



**REGINA GAETZ**  
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Regina enters the classroom with all the nervousness of a relatively new instructor who is teaching this course to provide summer income while she finishes her dissertation. Although she has taught several times before, this particular section of introductory psychology is different from her previous experiences because it is a Continuing Education class held in the middle of the day to accommodate non-traditional students. What are these students going to be like? How will teaching this group be different from previous experiences in the classroom?

As it turns out, many of the students are traditional, with only a few who are here during their lunch break from full-time work. The class is very small, which is widely regarded as the best situation for teacher and students. However, because Regina is used to teaching larger classes, some adaptations need to be made.

Of the few non-traditional students, one stout older gentleman with a white beard stands out. Carl is not worried about getting back to work after class, because he is, in fact, retired. He is also not shy about speaking up and asking questions in class. Because discussions can be difficult when students aren't willing to participate, his comments and questions are welcome. Regina is relieved to know that she will be able to count on Carl and his unique perspective during the class discussions to come.

Arriving in class on the second day, Regina notices a comment written on the board. "Thought for the day" it says. She first assumes this was left over from a previous class but soon discovers that Carl wrote it. Something about this situation makes her very uncomfortable, but she isn't sure what. She makes reference to the note in class and then erases it.

On the third day of class Regina finds a new phrase on the board. Again, she makes a comment about it and then erases it. Again, she is feeling uncomfortable, not sure why, and unable to figure out what the appropriate action might be. The next time she finds a comment on the board, she simply erases it without mentioning it. She decides that if she doesn't reinforce the behavior by calling attention to it, it will go away (a concept she will soon be teaching when the class encounters behaviorism). Contrary to the predictions of B.F. Skinner, the comments did not stop.

Regina, unable to figure out how to sensitively handle this situation, simply ignores it until the first exam. When the day of the first exam arrives, Regina is surprised to see that Carl has brought M&Ms to give out to the class. He passes them out and then announces "psychological studies have shown that students do better on exams after they eat chocolate."

It is now obvious that something must be done.

## Questions

1. What is it about Carl's behavior that makes Regina so uncomfortable? Is she overreacting?
2. Why is Regina having difficulty figuring out what to do? What are some possible explanations for the conflict she is experiencing?
3. What impact is Carl's behavior having on the other students? Are his comments disruptive to student learning? What potential problems might develop if Regina allows Carl's behavior to continue?
4. What are some educationally effective strategies Regina can use to address this situation? How might she make it a "teachable moment"?