

High-Order Control: The Construction Strategy of Preschool Children's Intrinsic Order

Zhuoran Zhao*

To cite this article: Zhuoran Zhao (2025). High-Order Control: The Construction Strategy of Preschool Children's Intrinsic Order. *Malaysian Journal of Chinese Studies* 14(2): 99-114.
[http://doi.org/10.6993/MJCS.202512_14\(2\).0005](http://doi.org/10.6993/MJCS.202512_14(2).0005)

To link to this article: [http://doi.org/10.6993/MJCS.202512_14\(2\).0005](http://doi.org/10.6993/MJCS.202512_14(2).0005)

Abstract

It is necessary for preschool teachers to control the discipline to manage an orderly and harmonious classroom, which creates a free and happy environment for children to focus on their work and cooperation energetically. As results of low-order control, either adopting strictly compulsory management maintains apparent uniformity, or free development without guidance leads to unorganised freedom. The core of constructing an orderly and effective class is to develop the intrinsic order of each child, which requires high-order control by preschool teachers. And these basic strategies become essential, such as categorical guidance through observation of children's behaviour, positioning the problem crux through comparison of development indicators, innovative guidance approaches by focusing on individual differences and so on.

Keywords: core literacy, intrinsic order, high-order control, class discipline

Introduction

The ideal classroom order should be preschool children, under the control of their free will, can achieve orderly behaviour and active intelligence through autonomous choice of work. This is the basic condition for ensuring high-quality and efficient classroom learning, and it is also a reflection of the formation of children's internal order. Through the observation of the classroom

organisation process of preschool children, it is found that many teachers' classroom organisation is either centred around the same teaching content, creating a serious and standardised teaching atmosphere, and the children follow the rules; or allowing children to carry out their activities freely and unrestrainedly. Obviously, both overly strict classroom order and unrestrained classroom order are not conducive to the effective realisation of children's education goals.

The author selected six classes and six teachers from two Chinese kindergartens as the research subjects. This study collected research data through four months of classroom observation records and interviews with several teachers. A comparative analysis of the research data revealed the different measures adopted by different teachers in the classroom organisation process and the different results they produced. The author summarised the outstanding classroom organisation practices identified in the study and organised discussions and revisions with early childhood educators, ultimately developing strategies for advanced classroom organisation control. These strategies were used to guide early childhood educators in improving their classroom organisation skills.

Key Definitions

Concentration

A well-ordered classroom environment can help children develop the habit of focusing on tasks, thereby promoting the development of their concentration. Hyson (2016) argued that "concentration" is an aspect of mental processes, representing the brain's execution of important control functions. McDermott defined attention and persistence as a behavioural tendency to focus on a goal, overcome distractions, and persevere in completing a task (Yu & Luo, 2020). Concentration can be understood as the psychological state of being fully engaged in a particular activity, where an individual concentrates their attention on a specific task or object and maintains sustained attention, active thinking, and proactive behaviour towards it.

Research on the value of concentration span in preschool children suggests that it is a crucial component of cognitive development, directly influencing learning efficiency, information processing capabilities, and task completion quality (Mahone & Schneider, 2012). In China, the "Guidelines for the Learning and Development of Children Aged 3–6" acknowledges that concentration span is a precious quality essential for children's lifelong learning and development (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2022). Wang (2013) proposed that concentration span serves as the foundation and prerequisite for young children to adapt to social learning and life, perceive the world, and develop memory and thinking skills. When children focus on a task, their observations become more detailed, their judgments clearer, and their interest more intense, thereby increasing efficiency. Individuals with good attention span can break free from the constraints of existing thoughts, re-examine things, and maintain the openness and diversity of their own thinking (Bondolfi, 2006).

Internal Order

As one of the core competencies of “key abilities”, the ability to act with self-discipline—that is, a child’s internal order—is the foundation for the development of a child’s attention span and a core element in establishing effective classroom discipline (Zhong, 2016). Teacher A explains internal order as follow:

“In the classroom, children focus on their current tasks, maintain an active state of mind, and engage in effective interactive behaviour. Their actions are guided by their ‘inner calling’, which is a manifestation of the formation and functioning of their internal order.”

