Building Classroom Discipline

C. M. Charles

Emeritus, San Diego State University

Collaboration by

Gail W. Senter

California State University San Marcos

2005



Boston New York San Francisco Mexico City Montreal Toronto London Madrid Munich Paris Hong Kong Singapore Tokyo Cape Town Sydney

Alfie Kohn's Beyond Discipline

OVERVIEW OF KOHN'S MODEL

Focus

- Teaching that promotes thinking, decision making, and consideration for others.
- Developing a sense of community in the classroom with shared responsibility.
- Involving students in resolving classroom problems, thus removing aversive control.

Logic

- Coercive discipline has no place in enlightened teaching: It harms rather than helps.
- Students develop self-control and responsibility when trusted and allowed initiative.
- Effective teachers use collaborative problem solving instead of coercive control.

Contributions

- Urged "constructivist teaching" as the best approach to education.
- Showed how coercive discipline limits the development of caring human beings.
- Popularized the concept of classroom as community with equal participation by all.
- Provided guidance to help teachers transform their classrooms into communities.

Kohn's Suggestions

- Involve students seriously in discussing curriculum, procedures, and class problems
- Organize the curriculum to attend to student interests and promote in-depth thinking.
- Always ask the question: How can my students help decide on this matter?
- Use participative classroom management to resolve problems that occur in the class.

About Alfie Kohn

Formerly a teacher, Alfie Kohn is now a full-time writer and lecturer. He has several influential books to his credit, including The Brighter Side of Human Nature: Altruism and Empathy in Everyday Life (1990); No Contest: The Case Against Competition (1986, 1992); Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes (1993, 1999); Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community (1996, 2001); and The Schools Our Children Deserve: Moving Beyond Traditional Classrooms and "Tougher Standards" (1999). He has also published numerous journal articles related to



motivation, grading, discipline, and developing caring people. Recognized as one of the most original thinkers in education, Kohn has appeared on over 200 radio and television programs, including *Oprah* and *The Today Show*, and his work has received mention in scores of national newspapers and magazines. He speaks frequently at major conferences and conducts workshops across the nation. He can be reached at his website www.alfiekohn.org.

Kohn's Central Focus

Kohn's critical analyses of schooling and teaching have focused mainly on helping teachers develop caring, supportive classrooms in which students pursue in depth topics of interest to them and participate fully in solving class problems, including problems of behavior. He has roundly criticized teaching and approaches to discipline that do things to students rather than *involving* students as partners in the process. Particularly scathing have been his attacks on discipline schemes that involve reward and punishment. He says that nothing valuable comes from reward and punishment—that the process is actually counterproductive, not only because it produces side effects such as mistrust, avoidance, and working for rewards only, but also because it causes students to mistrust their own judgment and thwarts their becoming caring and self-reliant. He advises teachers to forget the popular systems of discipline and work instead toward developing a sense of community in their classes, where students feel safe and are continually brought into making judgments, expressing their opinions, and working cooperatively toward solutions that affect themselves and the class.

Kohn's Contributions to Discipline

Kohn has made two significant contributions to discourse on classroom discipline. The first is his proposition that instruction should be based on **constructivist theory**, which holds that students cannot receive knowledge directly from teachers but must construct it from experience. A corollary of this view is that for instruction to be effective students

must be involved deeply in topics they consider important, and when they do so there is little need for discipline controls of any sort. The second contribution is his rationale and prescription for developing a sense of community in the classroom, which he judges essential for developing caring, responsible students. This sense of community would more effectively bring about purposeful activity and concern for others, which is what teachers normally hope to achieve through discipline techniques.

Kohn's Principal Teachings

- Educators must abandon teaching that "does things to" students and replace it with teaching that takes students seriously, involves them in decisions, and helps them explore in depth topics they consider important.
 - Students quickly forget most of what they learn in traditional teaching because the learning is superficial and of little importance from the students' point of view.
- Educators must look beyond the techniques of discipline and ask the question: What are we attempting to accomplish with discipline?
 - Doing this, he says, will make evident that most teachers are thinking in terms of making students compliant and quiet, conditions that do not develop the kinds of people we'd like students ultimately to become.
- Virtually all popular discipline programs are based on threat, reward, and punishment, which are used to gain student compliance.
 - Essentially, discipline programs differ only in how kindly and respectfully the teacher speaks to students while using threat, reward, and punishment.
- When students are rewarded (or punished) into compliance, they usually feel no commitment to what they are doing.
 - They have no real understanding of why they are doing the act and are not becoming people who want to act this way in the future.
- Teacher-made rules are of no practical value in the classroom.
 This is because students learn how best to behave not from being told but from having the opportunity to behave responsibly.
- Some teachers—and most authorities in discipline—have an unrealistically negative view of students' basic motives.
 - They consider students to be predisposed to disobedience and troublemaking. They seem also to ignore that the curriculum powerfully influences student interest and involvement.
- Student growth toward kindness, happiness, and self-fulfillment occurs as they work closely with fellow students.
 - This includes students' disagreeing and arguing with each other, which can have positive benefits.

