PART I

The System, Your Students, and You

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Drawing the Line

Years ago, after meeting the student teachers and first-year teaching interns I was to supervise, I asked about the topics and concerns they wanted to explore during the year we were to work together. Nearly all their responses had to do with student behavior and motivation. They had dozens of questions, mostly about how to get the kids to do something or stop doing something: "What if they don't listen?" "What if there's a fight?" "What if they won't do their work?" "What if . . . ?"

Since then, I've run across thousands of teachers whose primary concerns have sounded remarkably similar. But I've discovered few simple answers to questions about specific behaviors or misbehaviors. Over the years, any time I tried to address discipline issues in my teaching, presenting, or writing, I found myself backing up to explore seemingly unrelated issues—goals, intentions, needs, relationships, cooperation, motivation, success, classroom climate, and responsibility, to name a few. Without addressing these issues, most advice is short term, shortsighted, ineffective, and unrelated to the context of classroom relationships in which the problems occur.

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We have a peculiar myopia when it comes to discipline, and I hope that this book takes consideration of the topic beyond the normal "student behavior–teacher reaction" paradigm through which we typically regard how kids act in class. Instead, I present discipline in the context of a much bigger picture. When we look at the academic, social, emotional, and physiological issues involved with simply being a student—and not just the behavioral concerns—we can see a lot of places where our traditions can create stress, as well as a host of survival responses to this stress, any one of which can look like a discipline problem.

In a context of creating healthy, positive, and mutually respectful relationships between teachers and students, we can take a wider range of issues into consideration and examine how our policies and practices contribute to student behavior, attitudes, and achievement. Discipline then becomes a set of proactive and preventive techniques that encourage student self-management and self-control while reducing the number of conflicts anticipated by the vast majority of the "what if" questions. In other words, rather

than reacting to negative student behaviors, we focus instead on creating the kind of classroom environment in which these behaviors are not likely to occur in the first place.

For some, this is a hard sell. After years of traditions that require some negative or painful event to follow a misbehavior, any book or seminar that promises solutions to student behavior problems is bound to attract at least a few individuals who come looking for a bigger hammer with which to figuratively hit their unruly kids. But as many teachers know, some of the worst behaviors we see in classrooms are those exhibited by kids who are getting "hammered" pretty regularly outside the classroom. Looking for more effective punishments—in the hope of creating enough emotional, social, or in some cases, physical discomfort to discourage similar behaviors in the future—can be much like pouring gasoline on a fire.

So *The Win-Win Classroom* is not about better ways to punish kids, and it probably won't help much if you're simply searching for more effective negative consequences to student misbehavior. I am convinced that the lack of motivation, bad attitudes, and disruptions we see aren't happening because we don't have enough rules or bad enough punishments in our schools. And I'm less concerned with the specific reasons individual kids misbehave or shut down than I am with the things we can do to reduce the likelihood of these behaviors occurring in the first place. So any discussion of student behavior ultimately leads back to teacher behavior. Motivating cooperation from our students usually means modifying our own behaviors, learning new interaction skills, and letting go of ineffective or destructive policies and techniques. For better or worse, the kids don't change until we change. Whenever we're not happy with how students are behaving, the big question for us to consider is not about what we need to do to the kids, but instead what we can do differently in our behaviors and interactions with them to minimize the kinds of student behaviors we find most troublesome.

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This news can be rather disconcerting. To begin, the culture of schools and communities typically rewards "strict" or "tough" teachers, and that generally includes expectations for big-hammer approaches. It is my hope that this book will provide tools, strategies, and language to help teachers establish their authority, to draw the line, and, indeed, to be strict, even tough, in very positive and effective ways. Grasping the fact that these ideas are not mutually exclusive was an enormous challenge for me—and for many of the educators (and parents) with whom I work—and hopefully this middle ground will become clearer in the following pages.

Further, it will always be easier to want other people to change. For years, I've seen perfectly reasonable adults resist this proposition: "Why should *I* have to change? *I'm* not the one disrupting the class!" I'm sure most teachers agree that we shouldn't have to deal with half of what we inevitably confront, sometimes on a daily basis, in terms of student behaviors, language, or the quality (or absence) of their work. Let me urge you to do it anyhow. The alternative is the insanity of doing the same ineffective, frustrating things over and over and seeing nothing improve in the process.

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Most often, this resistance to change simply reflects a lack of clear, practical, and usable alternatives to the patterns and policies with which we are most familiar. Even with firm commitments to positive interaction strategies, avoiding the pitfalls of our own negative programming is always a challenge. Not realizing that more positive options exist, much

less knowing what these specific options look and sound like, severely limits our responses. We know what we know, and in some instances, it will serve us well to unlearn some of what we know, to clarify our intentions, and to actually think differently about how we approach issues like how we interact with our students. Certainly this is a process on every level, not just for us, but for our students as well.