Generally speaking, attention is not only manifested in observable external learning behaviours but also includes the key elements that trigger and sustain learning behaviours—internal motivation and self-regulation. Children driven by internal motivation exhibit focused behaviour (Huo et al., 2023). Under the influence of internal motivation, children achieve spontaneous regulation of their behaviour and engage in self-disciplined actions, which are hallmarks of the formation of internal order. Specifically, internal order refers to children’s intrinsic psychological needs and perceptual patterns regarding environmental stability, the regularity of things, and the predictability of behaviour (Yi, 2002).

A child’s internal order is a complex system that achieves internal-external coordination and autonomously guides individual behaviour through the construction of an internal cognitive framework based on external order. Internal order is crucial to the development of a child’s attention span because it not only helps children better understand the objective world, promotes the development of logical thinking, and achieves cognitive focus, but also guides children in forming good behavioural habits, learning self-control, developing a sense of rules, maintaining keen interest, and achieving emotional focus. Children organise their activities according to their internal order, which not only exercises intellectual thinking and promotes the formation of temporal and spatial order but also allows young children to deeply experience a sense of security, belonging, and awareness of rules, thereby promoting emotional and moral development (Hua, 2023).

Low-Order Control and High-Order Control

The concepts of low-order control and high-order control originate from systems science and control theory. Low-order control means using straightforward, direct methods for controlling simple systems, while high-order control involves more complex, non-linear methods for controlling systems that are more advanced (Fang, 2014). The perspectives of systems and control were later introduced into educational psychology and applied in the field of instructional environment de-

sign. Anderson categorised educational objectives from low to high into six levels: remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating, and creating (Flipped Classroom Research Society, 2014). The first three levels are “low-order cognitive abilities,” while the latter three are “high-order cognitive abilities,” with the latter developing from the former. Based on this definition, low-level control of classroom discipline refers to classroom order control based on low-level cognitive abilities. The basic characteristics of low-level control include direct, external, and emergency management of phenomena and problems that have already occurred, such as lax classroom discipline; this involves correcting children’s attention lapses or disciplinary violations in the classroom through reminders, reprimands, or hints to maintain normal classroom order.

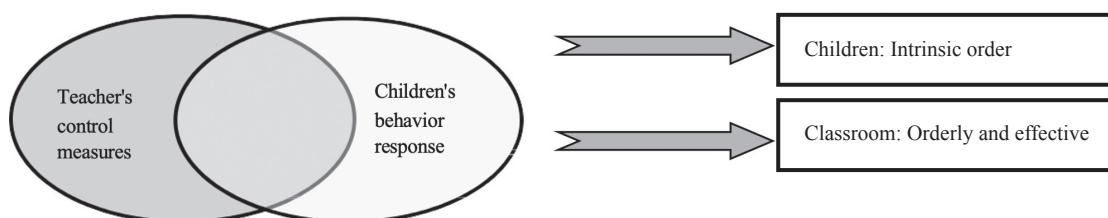
A system is an organic whole with a certain structure and function, composed of interconnected, interacting, and mutually constraining parts (Duan, 2019). The classroom is a complex system composed of numerous factors, such as young children, teachers, and the environment. Different control strategies will form different interaction patterns. Higher-order control is based on the “analysis, evaluation, and creation” of preschool children and their educational context, involving interactive, coordinated, and non-linear control. It places greater emphasis on guiding children’s independent thinking and constructing an internal order, effectively achieving multi-factor interaction, and establishing a good order. The outcome of high-level control is that children can choose learning materials according to their will, then focus and engage in their work. Prior to this, they must first learn the usage methods and placement of learning materials prepared by teachers in the environment, and under teacher guidance, children instinctively become aware of their internal needs and tendencies. If children’s internal needs align with environmental materials, their internal control in focusing on tasks becomes evident, and after some time, their internal order begins to emerge. The formation of an “orderly” and “effective” classroom order stems from each child possessing an internal order, which they use to regulate their behaviour, i.e., following the “call of the heart.”

This paper constructs three models of teacher-student interaction to illustrate the logical relationships between core concepts (Figure 1).