- When concerns arise, the teacher should always ask students, "What do you think we can do to solve this problem?"
 - This question is pivotal in helping students develop a sense of capability and responsibility.
- Class meetings offer the best forum for addressing questions that affect the class. Education must be reformed so that classrooms take on the nature of communities.
 - A classroom community is a place where students are cared about and care about others, are valued and respected, and think in terms of we instead of I.
- Teachers who wish to move beyond discipline must do three things: Provide an engaging curriculum based on student interests, develop a sense of community, and draw students into meaningful decision making.

Analysis of Kohn's Beyond Discipline

Discipline *per se* makes no sense except in relation to what the teacher is attempting to accomplish in the classroom. If the teacher is primarily concerned with keeping order and maintaining quiet, there are a number of effective discipline systems to use. If, on the other hand, the teacher is primarily concerned with developing self-directed, responsible, caring students who explore in depth topics they consider interesting and relevant, then an entirely different approach is required. Before we can properly understand what discipline means to Kohn, we need to examine his views concerning education and teaching.

The Trouble with Today's Teaching

Kohn thinks *traditional teaching* is falling well short of the expectations we hold for it. When he says traditional teaching, he means the type that is seen in classrooms everywhere in which the teacher selects the curriculum, does the planning, delivers the lessons through lecture, demonstration, guided discussion, reading assignments, worksheets, and homework, and tests students to assess their progress. Emphasis in that kind of instruction is placed on helping students reach certain specific objectives—information and skills that students can demonstrate behaviorally. Little attention is given to exploring ideas, seeking new solutions, looking for meaning or connections, or attempting to gain deeper understanding of the phenomena involved. Students remain relatively passive during traditional instruction. They listen, read assignments, answer questions when called on, and complete worksheets. There is little give-and-take. Instruction and learning are deemed "successful" to the extent that students show on tests that they have reached most of the stated objectives.

What is wrong with this kind of teaching? After all, it has been the predominant method of teaching for many years. Kohn (1999, p. 28) says that it counterproductively puts emphasis on *how well* students are doing rather than *on what* they are doing. Instruction concerned with *how well* tends to focus on outcomes that are shallow, relatively insignificant, and of little interest or relevance to learners. Students come to think of correct

243

answers and good grades as the major goals of learning. They rarely experience the satisfaction of exploring in depth a topic of interest and exchanging their views and insights with others. Kohn says an impressive and growing body of research shows that the traditional approach produces several undesirable outcomes, such as:

- undermining student interest in learning
- making failure seem overwhelming
- m not leading students to challenge themselves
- reducing the quality of learning (that is, learning that has little depth or relevance)
- acausing students to think of how smart they are instead of how hard they are trying

He goes on to say that students taught in this way develop a poor attitude toward learning. They think of learning as getting the work done rather than something they could be excited about exploring. Once they have done the "stuff," they quickly forget much of it as they move on to learn more new stuff. They strive to get the right answer, and when they do not, or if they don't make top scores on the test, they experience a sense of failure that is out of place in genuine learning in which making mistakes is the rule rather than the exception. They never have reason to challenge themselves intellectually. Their learning is superficial and their desire to learn for its own sake is nonexistent. The overall result is that although students seem to be learning well, they are actually doing poorly because they are not thinking widely and exploring ideas thoughtfully.

How Instruction Should Be Done

Kohn argues for instruction that is very different from traditional teaching. He says, first, that students should be taken seriously. By that he means teachers must honor them as individuals and seek to determine what they need and enjoy. Good teachers, he says, use a constructivist approach, knowing that students must construct knowledge and skills out of the experiences provided in school. These teachers look for where students' interests lie, continually trying to imagine how things look from the child's point of view and figuring out what lies behind the child's questions and mistakes. Such teachers know knowledge cannot be absorbed from the teacher. They, therefore, lead students to explore topics, grapple with them, and make sense of them. They provide challenges and emphasize that making mistakes is an important part of learning. Kohn has much to say about the role of mistakes in learning. He gives an example (1999, pp. 138-139) in which the teacher asks the class how many legs an insect has. A boy answers, "Twelve or fifteen or more." The teacher is tempted to say "No . . . " but instead decides to try to get a feeling for what the boy is thinking. She asks if he can give an example, and he replies, "a caterpillar." This unexpected answer opens up a good discussion about adult insects, larvae, and the possibility of mutations.

