

# Preface

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It's hard for me to believe that it's been more than two decades since I first wrote about relationships between teachers and students. When I began, my work focused almost exclusively on discipline and classroom management, arising from the needs of the student teachers and first-year teaching interns charged to my care. Among my earliest works was a book entitled *21st Century Discipline*, written when the new millennium still seemed to be a long way off. As that book—and a subsequent revision ten years later—generated its own strange history, passing from one publisher to another, so did my work with this topic continue to evolve.

When Corwin Press asked me to revisit the manuscript, I realized that with all the additions and changes, the book really wasn't about discipline anymore.

As might be expected, my perceptions and feelings about student behavior has, over the years, instigated numerous shifts in the vocabulary and conceptual framework presented in my writing and teaching. What started as a book (and eventually a seminar) about discipline had come to embrace a far wider range of issues related to various dimensions of classroom climate, particularly the teacher-student interactions that influence behavior. Nowadays, whether I'm talking about discipline and student behavior, school safety, dropout prevention, or dealing with difficult students, I always seem to be addressing not only power dynamics, but academic and cognitive issues, social and emotional matters, feedback and encouragement, learning needs, and neurological and physiological concerns. So it really was no surprise to discover, as I went through the manuscript for a final revision, that with all the new material I had included, and all the changes I had made to the ideas that had appeared in previous editions of the discipline book, that I had an entirely new creation on my hands (although a few of the stories and examples hail from my earlier work).

The concerns expressed by teachers today are not much different than they were when I first started writing about them. Kids still come to class unprepared, forget to put materials away, don't turn their homework in on time, and lack skills needed to succeed with the curriculum we're supposed to teach them. Bad attitudes, lack of initiative, poor impulse control, passive learning, indifference, power struggles, and, in many instances, verbal or physical violence, are a reality in many classrooms. Over the years, I've seen increasing impatience and disillusionment with traditional practices and ineffective techniques that simply do not address the most fundamental component of any educational experience, that is, the relationship between teacher and student.

The good news is: There is a better way.

I've spent much of my career looking for strategies that help teachers connect with kids in positive ways. In this book, I've done my best to share the ideas that worked best for the teachers I've met and observed—and those that worked for me as well. In the time that I've been writing about these strategies, I've received feedback from countless teachers, counselors, administrators, and other school personnel who have made the changes

suggested in this book. Although often attempted as a last resort, the enormous success they report continues to reassure me that the changes we say we want are not going to come from stricter enforcement of punitive discipline codes or increasing the number of rules. I am convinced that these changes will come, instead, from our efforts to develop relationships, structures, and a positive context within our classrooms that can indeed accommodate our students' needs, including their needs for autonomy and power within clear, definite limits in an emotionally safe environment.

As my work has evolved, I have concentrated my efforts on refining the language, conceptual foundation, and techniques of a win-win approach to dealing with student behavior and achievement. This revision incorporates research, observations, personal experiences, and information that account for several significant changes, any one of which can reduce stress and conflict in a school environment. I've borrowed from other fields and have learned much from educators throughout the world with whom I've worked. I've examined some of our most common and enduring practices, patterns, and policies and have found some simple, effective alternatives to the ones that aren't working, as well as the ones that are actually making things worse. I've broadened my understanding of how the brain works—and how brain- and body-related issues can contribute to student behavior—and have added these insights to my writing.

One of the most interesting updates in my work has come from changes in the technology that was available when I started teaching (and writing) and that which we currently find in schools. I'm well aware that my audiences are getting younger: I often find myself defining words like *ditto* for new teachers these days. I have attempted to eliminate all references to dittos,<sup>1</sup> as well as things like filmstrips, records, carbon paper, and film projectors, all of which were common references in my earlier work. Despite my passion for the latest technologies, writing about this makes me feel old.

Regardless of the focus of my work, putting a positive spin on negative student behavior has always been a challenge. Although *The Win-Win Classroom* has gotten away from the emphasis on discipline per se, many of the ideas presented here will have a positive impact on student behavior, eliminating many of the discipline problems teachers encounter. From my earliest work, I've tried to get away from equating discipline with punishment, or, at the very least, a negative reaction to a student's misbehavior, and to redefine the term to emphasize the development of relationships and classroom environments in which many typical discipline problems simply do not occur (or occur much more infrequently and much less disruptively).

While my earliest works included mention of rules and consequences (with the traditional negative orientation to dealing with misbehaviors), I simply couldn't get past the fact that there were just too many similarities, both in concept and implementation, to the dynamics of using punishments. Even the most positive spin on the pattern of using rules and negative consequences could not pull this approach out of its punitive and reactive tradition. As this work developed, I discovered the language and concepts that allowed me to shift from promoting rules and negative consequences to strategies for setting boundaries<sup>2</sup> and emphasizing contingent access to *positive* outcomes instead. I have found that this model afforded me a context, not only for intervening in disruptions and off-task behavior, but also for motivating and reinforcing cooperation without relying on power, anger, threats, or conditional teacher approval.

I believe that this shift to positive consequences lies at the heart of what *The Win-Win Classroom* is all about. The change is subtle but the difference is powerful. As a result, the relationship dynamics are a great deal cleaner and less power oriented, all without losing

their effectiveness. While rules may persist as a fact of life in educational institutions, my preference for using boundaries stands, as well as my belief in their effectiveness and compatibility with win-win objectives, even in the most negative and reactive environment.

Another change was in the area of internal and external motivation. These terms seemed a lot less ambiguous when I first started writing about them. I've seen a lot of teachers upset or confused by these terms, and I have experienced a great deal of frustration with this language myself. What I've come to is this: *All motivation is internal*. Whether we do something for the joy of doing it, to please someone, to get it out of the way, to feel a sense of pride or accomplishment, to fulfill a commitment or responsibility, to avoid a penalty or punishment, to keep from disappointing or annoying someone, to get a grade or a paycheck, or so that we can do something we enjoy even more when we're done, we are satisfying some internal need. Always.

Nowadays, I attempt to clarify this point by differentiating between motivators and reinforcers that rely on the reaction of another person (or jeopardize emotional safety with conditional approval) and those that do not. As far as I'm concerned, doing what the teacher wants so you can do a fun enrichment activity, check off a task you've completed, or go help out in the library is just as internal (and, quite frankly, as reasonable) as cooperating because you happen to love a particular subject area. In creating a safe emotional environment, I'm far more troubled about motivators and reinforcers that teach kids to constantly look outside themselves, to base their decisions on anticipated reactions of other people or build dependence on outside approval. Regardless of what we call it, quite frankly, the need to avoid rejection or anger is just as internal as anything else.

Writing this book has allowed me to not only put the latest incarnation of these ideas into print, but also to share a wealth of very practical and effective strategies gleaned from the research, from conversations and visits with teachers over the years, and from my personal experiences as well. It is my hope that this material will make the creation of a productive, cooperative, enjoyable—and yes, win-win—learning environment clear and accessible, that it will put some fun and passion into your work, and that it will help you remember what brought you to this profession in the first place. I wish you joy and success in your journey.

—Jane Bluestein  
April, 2007  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

## NOTES

1. In case you're not familiar with this medium, *dittos* are duplicated papers with purple imprints, run off on machines that left a subtle solvent residue smell my kids used to love.

2. I elaborate on the concept and use of boundaries in greater detail in later chapters. To introduce the term, I'm referring to a process that goes beyond simply setting limits. Therapist Jared Scherz suggests thinking of boundaries as "a meeting place for the transfer of ideas (as opposed to a fence)."