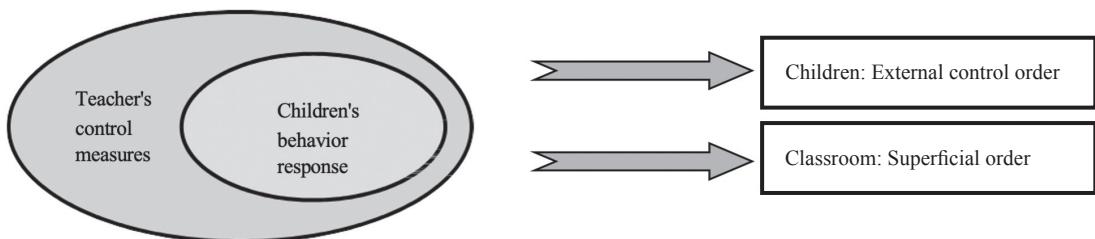
Figure 1

High- and Low-Level Interaction Model

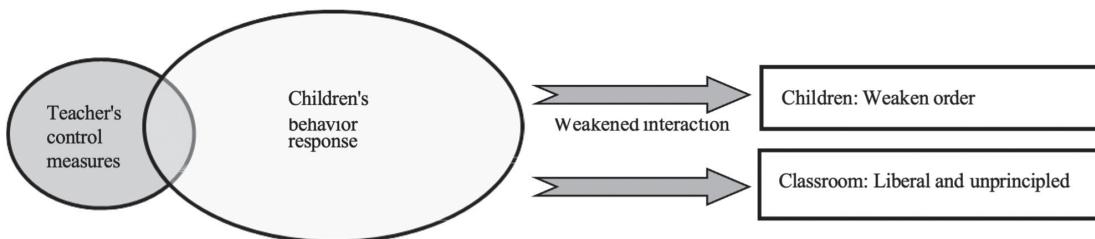
■ High-level control interaction model



■ Low-level control interaction model one



■ Low-level control interaction model two



In the classroom, teachers and children engage in intersubjective interaction around the conduct of educational activities. Different interaction models lead to distinct environmental changes and developmental outcomes. The overlapping area between the two ellipses represents the zone where teacher behaviour and child behaviour mutually intervene, with the size of the area indicating the degree of autonomous behaviour exhibited by the subjects. High-level control is a moderate form of control that better reflects the behavioural balance between the teacher and child subjects. The moderate intervention between teacher and child subjects enables positive interaction between them. Low-level control is imbalanced control. Pattern one reflects the teacher's pervasive influence, with children's behaviour constantly constrained by the teacher, resulting in passive behaviour and maintaining only the superficial order of the classroom. Pattern two reflects the weakening of the teacher's influence, with the children's behaviour rarely constrained, leading to a state of disorder and a lack of discipline in the classroom.

Manifestations and Shortcomings of Low-Level Control in the Classroom

Low-level control is typically manifested through simple, direct responses based on cognitive concepts. Data from interviews and observations support the view that there are two modes of low-level control in preschool classrooms. The first involves the use of high-pressure measures to force children to comply. The second involves the use of autonomous, relaxed measures that give children ample freedom of choice, with teachers not interfering excessively in the children's behaviour.

When discussing how to maintain classroom order, Teacher B stated that,

“It is essential to establish the teacher's authority. In my classroom, there will be no disorderly behaviour. Children neatly arrange their belongings and follow the teacher's instructions. When I notice individual children who are restless or agitated, I intervene promptly. Sometimes, a single glance is sufficient to exert influence.”

Teacher B is a preschool teacher with three years' experience, and her classroom discipline is characterised by strictness and orderliness. In subsequent classroom observations, we found that in Teacher B's class, children demonstrated neatness and orderliness upon entering the classroom, whether in the arrangement of their backpacks, shoes, hats, and clothing, or in their participation in teaching and activities. Whenever a child exhibits “misbehaviour,” Teacher B will loudly reprimand them or physically intervene to correct the behaviour promptly. Teacher B's approach reflects the views of many newly hired teachers, who believe that “preschool children are inherently disorderly, primarily focused on unintentional attention, unable to sit still, and easily distracted. Only through external coercive constraints can normal classroom discipline be maintained.” Based on the understanding that children's disorderliness, restlessness, and lack of concentration are normal phenomena, adopting an ‘overly interventionist’ strategy represents the first mode of low-level classroom control.

This model emphasises the teacher's leadership and highlights the role of external control in maintaining classroom discipline. Behind the temporary and superficial classroom order, there are obvious shortcomings. Teachers need to constantly take coercive measures or rely on designing interesting activities and games to capture children's inattentive attention, which results in children's passive thinking and behaviour. After spending a day with the children, many teachers manage classroom order based on this philosophy, which often leaves them exhausted and drained.