How do teachers help students move into deeper levels of thinking? Kohn says the best way is by asking them for examples or asking the question, "How do we know that?" This helps students maintain a critical mind, a healthy skepticism, a need for evidence, a willingness to hear different points of view, and a desire to see how things are connected.

It encourages them to appraise the importance of what they are learning and to explore how it can be useful in their lives.

From his constructivist position, Kohn argues for a curriculum that allows students to be purposefully active most of the time rather than passive. He says the way to bring that about is to "... start not with facts to be learned or disciplines to be mastered, but with questions to be answered" (1999, p. 145). He says these questions should not lead students to correct answers but make students pause, wonder, and reflect. Kohn gives examples of what he means in questions such as, "How could you improve the human hand?" and "Why were the founding fathers so afraid of democracy?" (1999, p. 146).

Kohn urges educators to remember three key facts about teaching: (1) Students learn most avidly and have their best ideas when they get to choose which questions they want to explore; (2) all of us tend to be happiest and most effective when we have some say about what we are doing; and (3) when student choice and control over learning is not allowed, achievement drops. Given these facts and the difference they make in learning, it is astonishing that present-day instruction tends systematically to ignore them. It is unnerving to most teachers, at least at first, to try to organize instruction in accordance with Kohn's suggestions. Kohn, however, says it is breathtaking to be involved in learning when students have a say in the curriculum and can decide what they will do, when, where, with whom, and toward what end. Kohn points out that this approach must be adjusted to the maturity levels of students, but he maintains it is a rule of thumb that "the more students' questions and decisions drive the lesson, the more likely (it is) that real learning will occur" (1999, p. 151). The best teachers, he insists, are those who ask themselves, "Is this a decision I must make on my own, or can I involve students in it?"

To summarize, Kohn's description of good teaching includes the following:

- Teachers taking students seriously by treating them as individuals with needs to be met, including the opportunity to delve deeply into topics of interest.
- Strong student involvement in making decisions about what is to be learned and how progress will be demonstrated.
- Curriculum and instruction organized in large part around questions students want
- Questions explored in depth, rather than superficially, and opinion, evidence, relevance, and interconnectedness examined critically.
- Students encouraged to work actively, purposefully, and often cooperatively, with
- Teachers assisting students by helping to obtain needed resources, listening, urging and encouraging, exploring mistakes and showing students how to use mistakes productively, and helping them make sense of what they are learning.
- Progress demonstrated not in test results but in productivity, insight, and ability to explain and analyze critically.

Where Discipline Fits in Kohn's Views on Teaching

It is time, Kohn says (2001, p. 54), to decide just what it is we hope to accomplish with discipline. We should take a serious look beyond the methods of discipline and give careful consideration to the *goals* of discipline. This statement gives pause. Most people have taken for granted that the goal of discipline is to control student behavior (or enable students to control their own behavior in accordance with adult expectations) so that teaching and learning may proceed as intended. But Kohn persists in putting the question: "Just what is it we are trying to do here?"

This question presents an issue, he says, that people who write about and do research in discipline never address. They expound on "effective discipline," but effective in regard to what? The obvious answer is that discipline is considered to be effective when it causes students to behave as teachers wish them to. Therein lies the rub, in Kohn's view. All approaches to discipline, when analyzed, reveal a set of assumptions about students, learning, and the role of the teacher. Because these assumptions are seldom made explicit, even in the writings of the most respected authorities, they directly suggest that (1) students are by nature predisposed to disrupt the learning program and deal misery to teachers, (2) learning occurs best in an atmosphere of structure, quiet, and order, and (3) the teacher's role in discipline is to make students obedient, compliant, and above all quiet.

Kohn contends that all three assumptions are ill-founded and he, therefore, finds fault with virtually all the popular approaches to classroom discipline. He points, for example, to the work of Jacob Kounin (see Chapter 2), one of the first writers to attempt a scientific analysis of classroom behavior related to discipline. Preeminent among several teacher traits that Kounin found helpful in discipline is one called "withitness." Teachers display this trait when they are attentive to what all students are doing in the classroom at all times and make sure the students are aware of it. Such teachers are more effective than their "withoutit" colleagues, to use Kohn's words. But to what does the word effective refer? Kohn points out that Kounin used it to mean getting student conformity and obedience. In other words, it means that students keep busy at their assigned work and don't do anything the teacher considers inappropriate. Kohn (2001) says:

Now, if a good classroom is one where students simply do what they're told, we shouldn't be surprised that a teacher is more likely to have such a classroom when students are aware that she can quickly spot noncompliance. (p. 55)

Kohn levels some of his sharpest criticisms against the Canters' Assertive Discipline but is also troubled by contentions in many of the "newer" approaches to discipline. He alludes to what he calls the rhetoric that accompanies these supposedly more humane discipline systems, saying:

