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INTRODUCTION

In describing the climate of a classroom, we are often guided by a certain set of values, a vision of what school ought to be like. We might begin with the premise, for example, that an ideal climate is one that promotes deep understanding, excitement about learning, and social as well as intellectual growth (Kohn 1996, p. 54).

Every educator works toward establishing and maintaining an improved school climate in order to enrich school conditions so that teachers can teach better and students can learn more (Hansen and Childs 1998). This goal is challenging because students in the twenty-first century live in an age of information overload, high-stakes testing, Internet access, personal insecurity, drug use, and sometimes violence in their homes, schools, and society. Thus, it is difficult for students to walk through the doors of a school and leave all their distractions and problems behind them.

In the students' search for their own identities and, sometimes, their search for an escape from family and societal problems, they look to the schools for the constant that is often missing in their home lives. Educators today need to do more than help students meet standards, score high on standardized tests, master the curriculum, secure jobs or get accepted into college. Educators are also responsible for teaching students how to interact in socially acceptable ways and how to develop the interpersonal skills necessary to be successful in life.

The obedience model of discipline used by many educators in the past is no longer effective in today's world. Glasser (as cited in Gough 1987) states that no amount of coercion in the schools is going to make students learn. "The old theory, 'we can make 'em work; all we have to do is get tougher' has never produced intellectual effort in the history of the world, and it certainly won't work in this situation" (p. 657). Glasser (1997) advocates "choice theory" to help students. Choice theory shows people that behavior can only be controlled by themselves. If people are not personally satisfied with what they are doing, no amount of punishment or number of rules and restrictions will force them to comply with ideas or systems they do not believe in. "Individuals need to belong, to have power, to have freedom, and to have fun" (Glasser as cited in Hansen and Childs 1998, p. 16).

Making students work and learn by “getting tough” is not the answer. Moreover, the “pour and store” philosophy of filling students’ heads with knowledge has been dispelled by brain research that shows students need time to make connections and process information. New strategies for instruction, assessment, curriculum, and classroom management that reflect students’ learning needs are beginning to be implemented by schools throughout the world to meet the needs of all learners.

About This Book

The purpose of this book is to help beginning teachers and veteran teachers establish a climate in their classrooms and schools that fosters a spirit of cooperation, a sense of responsibility, and a love of learning. Educators need to make the environment conducive for learning before they can address standards, curriculum, or assessment. The atmosphere of the classroom and the respect and courtesy students show to themselves, their peers, and their teachers form the essential foundation for engaged learning and increased student achievement.

This book is divided into nine chapters and an epilogue that can be summarized as follows:

- *Chapter One* addresses current issues in education such as inclusion, ADD (attention deficit disorder), bilingual education, and violence in schools.
- *Chapter Two* discusses the theories of brain-compatible learning, multiple intelligences, authentic assessment, the emotional intelligence, and cooperative learning.
- *Chapter Three* reviews what educational researchers believe about the most effective way teachers teach and students learn.
- *Chapter Four* introduces specific strategies to establish a positive classroom climate where students create rules and consequences to guide their conduct.
- *Chapter Five* integrates the explicit teaching of social skills into the curriculum so that students are taught how to interact with peers, work in cooperative groups, and resolve conflicts.
- *Chapter Six* explores strategies to deal with students who have trouble accepting responsibility for their behavior and learning.
- *Chapter Seven* introduces methods to help students who have weak interpersonal skills that hurt their relationships with peers and teachers.
- *Chapter Eight* offers problem-solving strategies to prevent and handle more serious discipline problems caused by aggressive, attention-seeking, or power-seeking students.
- *Chapter Nine* reviews ways to help students with special needs deal with their learning challenges, behavior problems, and language and physical challenges.
- *The Epilogue* provides an example of a class meeting where teachers and students meet to discuss problems and solutions to situations.

While Chapters 1–3 provide a review of issues, theories and research related to classroom management, Chapters 4–9 contain scenarios that outline a specific social skill problem, as well as activities, assignments, possible solutions, and specific

strategies to address not only the problems outlined in the book, but also the real problems teachers experience in the classroom every day.

There are no “right” answers for the daily problems teachers face. Hopefully, however, educators can use or adapt some of the techniques presented in this book to achieve success preventing or solving problems they face in their own classrooms. To some, the words “discipline” and “management” sound somewhat coercive—almost conveying the idea that teachers are trying to “control” students. The techniques presented in this book, however, are problem-solving ideas that may be an alternative to traditional discipline or classroom management techniques. These techniques can help prevent, reduce, or resolve disruptions that detract from a positive learning environment. Teachers can facilitate their students in developing their own sense of cooperation, self-discipline, and responsibility in the classroom by establishing a caring classroom climate and providing a safe environment in which students can interact with others and learn.