Teacher C, a new teacher with less than one year of experience, adopts a completely different strategy for managing classroom order: Preschool children are different from primary school students; they need ample space for free activity. After assigning activity tasks in class, the teacher allows children to freely choose playmates and learning materials and independently select activity methods. Observations of classroom activities reveal that Teacher C's classroom is relatively “lively”, with many children speaking loudly, some moving around, and others sitting idly in corners. Teacher C adopts a “lenient” attitude toward classroom discipline, intervening only when individual children engage in toy disputes or physical conflicts. This notion of respecting children by allowing them to freely choose without excessive interference, coupled with a simple, laissez-faire approach to classroom discipline, reflects the second mode of low-level control. The shortcoming of this

mode is that the classroom exhibits obvious characteristics of disorderliness, with the teacher only able to maintain positive and effective interaction with some children, making it difficult to organise overall, orderly, and effective learning activities.

A strict, low-level control model makes children's behaviour dependent on external orders, hindering their interest in exploring things and their ability to concentrate. A lenient low-level control model places children in a state of weak order with frequent mutual interference, making it difficult to organise systematic and orderly learning activities as a whole. Both overly "strict" authoritarian management and unguided 'free' development are inefficient at promoting children's cognitive development and self-formation, and neither can create an orderly and effective classroom environment based on internal discipline.

The Development of Children's Internal Order and the Role of Higher-Order Control

In the process of establishing good classroom order, striking the right balance between "strictness" and "freedom" requires the use of higher-order cognitive abilities to make reasonable plans and designs achieve higher-order control of classroom order. The core objective of higher-order control is to cultivate children's internal order, enabling them to learn and grow freely, joyfully, and proactively within the classroom while also engaging in activities in a regulated and orderly manner, focusing on learning and collaboration, achieving effective interaction without causing mutual interference. In traditional teaching processes "effectiveness" and "orderliness" are often difficult to achieve simultaneously. Only a small number of experienced teachers can implement higher-order control to create a lively yet well-organised classroom discipline.

Factors Influencing the Formation of Children's Internal Order

The formation of children's internal order is primarily manifested in the development of intentionality and controllability in their actions, which is a self-directed and spontaneous process. Internal order is not an innate ability but a process that is continuously constructed alongside their socialisation process, based on physiological maturity. The formation of children's internal order is influenced by physiological factors, but more significantly by external environmental factors, primarily the influence of parents and teachers from the adult world. Different interaction patterns between adults and children lead to different directions and outcomes in the development of internal order.

Physiological Factors

The development of a sense of order in early childhood serves as the physiological foundation for the development of children's internal order. The emergence of a sense of order in children occurs naturally alongside the process of physiological maturation. The internal unconscious order

is universal, historically embedded in the depths of every individual's psyche through acquired inheritance, manifesting as a certain order or structure of the mind (Teng, 1985). Gombrich (1980) posited that there exists an ordered reference frame within biological organisms and referred to the innate predictive function of organic systems as "sense of order". Research indicates that the preschool stage marks the embryonic phase of intentional development and a critical period for the development of self-control abilities. By the age of four, a child's internal inhibition begins to flourish gradually, forming a sense of rules and continuously enhancing self-control abilities (Lin, 2009). Additionally, infants exhibit "turn-taking" characteristics at a very young age, such as remaining quiet when adults speak and resuming movement and vocalisation after adults stop speaking. This is the result of 'joint attention' and the initial manifestation of behavioural "sequencing". Internal order cannot simply be equated with the 'sense of order' in children's psychological development. A sense of order refers to a person's perception and pursuit of order, manifesting on one hand as a sense of pleasure, excitement, and comfort derived from harmony and order, and on the other hand as anxiety, fear, and a desire for change when faced with chaos and disorder (Gombrich, 1980). A sense of order is more of an emotional experience, where satisfaction or joy is felt when things or actions align with the predetermined programme. Conversely, frustration or unease is felt when they do not. Internal order, on the other hand, is more about the control of autonomous behaviour, where the subject perceives environmental factors, makes judgements, and regulates their behaviour to align with the requirements of order and achieve predetermined goals.