... I have reluctantly concluded . . . that the New Disciplines are just as much about getting compliance as is the more traditional approach. The overriding goal is to get students to do what they are supposed to be doing . . . (and) to learn what's acceptable to the teacher and what's not. (p. 59)

The Trouble with Compliance

Thus, Kohn is deeply troubled by the notion that schooling is usually structured to force, or at least entice, compliant behavior from students. Most teachers are delighted when

students comply with their expectations, so what is wrong with compliance? Kohn describes how he often begins workshops with teachers by asking the question: "What are your long-terms goals for the students you work with? What would you like them to be to be like—long after they've left you?" (2001, p. 60). Teachers say they want their students to be caring, happy, responsible, curious, and creative, a conclusion that

... is unsettling because it exposes a yawning chasm between what we want and what we are doing, between how we would like students to turn out and how our classrooms and schools actually work. We want children to continue reading and thinking after school has ended, yet we focus their attention on grades, which have been shown to reduce interest in learning. We want them to be critical thinkers, yet we feed them predigested facts and discrete skills-partly because of pressure from various constituencies to pump up standardized test scores. We act as though our goal is short-term retention of right answers rather than genuine understanding. (Kohn, 2001, p. 61)

Many teachers rely heavily on class rules and rewarding students who behave or respond as teachers want. But Kohn points out that even when students are rewarded into compliance, they usually feel no commitment to what they are doing, no genuine understanding of the act or why they are doing it, and no sense that they are becoming people who want to act this way in the future. Moreover, classroom rules are self-defeating because they cause students to look for ways of subverting the rules and cast teachers as police officers who feel obliged to take action when students break the rules. Kohn (2001) concludes that the entire process of behavior management works against what we hope to achieve:

The more we "manage" students' behavior and try to make them do what we say, the more difficult it is for them to become morally sophisticated people who think for themselves and care about others. (p. 62)

Kohn says that if compliance is not what teachers are looking for in the long run, then we are faced with a basic conflict between our ultimate goals for learners and the methods we are using to achieve those goals. One or the other, Kohn asserts, has got to give.

What Is Needed in Classroom Management

If we give up reward and punishment as means of ensuring desired behavior, indeed if we move away from compliance entirely as the goal of discipline, then what are we left with? Most people ask, "Aren't there times when we simply need students to do what we tell them?" Kohn begins his reply to that question by suggesting that teachers think carefully about how often "students need to do what the teacher tells them." He notes that the number of such occasions varies widely from one teacher to another, which suggests that the need for student compliance is seated in the teacher's personality and background. Teachers ought to examine their preferences and bring them to the conscious level: If one teacher needs students to be more compliant than another, is that teacher then entitled to use a coercive discipline program to meet his or her particular needs?

When reflecting on this point, many teachers are inclined to ask whether this means that anything goes, whether students don't have to comply with expectations that they participate and learn, and whether they can ignore assignments, shout obscenities, and create havoc.

This concern, Kohn explains, misses the point. The question isn't whether it's all right for students to act in those ways, but rather, are they likely to do so if their teacher does not demand control and compliance, but instead emphasizes a curriculum that appeals to students. Teachers do not have to choose between chaos on the one hand and being a strong boss on the other. There is another, and better, option available to teachers, which is to work with students in creating a democratic community where the teacher is not much concerned with personal status and only rarely with demanding compliance.

Kohn contends that students in such classrooms are likely to comply with teacher expectations when it is truly necessary for them to do so, and he acknowledges that there are such times, as when personal abuse or safety or legal matters are concerned. Even then, students are more apt to comply willingly when bonds of trust have been built between teacher and students. Teachers who make a habit of trusting students find that students come to trust and respect them in return.

The Value of Conflict

Student growth toward kindness, happiness, and self-fulfillment depends more on working closely with fellow students, including disagreeing and arguing with them, than with following rules and learning discrete bits of information. Kohn says that it is more important for students to wrestle with dilemmas, clash with others' ideas, and take others' needs into account than to follow sets of rules. The sound of children arguing (at least in many circumstances) should be music to teachers' ears. True, conflict can become destructive, in which case it must be stopped and the problem ironed out. But disagreement presents golden opportunities for learning and, therefore, should not be suppressed. Even hurtful conflict needs to be resolved rather than pushed aside. Kohn notes that teachers should be wary of various versions of conflict resolution that do not examine the deeper issues involved, including people's motives and the possibility that something valuable may be gained from dealing with the conflict. Kohn expresses suspicion about classrooms that operate too smoothly and cleanly. To him, they suggest that conflict may have been conveniently suppressed by the teacher.

