The chief source of the "problem of discipline" in schools is that . . . a premium is put on physical quietude; on silence, on rigid uniformity of posture and movement; upon a machine-like simulation of the attitudes of intelligent interest. The teachers' business is to hold the pupils up to these requirements and to punish the inevitable deviations which occur.

—JOHN DEWY

DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION
The dissolution of punishments and rewards altogether is necessary in a community based on worth and caring. When punishments are used the teacher becomes an enforcer rather than the coach and nurturer; when rewards are used the teacher becomes the manipulator of mindless obedience.

Kohn artfully correlates how students act in school with what they are being asked to learn, describing clearly how unwelcome classroom behaviors can be directly traced to what children are asked to learn. The curriculum is part of the larger classroom context from which a student's behavior or misbehavior emerges. Kohn says that if we really want to make sense of how students act, then the curriculum must be scrutinized. Is it too simple, boring, without value, or lacking opportunities to interact with others? To get beyond discipline, we must expose children to a rich curriculum that extends their thinking, elicits their curiosity, and helps them reflect more skillfully on questions that are important to them.

In Beyond Discipline, Alfie Kohn offers readers a thoughtful guide for creating classrooms based on respect and dignity. To some, his approach may be unsettling because it differs, delightfully so, from traditional classroom management models in which teachers control students by promising them rewards or threatening them with punishment. But for the unencumbered seeker, moving beyond discipline can lead to a new understanding of the educational process. By relinquishing power and reconsidering the way we define and think about students' behavior, we can see the role of teachers with new clarity and, with our students, reconnect with the ideals of democracy.

—FRANCES FAIRCLOTH JONES
ASCD President 1996-97

Kohn, Alfie. 1996. Excerpt from "Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community"

INTRODUCTION

A few years ago, I decided to start observing extraordinary classrooms. Whenever I was traveling and found myself with some extra time, I tracked down teachers in that area who were rumored to be doing interesting things and asked if I could visit them at work. I was particularly keen to see how they dealt with discipline problems. My assumption was that I could learn more from seeing how talented practitioners responded to obnoxious behavior than I could from reading books on the subject.

As it turned out, I rarely got the chance to see these teachers work their magic with misbehaving children because it seemed as though the children in their classes almost never misbehaved. Evidently I just happened to show up on unusually harmonious days—or else I wasn't staying long enough. After a while, however, it dawned on me that this pattern couldn't be explained just by my timing. These classrooms were characterized by a chronic absence of problems.

Even in schools where students are sent to the office to be disciplined, principals know that some teachers almost never need to do this. But why? Obviously there is something to the luck of the draw: the feel of a class, the characteristics of a given group of students and the way they interact, will vary from year to year. But how likely is it that certain teachers just happen to get dream classes every September?

Clearly, we need to look at the teachers themselves, not just at the kids who are assigned to them. These teachers seem to be doing something that makes it less likely that their students would want to,
or need to, act in disturbing ways. During my visits, I've been struck not only by what such teachers are doing, and how successful it is, but by what they are not doing.

They are not concentrating on being effective disciplinarians.

This is partly because they have better things to do, and those better things are preventing problems from developing in the first place. But it's also because discipline—at least as that word is typically used—actively interferes with what they are trying to accomplish. It took me a while to figure that out and to be able to explain why I believe it's true. That's what I attempt to do in this book, and the result is likely to be not merely controversial but deeply unsettling to many readers. What other books have been doing to the old Listen-to-me-lecture, Memorize-these-facts, Fill-in-the-blanks, Keep-your-eyes-on-your-own-paper style of academic learning, this book tries to do to the field of classroom management. (Ironically, a lot of people who offer well-reasoned critiques of traditional academic learning take for granted a bundle of premises about the nonacademic side of what goes on in schools.)

The raison d'etre of discipline or classroom management* is almost always to secure children's compliance with adults' demands. Thus, it is assumed, teachers have a responsibility to get and maintain control of their classrooms. In doing so, they are encouraged to focus on students' behaviors and attempt to alter those that they, for whatever reason, deem inappropriate. Behavioral changes, in turn, are usually achieved by resorting to one or another extrinsic inducement, which is to say, some sort of reward or punishment.

It is in most respects a teacher-directed model, one in which expectations, rules, and consequences are imposed on students. And it is typically driven by a remarkably negative set of beliefs about the nature of children. But whenever things go wrong in such classrooms—which is often—the approach itself is rarely blamed. It is the children who are said to be incorrigible, or the teachers who are faulted for being insufficiently firm or skillful. "Just look at our schools!" the educational commentators cry. "What we need is ..." more of the same. Thus, the more we discipline, the more need there is to do so. The more classroom management programs disappoint, the more they create their own demand.