Social Factors

Children's development is the result of the interaction between internal and external factors. The sense of rules and joint attention brought about by physiological maturity lay the physiological foundation for the development of internal order, while guidance and interaction from the adult world constitute the external factors influencing the development of children's internal order. The influence of parents and the family environment they create enriches and strengthens children's order systems, a process that occurs subtly and gradually. For example, in daily life, children experience rules such as "wear a hat when going out", "the bed is for sleeping", and "go to sleep after dark" and in this process, they continuously construct the order of things. This is the initial process of children's socialisation, and the driving force for development comes from the ordered interaction between children, parents, and the environment. This process is not the result of deliberate shaping by parents but rather the natural construction of children's internal order through ordered family life scenarios. Montessori believed that in this process, children's "absorbent minds" play an active role.

The question we are concerned with is: In the preschool education stage, can preschool teachers also adopt the same strategies as parents, allowing children to autonomously and spontaneously

construct their internal order without deliberate shaping? The answer is clearly no! Orderly and positive behaviour requires the correct guidance of teachers, and teachers' higher-order control initiates children's continued socialisation and growth in kindergarten.

Even in the initial stages of a child's development of a sense of order, the different environments created by parents play varying roles. The active, spontaneous absorbent mind, combined with a structured and orderly environment, jointly promotes the construction of a child's ordered "schema". Children living in families where tasks are organised, behaviour is regulated, and there is a clear hierarchy between adults and children are more likely to develop self-control and form an internal order than those living in families where plans are constantly changing, behaviour is arbitrary, and the environment is loosely structured. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that in a class of ten or more children, the formation of satisfactory classroom order requires the "diligent" efforts of preschool teachers, who must scientifically plan and carefully guide based on a thorough understanding of each child's characteristics. This goes far beyond the simple, direct, and linear low-level control that can be achieved.

The Role of High-Level Control

In a well-ordered classroom, we see a quiet environment and orderly behaviour, with children happily using the learning materials they have chosen themselves, focusing on their own "research", while also being able to communicate with their peers or teachers whenever necessary. Every child who enters such a classroom will develop effectively. Newly hired early childhood teachers are often amazed by this scene, viewing it as the ideal classroom order and developing a strong desire to emulate and adopt this model. However, when they enthusiastically dive into the classroom to lead a class, they soon discover that children are far from as orderly as imagined.

Teacher D, a three-year veteran early childhood teacher, described the scene when she first took over a class: In the beginning, the classroom was filled with chaos. The most obvious example was the children quickly switching between teaching aids. In a short time, they had explored nearly every object in the classroom, to the point where even the teacher felt there were insufficient teaching aids. However, using each teaching aid did not make the children quiet, happy, or cooperative, nor did it allow them to reach a state of immersion and self-forgetfulness, which left the teacher feeling helpless. Another puzzling phenomenon was that some children would spend a long time "playing with" the teaching materials without following the correct operating rules, constantly chatting about various things, turning the teaching materials into part of a real-life scenario, imagining themselves as part of that scenario, creating many imaginary peers, and using the teaching materials as a medium to talk to these imaginary "others" in a self-talking manner. Some children show no interest in the objects in the classroom, instead wandering around and causing disturbances.

A teacher without higher-order control may feel helpless or resort to authoritarian and coercive methods in such a chaotic situation. She may feel confused or even doubt the effectiveness of the method: I followed the basic principles for establishing classroom order, so why did this happen? Indeed, when she standardised educational activities, she adhered to these principles: children must be free to choose teaching materials, and when children are working, they must not be disturbed; children must not be forced to do anything, and there must be no threats, rewards, or punishments in the classroom; the teacher must step back, conceal their personalities, and allow children's spirits to develop fully.

Based on this, we conclude that the principles she followed were not problematic, but rather she lacked practical experience to translate theory into practice. In other words, she merely imitated and applied the principles directly based on her initial "standardised and understanding" of them, without truly understanding the children or possessing the ability to tailor instruction to their individual characteristics. This is a typical manifestation of low-level control. Her underlying belief may be that teachers have infinite patience, expecting children's order to emerge spontaneously and firmly believing that children will eventually improve on their own without the need for timely correction of deviant behaviour. Clearly, unguided "freedom" and unreasonable "coercion" are equally harmful to the formation of children's inner order!