Teachers question the practicality of stopping planned lessons in favor of lessons about resolving conflict. Certainly, many situations do not permit an extended discussion at the time they occur. When that is the case, the teacher may wish to ask for a conversation about the matter later on. The enlightened point of view, hard though it may be to accept at first, is that teachers should expect and welcome students' arguments about the rules. Students become thinkers when they try to make sense of things in their own minds. Students who cannot voice their opinions find ways of expressing them in ways far less productive than rational argument. Kohn says that discipline writers are wrong in suggesting that teachers should do everything possible to keep classroom misbehavior from occurring. Kohn (2001) suggests instead that

... the real quantum leap in thinking is not from after-the-fact to prevention, where problems are concerned. It involves getting to the point that we ask, "What exactly is construed as a problem here—and why?" It means shifting from eliciting conformity and ending conflict to helping students become active participants in their own social and ethical development. (p. 77)

Regarding Structure and Limits

Most teachers feel it is necessary to place structure and limits on student behavior if the class is to function efficiently. Is their belief justified? Kohn presents criteria for determining how defensible a structure or limit is in terms of how much it resembles plain teacher control. Here are some of his criteria:

- Purpose. A restriction is legitimate to the extent its objective is to protect students from harm as opposed to imposing order for its own sake.
- Restrictiveness. The less restrictive a structure or limit is the better. Kohn says that it is harder, for example, to justify a demand for silence than for quiet voices.
- Flexibility. Although some structure is helpful, one must always be ready to modify the structure in accordance with student needs.
- Developmental appropriateness. Kohn uses the example that although we need to make sure that young children are dressed for winter weather, it is better to let older students decide on such matters for themselves.
- Presentation style. The way in which restrictions are presented makes a big difference in how students accept them. Kohn cites a study that found no negative effects when guidelines for using art supplies were presented respectfully to students. But when the identical rules were presented to another group in a tone that ordered them to comply, the students showed less interest and did less creative work.
- Student involvement. Most importantly, it is student input that makes structure acceptable. When concerns arise, the teacher can ask students, "What do you think we can do to solve this problem?"

Class Meetings

Kohn agrees with many other authorities that class meetings offer the best forum for addressing questions that affect the class. He makes the following points about class meetings:

- Sharing. Class meetings are a place to talk about interesting events. Students decide whether or not they want to speak up.
- Deciding. Class meetings are ideal places for deciding on matters that affect the class, such as furniture arrangement and procedures for working on projects.
- Planning. Class meetings are places where planning should be done for field trips, raising money, inviting chaperones, and so forth. Teachers should always be asking themselves, "Wait a minute: How can I bring the students in on this?"
- Reflecting. Class meetings are good places to think about progress, what has been learned, what might have worked better, and what changes might help the class.

Holding good class meetings is not as easy as it sounds. Sometimes participants can't agree on a solution. Some don't participate. Some behave in an unkindly manner to someone's idea or don't pay attention. Sometimes one or two students dominate the meeting. Kohn reminds us that these are not problems for the teacher to solve alone. They are to be brought up for consideration and dealt with by the group.

Many teachers say they like the idea of class meetings but can't find time in their schedules to include them. Kohn gives a simple response to that concern: Make the time. Class meetings are too important to leave by the wayside. They bring social and ethical benefits, foster intellectual development, motivate students to become more effective learners, and greatly cut down on the need to deal with discipline problems. Kohn tells of a secondary math teacher who regularly devotes time to class meetings even though the class is limited to a total of 45 minutes per day. In their meetings the students reflect on how the class is going, exchange ideas on their independent projects, decide when the next test should be scheduled, and decide when it would be appropriate to work in small groups.

Making Decisions

The process of making decisions produces many benefits for students, such as helping them become more self-reliant, causing them to think issues through, and encouraging them to buy-in to the school program. This is not a matter to be reserved for older students alone. As Kohn says, it is experience with decisions that helps children become capable of handling them.

But students long accustomed to being told what to do may need time to get used to deciding on things for themselves. Kohn cautions that students may respond to increased freedom in several different ways—ways that can be discouraging to educators who aren't prepared for reactions such as:

- Acting out. As students adjust to greater freedom, teachers may see a lot more behavior of every kind, including negative behavior. This is not especially pleasant, Kohn says, but he urges teachers to keep thinking, "Bring the kids in on it." In class meetings ask them if they can figure out what's going on and what to do about it.
- Testing the teacher. Students may test teachers in several ways in order to see whether the teacher means what he or she says about wanting students to express themselves. They may be trying to see whether the teacher really means it when saying, "This is our classroom!"
- Outright resistance. Students may simply refuse to do what the teacher asks. That is a good time to discuss with them questions such as, "What is the teacher's job? And what about yours? Are you old enough to participate in such decisions? Do you learn better in a classroom where someone is always telling you what to do?"
- Silence. Some students will not participate in class discussions, even when asked for their opinion. The teacher should reflect on why this is happening. It might be that the student has nothing to say for the moment, doesn't feel safe with the teacher or classmates, is chronically shy, or has trouble handling new responsibility.
- Parroting. Some students will make glib remarks in discussions, hoping to say what the teacher wants to hear. When that occurs, the teacher might want to invite deeper

reflection rather than taking that response at face value. In so doing, the teacher should be careful not to criticize the individual student.

