compliance and non-compliance. Teachers own classrooms – students do not.
- Assertive Discipline requires good teaching, which in turn requires both quality curriculum and quality pedagogy.
- Compliance (obedience) provides psychological safety for students.
- Much of the disruptive student behaviour in schools is a product of relatively unstable, unsupportive and ill-disciplined home lives, and the resulting poor self-esteem and self-responsibility.
- Unassertive teachers encourage misbehaviour.

**Positive practices**
Teachers who align to Assertive Discipline can build positive learning environments by:
- establishing an ordered and productive teaching learning environment, so good teaching and learning (including both good curriculum and pedagogy) can flourish
- preparing and teaching a comprehensive discipline plan, with rules and positive and negative consequences for compliance and non-compliance
- getting to know their students, especially their names and interests
- greeting their students daily – by name, and having some fun and (equitable) ‘quality’ time with each
- focusing on helping students to achieve academic success
- invoking negative consequences and escalating sanctions in a calm, matter-of-fact, systematic way.

**Intervention practices**
Teachers who align to Assertive Discipline can intervene with more challenging students by:
- clearly identifying and evidencing non-compliant and disruptive behaviours for students who are not responding reasonably to the class discipline plan
• publicly reiterating rules, behavioural expectations, consequences and sanctions – in a calm and systematic way
• engaging closely with these students to ensure they understand their misbehaviours and the consequences for continued non-compliance. This usually requires counselling outside of class time
• collaborating with the student to develop an individualised behaviour plan. This will still contain class rules and behavioural expectations, but individualised consequences, sanctions and due process may apply. This must be taught to the student. This plan may also involve the support of the school executive and the student’s parents. (Note that school rules and due processes still apply outside the classroom.)

Challenges and criticisms
Critics argue that Assertive Discipline is not rigorously theoretically based, and does not account for wider school community culture. It presumes absolute authority for the teacher with little consideration of democratic principles and/or student rights, and provides no pathways for the development of student self-discipline. Structure and limit setting are indistinguishable from rule setting. Critics claim that both students and teachers are widely constrained by Assertive Discipline and that although it may control student behaviours it does little to change the reason misbehaviours occur. The rigidity of this approach may leave little, if any, room for teachers to use professional discretion and accommodate individual differences. There is little research evidence to support claims of its efficacy.

Applied Behaviour Analysis
(e.g. Paul Alberto & Anne Troutman)
Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), based on the seminal work of B. F. Skinner, (and the more recently refined Functional Behaviour Assessment and Positive Behaviour Support,) posits that behaviours are ‘simply’ controlled by their antecedent conditions (the environment) and their consequences; that is, reinforcing consequences increase the (frequency, intensity and/or duration of) behaviours and punishing consequences decrease the behaviours. In schools, applied behaviourism is synonymous with a good number of the ‘basic’ classroom management practices used by many teachers, but more often applies when responding to students who manifest more challenging behaviours. ABA interventions involve defining, observing and recording focus behaviours in the context of their antecedent conditions and consequences. Teachers then manipulate antecedent conditions and, if necessary, use reinforcing consequences (using a hierarchy of reinforcers) to increase or decrease targeted behaviours. Note: In our taxonomy of classroom management theories, ABA would be positioned as a theory most strongly influenced by behaviourist theory.

Principles
• The philosophy of behaviourism underpins ABA. This maintains a strictly authoritarian approach to behaviour change. All learned behaviours are voluntary and may be modified by the manipulation of antecedent conditions and reinforcing consequences.
• Children’s actions are determined by the same outside forces as adults. Children learn to behave when they are rewarded for model behaviour and punished for misbehaviour.
• Behaviours are verifiable (observable), functional and purposeful in that they are intended to achieve or avoid consequences.
• By preference the (classroom) environment should be changed to improve behaviours. If necessary the reinforcement value of consequences can be changed to improve behaviours. Reinforcers and punishments may be varied in terms of intrusiveness (impact upon learning) and restrictiveness (level of control) but ABA must be implemented in the least intrusive and least restrictive ways.
• The due process involved in conducting ABA is rigorous and closely prescribed, but in all cases of learning through ABA, modified consequences must only be delivered when the behaviour occurs. Note that consequences are defined by their effect, not their intent.

Positive practices
Teachers who align to ABA can build positive learning environments by:
• establishing classroom order so that students can be successful at learning
• using a direct instruction approach to teaching (rather than a constructivist approach) to focus student learning
• focusing instruction on increasing desirable learning behaviours and skills, and decreasing undesirable behaviours which inhibit learning
• applying ABA theory and practices in the least intrusive and restrictive ways.

Intervention practices
Teachers who align to ABA can intervene with more challenging students by:
• conducting a thorough, data-based baseline assessment (of the domains) of targeted behaviour/s, and defining these accurately
• organising sufficient supports and resources to implement a viable intervention – along with informed consents; resources to systematically record, monitor and evaluate progress are essential
• manipulating the antecedent (environmental) conditions to impact the presentation and nature of consequences to the target behaviour/s
• increasing reinforcement for desired behaviours – from least to most intrusive means – in accordance with an appropriate reinforcement schedule
• (as a last resort) ‘punishing’ misbehaviours – using least to most intrusive means – in accordance with an appropriate reinforcement schedule
• including generalisation training in any intervention.

Challenges and criticisms
Impartial observation of target behaviours is often difficult and costly, and arguably represents an oversimplification of complex classroom behaviours. The use of punishment (notwithstanding its various forms) is too often poorly done in complex classroom settings, and its effective use requires considerable skill and training on behalf of the teacher. Although shorter term behaviour change often results from using ABA strategies, there is far less evidence of generalisation and sustained behavioural change without its continuing use.