Achieving an "orderly and effective" state requires a process, necessitating teachers to have a thorough understanding of the environment and children, to establish a bridge between children and the environment, and to standardize higher-order cognitive abilities to manage classroom order. In China, the Ministry of Education reminds teachers that discipline is not inborn but acquired through nurture and the teacher's task is to guide the development of this discipline (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2022). In other words, the internal discipline of preschool children is the result of nurture, not something innate. (Soydan et al., 2018) claims that children's wisdom and discipline await awakening by their teachers. This requires teachers to use higher-order cognitive abilities such as analysis, evaluation, and creation to exercise higher-order control over classroom discipline.

Strategies and Implementation Effects of Advanced Classroom Control

Exploring the strategies teachers employ to influence children and shape classroom order is a solution that addresses the root of the problem. Through discussions with six teachers and two kindergarten principals who participated in the interviews, three experienced teachers shared their excellent practices in classroom control, analysed the challenges faced by novice teachers, and based on standardised practical experiences, conducting in-depth theoretical analyses, and collective discussions and revisions, developed a list of advanced classroom control strategies.

Observing Children's Behaviour and Providing Categorised Guidance

In a free and open classroom, children's behaviour varies greatly, requiring teachers to calmly observe and analyse, distinguish different types, and implement targeted guidance measures.

Free-Spirited Children

The first type is the **free-spirited children**. They act impulsively, engaging in chaotic behaviour such as destroying things, mixing various objects, and moving uncontrollably from one activity to another. Their movements are aimless, and they run around everywhere, being completely unconcerned about the harm their actions bring, and are even so restless to infringe on other students. They will always try every means to get the inactive students excited and join their group.

The measures to deal with these children are:

- a. Tolerating their behaviour while giving them time and space to express themselves.
- b. Intervening promptly to stop any inappropriate actions when necessary.
- c. Using objects as a means of positive communication. If one approach does not capture their attention, we should explore other options until we find an object to help them focus on a more constructive activity.

Fanciful Children

The second type is the fanciful children. These children possess a vibrant and active imagination. When given an object, instead of observing and studying it, they tend to imagine it as a person like themselves or as a prop in an imaginary scene. They often talk incessantly and struggle to focus their attention on the object at hand. Their thinking is fickle, which can easily lead to clumsy actions or deviations from standards.

The measures to deal with these children are:

- a. Be tolerant and pull them back to reality at the right time, guiding them to understand the characteristics of learning tools and their usage methods.
- b. Provide constant reminders and a structured environment, hoping that they will eventually learn to “de-centre” themselves, moving towards a more objective understanding of the world and developing the ability to observe, think, and act in a coordinated manner.

Lazy Thinkers

The third type is the lazy thinkers. These types of children are obsessed with objects they already know how to manipulate, being lazy and casual, unwilling to accept challenges, refusing to accept things that are slightly more difficult, and saying “I don’t know how to do that” very quickly.

The measures to deal with these children are:

- a. To hide the classroom teaching aids that they can already handle and arrange challenging tasks that are similar but more difficult.
- b. To create an environment with teaching aids and demonstrate work or provide individual counselling to activate their thinking and mobilise their emotions.
- c. To guide them to take positive action and experience the joy of problem-solving by overcoming difficulties and achieving success.

Identifying the root of the problem by comparing developmental indicators

The formation of a child's internal order generally goes through three stages: "disorder—surface order—internal order". Children's external behaviour varies across these stages. Evaluating and identifying the stage a child is in using multi-dimensional indicators helps teachers adopt standardised guidance strategies to guide and promote the healthy development of the child's internal order (Table 1).

Table 1

Three Stages in the Formation of a Child's Internal Order

Stage	Disorder Phase	Surface Order Phase	Internal Discipline Formation Phase
External Behavioral State	Actions are chaotic, aimless, uncoordinated, and uncooperative	Noticeably quiet, independent activities with minimal interference.	Classroom is quiet, harmonious, and orderly; children engage in purposeful activities.
Autonomous Choice Awareness	Purely impulsive, spontaneous actions without purpose.	Clear purpose in work; significantly improved decision-making ability.	Exhibits vigorous spontaneous activity; autonomously selects tasks that reflect individuality.
Object-Interaction Level	Difficulty focusing attention on real objects.	Begins practical activities but frequently switches tasks unpredictably.	Enjoys repetitive, focused work; movements are purposeful and graceful.
Concentration Level	Prefers play; completes tasks perfunctorily.	Engages in mischief when unsupervised; exhibits improper behavior.	Prefers work over play; approaches tasks with diligence and seriousness.