School and Classrooms as Communities

Kohn writes at length about the importance of transforming schools and classrooms into communities. By *community* Kohn (2001) means

a place in which students feel cared about and are encouraged to care about each other. They experience a sense of being valued and respected; the children matter to one another and to the teacher. They have come to think in the plural: they feel connected to each other; they are part of an "us." And, as a result of all this, they feel safe in their classes, not only physically but emotionally. (pp. 101–102)

Kohn suggests various strategies that will help teachers and schools move toward a greater sense of community. Among them are the following:

Building Relationships between Teachers and Students

Students come to behave more respectfully when important adults in their lives behave respectfully toward *them*. They are more likely to care about others if they know *they* are cared about. If their emotional needs are met, they show a tendency to help meet other people's needs rather than remaining preoccupied with themselves.

Enhancing Connections among Students

Connections among students are established and enhanced through activities that involve interdependence. Familiar activities for enhancing connections include cooperative learning, getting-to-know-you activities such as interviewing fellow students and introducing them to the class, and finding a partner to check opinions with on whatever is being discussed at the moment. Kohn also suggests using activities that promote perspective taking, in which students try to see situations from another person's point of view.

Undertaking Classwide and Schoolwide Activities

To develop a sense of community, students need plenty of opportunity for the whole class to collaborate on group endeavors. This might involve producing a class mural, producing a class newsletter or magazine, staging a verse choir performance, or doing some community service activity as a class. Kohn contends that the overall best activity for involving the entire group is a class meeting, as discussed earlier. Such meetings at the beginning of the year can be particularly helpful in establishing a sense of community. Kohn suggests posing questions at these first meetings, such as: "What makes school awful sometimes? Try to remember an experience during a previous year when you hated school, when you felt bad about yourself, or about everyone else, and you couldn't wait for it to be over. What exactly was going on when you were feeling that way? How was the class set up?"

Kohn says that not enough teachers encourage this sort of reflection, particularly in elementary schools where an aggressively sunny outlook pervades. Students' feelings of anger or self-doubt do not vanish just because their expression is forbidden.

Using Academic Instruction

The quest for community is not separate from academic learning. Class meetings can be devoted to talking about how the next unit in history might be approached or what the students thought was best and worst about the math test. Academic study pursued in cooperative groups enables students to make connections while learning from each other. Units in language arts and literature can be organized to promote reflection on helpfulness, fairness, and compassion.

Strengths of Kohn's Beyond Discipline

Kohn brings into public debate intriguing ideas about how education can be done to produce people who lead full lives and contribute to society. He is very critical of traditional education for being shallow and unattractive to learners. But he doesn't stop with criticism—he sets forth compelling alternatives that he believes will make education the dynamic force it should be. His suggestions have to do mostly with curriculum and teaching and little to do directly with discipline. This is understandable because he advocates building curriculum around topics students find interesting and relevant, while eschewing topics that have no appeal or relevance to real life. When students are afforded the opportunity to delve into such topics, and when their progress is not driven by getting answers right on tests, they will eagerly explore learning in depth, enjoy give-and-take with other students, and seek out connections that help them make sense of things. When thus engaged in learning, students have little reason to misbehave. Should personal problems arise, they are sorted out by those involved or, if necessary, addressed by the class as a whole. Yet, Kohn does make suggestions to strengthen relationships among members of the class, as seen in the next section on implementing his ideas.

Implementing Kohn's Beyond Discipline

Teachers who wish to move beyond discipline must do three things: provide an engaging curriculum, develop a caring community, and provide students latitude in making choices. When this is accomplished, Kohn says, the result can be properly called a democracy. In this kind of classroom, the teacher's point of departure when problems occur is to ask: How can I work with students to solve this problem? How can I turn this into a chance to help them learn?

Kohn offers 10 suggestions that he believes will be helpful to teachers who wish to move beyond discipline but find that their efforts do not produce the desired results:

 Work on establishing a trusting, caring relationship with your students. It's hard to work with a student to solve a problem unless the two of you already have a relationship on which to build. 2. Work diligently toward acquiring for yourself, and developing in your students, skills of listening carefully, remaining calm, generating suggestions, and imagining someone else's point of view.