Self-Control Ability	Loud outbursts or unfocused fantasy talk; struggles to remain calm.	Achieves quietness through external supervision and reminders.	Balances activity and calmness—focused when quiet, lively when active.
External Reinforcement	Values extrinsic rewards like food or toys.	Begins to appreciate personal attention from teachers.	Less concerned with extrinsic rewards; focuses on intrinsic satisfaction.
Cognitive Engagement	Struggles with independent work; tends to imitate others.	Uses materials correctly but briefly and switches frequently.	Strong curiosity; high cognitive engagement—compares, evaluates, and thinks before acting.
Teacher-Student Interaction	Unclear expression: resists discipline; indifferent to teacher communication.	Complies with teacher guidance but lacks internal reflection or active engagement.	Exhibits kindness, honesty, and authenticity; communicates effectively with teachers.
Group Interaction Dynamics	“Herd instinct” leads to collective chaos; forms cliques.	Show cooperative intent but lacks awareness of others; follows rules under supervision.	Strong social awareness; values rules, cooperation, and responsibility; considers others.
Attitude Toward Order	No order; disrupts order.	Superficial order with underlying chaos.	Values and protects order.

The role of the indicator system is to provide teachers with a basis for analysing issues. By analysing children's daily behaviour, it is possible to accurately identify and pinpoint the key issues affecting the formation and development of their internal discipline, thereby enabling targeted guidance measures to be implemented.

Focusing on Individual Differences and Innovating Guidance Methods

Child development types provide horizontal comparison indicators, while order development stages provide vertical comparison indicators. This allows for accurate identification of children, enabling tailored instruction based on their individual differences. It is essential to clearly communicate to children what they should do, addressing issues while also resolving them.

For example, children in the disordered stage, who are free-spirited and active, prominently exhibit exaggerated behaviour, strong interactivity, easy excitability, and difficulty in self-control. The focus of guidance should be on the development of self-control abilities, achieving a transition from external control to internal control. This requires teachers to guide children through their voice and appropriate behaviour, using firm yet gentle reminders to consistently stop their inappropriate behaviour and stimulate their awareness of rules. The choice of teaching aids, whether to

raise one's voice or speak softly, or to use other reminder methods to regulate children's behaviour and restore classroom calmness, depends on the teacher's assessment of the situation.

For imaginative children in the superficial order stage, whose prominent characteristics are wandering thoughts, scattered actions, and a tendency to immerse themselves in their own world and find it difficult to coordinate with the people and environment around them, the focus of teacher guidance is to remind them of the purpose of their work, guide their thinking, and achieve effective interaction between teachers and students and between groups. Before allowing children to engage in free activities, teachers should focus on eliminating movements that children cannot control and emphasise the use of quiet exercises and large group activities. Teachers should guide children with a calm, firm and patient voice, and their tone of voice should be consistent. Teachers should always ensure that all children feel their presence. A combination of overall supervision and individual guidance can effectively facilitate the transition of children to the surface order stage from passive to active thinking. The teacher's persistence and patience will awaken the children's inner order, leading them into a more perfect stage of self-development.

Whether children are free-spirited and active or slow to think, when they enter the stage of forming internal discipline, their sensitivity begins to revive. They have become individuals who can "follow their inner calling" and possess good self-control. At this point, the teacher "need only prepare and provide an environment that meets their developmental needs and remove obstacles from their path to perfection; there is no need to worry about them". However, this does not mean the end of the teacher's guidance role. In addition to preparing materials on time, arranging teaching aids scientifically, and scheduling progress reasonably, the teacher should act as a quiet observer, striving not to interfere with the children. They should neither make the children aware of their presence nor miss the subtle changes in the children's autonomous work process, understanding their doubts, hesitations, and confusions, and intervening appropriately when the children need assistance.