3. When an unpleasant situation occurs, your first effort should be to diagnose what has happened and why. If you have a trusting relationship with students, you can gently ask them to speculate about why they hurt someone else's feelings, or why

they keep coming to class late.

4. To figure out what is really going on, be willing to look beyond the concrete situation. Do not immediately identify the student as the sole source of the problem while letting yourself off the hook. You should ask yourself, or the student or the class, what is really going on here. Can you do anything to help? Try sitting down in a friendly way and see if a plan can be made that will resolve the problem.

5. Maximize student involvement in making decisions and resolving problems. Individual students should be asked, "What do you think we can do to solve this problem?" Involving students is far more likely to lead to a meaningful, lasting solution

than having the teacher decide unilaterally what must be done.

Work with students on coming up with authentic solutions to problems. This requires an open-ended exploration of possibilities and reflection on motive.

- 7. When students do something cruel, our first priority is to help them understand that what they did is wrong, and why it is wrong, to discourage its happening again. Then an examination should be made of ways to make restitution or reparation, such as trying to restore, replace, repair, clean up, or apologize. Making amends is important and should be viewed as an essential part of the process, but more importantly, students must construct meaning for themselves around concepts of fairness and responsibility, just as they would around concepts in mathematics and literature.
- 8. When new plans or strategies are put into effect, be sure to review them later to see how they have worked.
- Remain flexible and use judgment concerning when you need to talk with a student about a problem. Sometimes it is better to delay the talk for a while so the student will feel more inclined to discuss the problem.
- 10. On the rare occasions when you must use control, do so in a way that minimizes its punitive impact. Sometimes, despite your every effort, you will have to control misbehavior. A student may be disrupting the class, despite repeated requests not to do so. In that case you may have to isolate the student or send him or her from the room. But even then your tone should be warm and regretful and you should express confidence that the two of you will eventually solve the problem together.



KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS PRESENTED IN THIS CHAPTER

The following terms are used with special meaning in Kohn's model of discipline. Check yourself to make sure you understand them.

compliant behavior constructivist theory democracy goals of discipline versus methods of discipline perspective taking sense of community traditional teaching



SELECTED SEVEN—SUMMARY SUGGESTIONS FROM ALFIE KOHN

Alfie Kohn suggests that you emphasize the following, as well as his many other suggestions:

- 1 Take students seriously and organize your class so it takes on the nature of a community, where students take part in making decisions, cooperate, explore topics in depth, support each other, and think in terms of "we" rather than "I."
- 2 Make regular and frequent use of classroom meetings as forums for discussion and group decision making.
- 3 Students come to behave more respectfully when important adults in their lives behave respectfully toward them. They are more likely to care about others if they know they are cared about.
- 4 You can largely remove misbehavior as a problem if you provide an engaging curriculum based on stu-

- dent interests, develop a sense of community, and draw students into meaningful decision making.
- 5 Allow students to work closely with each other and help them show kindness and find happiness and fulfillment.
- **6** When class concerns arise, ask students, "What do you think we can do to solve this problem?"
- 7 You cannot transfer your knowledge to students. The best you can do is lead students to explore topics, grapple with them, and make sense of them. Provide challenges and emphasize that making mistakes is an important part of learning.



CONCEPT CASES

I CASE 1 Kristing Will Not Work

Kristina, a student in Mr. Jake's class, is quite docile. She socializes little with other students and never disrupts lessons. However, despite Mr. Jake's best efforts, Kristina will not do her work. She rarely completes an assignment. She is simply there, putting forth no effort at all. How would Kohn deal with Kristina?

From the first day Kristina was in his class, Kohn would have begun establishing a trusting, caring relationship with her and all other students. He would try to put himself in her place and imagine her situation, hoping thereby to understand her reluctance to participate. He would examine the class situation and himself to see if the problem lay there. He would chat with Kristina and gently sound her out. He would ask why she didn't feel like participating, if she could suggest a solution, and if there was a way he might help her. He would see if the two of them could devise a plan to resolve the problem. He would ask her opinions and involve her fully. After deciding on a possible solution, he would remain flexible, talk with her, and be ready to alter the plan if the need were indicated.

CASE 2 Sara Cannot Stop Talking

Sara is a pleasant girl who participates in class activities and does most, though not all, of her assigned work. She cannot seem to refrain from talking to classmates, however. Her teacher, Mr. Gonzales, has to speak to her repeatedly during lessons to the point that he often becomes exasperated and loses his temper. What suggestions would Kohn give Mr. Gonzales for dealing with Sara?