Based on this consensus, we piloted the high-level control strategy in the classrooms of teachers B, C, and D, who participated in the interviews, to verify its operability and effectiveness. The goal of high-level control is to enhance children's concentration and establish an orderly and effective classroom environment. Children's concentration is typically measured by the duration of focused attention, while classroom order is assessed by observing their participation, interaction, and the level of quietness and harmony in the classroom. After three months of piloting and classroom observation records, it was found that the average time children spent focusing on manipulative activities increased by 2.3 minutes, and the transition from disorder to order, and from superficial order to internal order, was also very evident. These changes preliminarily demonstrate the effectiveness of the high-level control strategy.

Conclusion

This paper is based on data obtained from teacher interviews and direct classroom observations, and through rational analysis and discussion, a high-level control strategy has been constructed. In terms of strategy application and practical effect testing, the research is still preliminary. The test indicators for concentration and classroom order need to be further refined, and the testing methods are not yet scientific and standardised. Follow-up research will further deepen and enrich these aspects.

From the perspective of children's internal order construction, it is not advisable to allow children to engage in free activities and then provide passive guidance; neither is it advisable to regulate and restrain children's behaviour in every detail. How to adhere to the principles of internal order construction, grasp the timing and degree of teacher guidance intervention, requires teachers to possess higher-order cognitive abilities and employ higher-order control strategies to engage in creative work. A teacher with rich experience in observing and guiding children will never allow the classroom to descend into chaos. As long as she consistently uses "analysis, evaluation, and creation" to understand children and employs warm, patient, firm, and authoritative manners to control discipline, she can shape an ideal classroom. Only teachers who embrace and understand children from within can stand at a higher vantage point, guide children through advanced control methods, and gradually lead them into an orderly, effective, wise, and harmonious classroom environment.

*Zhuoran Zhao [赵卓然] is Lecturer, School of Education, Taylor's University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Email: zhuoranzhao30@gmail.com

References

Bondolfi, G. (2006). A stepwise drug treatment algorithm to obtain complete remission in depression: A GENDEP study. *Swiss Medical Weekly*, 136(5–6), 84.

Duan, X. (2019). *Introduction to systems science*. Science Press.

Fang, H. (2014). Research on the development of high-order/nonlinear multi-agent consensus control. In *2012–2013 Report on the development of control Science and Engineering*. Science Press.

Flipped Classroom Research Society. (2014). *Flipped classroom: Changing the future of education*. Meishi Bookstore.

Gombrich, E. H. (1980). The sense of order. *Journal of Philosophy*, 77(3).

Hua, T. (2023). Practical research on promoting children's sense of order during the kindergarten–primary school transition. *Educational Reference*, (5), 35–39.

Huo, L., Gu, H., & Huang, S. (2023). A comparative study on the structural indicators of preschool children's attention: A coding analysis based on 16 international documents. *Educational Science Research*, (12), 54–61.

Hyson, M. (2016). *Enthusiastic and engaged learners: The qualities of preschool children's learning and their cultivation*. Educational Science Publishing House.

Lin, C. (2009). *Developmental psychology* (3rd ed.). People's Education Press.

Mahone, E. M., & Schneider, H. E. (2012). Assessment of attention in preschoolers. *Neuropsychology Review*, 22(4), 361–383. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11065-012-9217-y>

Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2022). *Guidelines for the learning and development of children aged 3–6*. http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A06/s3327/201210/t20121009_143254.html

Montessori, M. (2007). *The absorbent mind*. China Development Press.

Soydan, S. B., Pirpir, D. A., Samur, A. O., & Angın, D. E. (2018). Pre-school teachers' classroom management competency and the factors affecting their understanding of discipline. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 18(73), 149–172.

Teng, S. (1985). *Aesthetic psychological description*. Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Press.

Wang, L. (2013). A brief discussion on cultivating young children's concentration. *Modern Educational Science Journal*, (12), 27–30.

Yi, X. (2002). Sense of order as an important emotional resource in children's moral development. *Early Childhood Education Research*, (2), 14–20. <https://doi.org/10.13861/j.cnki.sece.2002.02.005>

Yu, L., & Luo, S.-L. (2020). The influence of family capital on the learning quality of disadvantaged children: The mediating role of family resilience. *Early Childhood Education Research*, (9), 58–68. <https://doi.org/10.13861/j.cnki.sece.2020.09.007>

Zhang, H. (2016). On the connotation of core literacy. *Global Education Outlook*, 45(1), 10–24.

Zhong, Q. (2016). Curriculum development based on core literacy: Challenges and issues. *Global Education Outlook*, (1), 5–9.