CASE 3 Joshua Clowns and Intimidates

Larger and louder than his classmates, Joshua always wants to be the center of attention, which he accomplishes through a combination of clowning and intimidation. He makes wise remarks, talks back (smilingly) to the teacher, utters a variety of sound-effect noises such as automobile crashes and gunshots, and makes limitless sarcastic comments and put-downs of his classmates. Other students will not stand up to him, apparently fearing his size and verbal aggression. His teacher, Miss Pearl, has come to her wit's end. Would Joshua's behavior be likely to improve if Kohn's techniques were used in Miss Pearl's classroom? Explain.

CASE 4 Tom Is Hostile and Defiant

Tom has appeared to be in his usual foul mood ever since arriving in class. On his way to sharpen his pencil, he bumps into Frank, who complains. Tom tells him loudly to shut up. Miss Baines, the teacher, says, "Tom, go back to your seat." Tom wheels around, swears loudly, and says heatedly, "I'll go when I'm damned good and ready!" How would Kohn deal with Tom?



QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- In your journal, make notes from Kohn's Beyond Discipline that apply to the five principles of constructing a personal system of discipline.
- 2. Compare Kohn's views on discipline with those of Canter (Chapter 3). Which do you feel more accurately depicts classroom realities and makes the better suggestions for helping students?
- In pairs or small groups, discuss (a) what you think of Kohn's views, (b) the extent to which you feel his

views are grounded in the realities of classrooms and students, (c) whether you yourself would consider implementing his suggestions and why, and (d) the changes, if any, you would have to make in your views of discipline before you could enthusiastically endorse his suggestions.



YOU ARE THE TEACHER

Sheltered English Kindergarten

You teach a sheltered English kindergarten class comprised of 18 students, only three of whom speak English at home. The ethnic/racial makeup of the class is a mixture of Vietnamese, Laotian, Chinese, Samoan, Iranian, Latino, Filipino, African American, and Caucasian. The emphasis of the class is rapid English language development. For the most part, the students work in small groups, each of which is directed by a teacher, aide, or parent volunteer. The groups rotate every half hour so as to have a variety of experiences.

A Typical Occurrence

Shortly before school begins, a new girl, Mei, is brought into the class. She speaks very little English and is crying. She tries to run out of the classroom but is stopped by the aide. When you ring your bell, the students know they are to sit on the rug, but those already at the play area do not want to do so. You call them three or four times, but you finally have to get up and physically bring two of them to the rug. As the opening activities proceed, you repeatedly ask students to sit up. (They have begun rolling around on the floor.) Kinney is pestering the girl next to him. Twice you ask him to stop. Finally, you send him to sit in a chair outside the group. He has to sit there until the opening activities are finished. Then he can rejoin his group for the first rotation at the art table. As soon as the groups get under way, you hear a ruckus at the art table, which is under the guidance of Mrs. García, a parent volunteer. You see that Kinney has scooped up finger paint and is making motions as if to paint one of the girls, who runs away squealing. Mrs. García tells him to put the paint down. Kinney, who speaks English, replies, "Shut up, you big fat rat!" You leave your group and go to Kinney. You tell him,

"You need time out in Mrs. Sayres's room (a first grade next door to your kindergarten)." Kinney, his hand covered with blue paint, drops to the floor and refuses to move. He calls you foul names. You leave him there, go to the phone, and call the office for assistance. Kinney gets up, wipes his hand first on a desk and then on himself, and runs out the door. He stops beside the entrance to Mrs. Sayres's room, and when you follow he goes inside and sits at a designated table without further resistance. You return to your group. They sit quietly and attentively but do not speak. You are using a Big Book on an easel, trying to get the students to repeat the words you pronounce but with little success. When it is time for the next rotation, you go quickly to Mrs. Sayres's room and bring Kinney back to the class. He rejoins his group. As you begin work with your new group, you see Rey and Duy at the measuring table pouring birdseed on each other's heads. Meanwhile, the new girl, Mei, continues sobbing audibly.

Conceptualizing a Strategy

If you followed the suggestions of Alfie Kohn, what would you conclude or do with regard to the following?

- Preventing the problem from occurring in the first place.
- 2. Putting a clear end to the misbehavior now.
- Involving other or all students in addressing the situation.
- Maintaining student dignity and good personal relations.
- Using follow-up procedures that would prevent the recurrence of the misbehavior.
- Using the situation to help the students develop a sense of greater responsibility and self-control.



REFERENCES

Kohn, A. 1986, 1992. No contest: The case against competition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Kohn, A. 1990. The brighter side of human nature: Altruism and empathy in everyday life. New York: Basic.

Kohn, A. 1993, 1999. Punished by rewards: The trouble with gold stars, incentive plans, A's, praise, and other bribes. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. Kohn, A. 1999. The schools our children deserve: Moving beyond traditional classrooms and "tougher standards." Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Kohn, A. 2001. Beyond discipline: From compliance to community. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall. 1996 edition published Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.