Be assured that the book you are holding does not offer yet another discipline plan to be placed alongside those that are already out there. I don't think we need another one—not when we already have Assertive Discipline and Cooperative Discipline, 21st Century Discipline and several programs called Positive Discipline, as well as Discipline with Dignity, Discipline with Love and Logic, and programs where the discipline is described variously as collaborative, commonsense, creative, effective, gentle, innovative, judicious, and stress-free (in alphabetical order).

Some of these programs are remarkably autocratic, urging teachers to lay down the law with children and coerce them into compliance. The best that can be said about such advice is that it is straightforward: you know what you're getting. This is not always the case with what I will call the "New Disciplines." These are the programs that come wrapped in rhetoric about motivation and responsibility, dignity and cooperation and self-esteem. Look carefully at the prescriptions in the books and videos that describe these programs, and you will find a striking resemblance to standard old-time discipline.

The need to look carefully at such programs—and at the informal classroom management practices that teachers use—is what led me to write this book. In fact, to be perfectly honest, I am suspicious of the very word "discipline"—perhaps because of its proximity to "bondage." I am even less enamored of the phrase "classroom management." I remember using the latter term one day while chatting with my wife, who is not an educator. She interrupted me and echoed the phrase: "Classroom management?" Her tone was faintly incredulous, at once amused and appalled, and suddenly I saw an entire field as if for the first time.

*For reasons of convenience, I will be using these terms more or less interchangeably. Some writers understandably prefer to define discipline as a subset of classroom management that deals only with responses to misbehavior. Others, meanwhile, including some who may be sympathetic to my critique, are anxious to rehabilitate the word discipline and therefore take pains to distinguish it from punishment. I want to be clear from the beginning about my use of these words so that we can separate semantic from substantive disagreements. My reason for writing this book is not to quibble about certain language but to challenge deeply held assumptions and widely accepted practices.
“Management” is a term borrowed from business, of course, with overtones of directing and controlling employees. Like “discipline,” it seems relevant to “groups of strangers rather than to people who are working together as a community” (Goodman 1992, p. 95; also see Bowers and Plinders 1990). In fact, the uncritical use of such terms reflects a willingness to accept some troubling assumptions about the relative roles and rights of those who are managing vis-à-vis those who are managed.

The fact that classroom management systems rarely prove satisfactory over the long run—hence the insatiable hunger for new techniques—should lead us to reconsider the whole enterprise of managing children. Thus, I want to invite educators to move beyond “discipline” or “management.” I want to offer alternatives to the conventional goals and methods of discipline rather than another set of techniques for maintaining order.

Even those readers willing to join me in such an expedition may immediately demand to know whether they will be given a “practical alternative” to existing discipline programs. The answer is that it depends on how we want to define those words. On one level, I would reply: Yes. My purpose is not just to criticize the status quo but to move beyond it, not merely to interpret and analyze but to offer a framework that can help teachers and administrators change what they do.

But whenever I hear teachers ask for something they can “use,” something that “works,” I want to ask: Use for what? Works to accomplish what goal? Someone who has accepted uncritically the objective of discipline programs—namely, to get students to comply with whatever the adult demands—may insist that any alternative has to achieve the same end. Thus, anything that doesn’t look, feel, and smell like a discipline program is, by definition, impractical.

Related to this is the desire for how-to guides: “When a student does such and such, tell me where to stand and how to look and what to say.” This is the sort of demand that keeps classroom management consultants in business. But these easy-to-follow recipes are fundamentally insulting to teachers, not unlike attempts to design a “teacher-proof” curriculum. They are short-term fixes, instruments of control intended, at best, to stop bad behaviors rather than affirmatively help children to become good people.

After raising such questions about existing discipline programs and the very idea of discipline, I do lay out an alternative vision—one brought to life in those extraordinary classrooms I’ve visited. This alternative is neither a recipe nor a different technique for getting mindless compliance. It requires that we transform the classroom, give up some power, and reconsider the way we define and think about misbehavior. But despite those things—or, actually, because of those things—I believe it is exquisitely practical. In fact, it may be the only way to help children grow into caring and responsible adults.

My argument is that our first question should be “What do children need”—followed immediately by “How can we meet those needs”—and that from this point of departure we will end up in a very different place than if we had begun by asking, “How do I get children to do what I want?”

My argument is that how students act is in school is so bound up with what they are being asked to learn as to raise serious questions about whether classroom management can reasonably be treated as a separate field.

My argument is that the quest to get students to act appropriately is curiously reminiscent of the quest to get them to produce the right answers in academic lessons. Thus, the constructivist critique, which says that a right-answer focus doesn’t help children become good thinkers, also suggests that a right-behavior focus doesn’t help children become good people.

I say that these are “my” arguments, but the truth is that I can’t take credit for any of them—or for the details of application offered in the chapters that follow. More people than I can acknowledge have helped me to shape a vision of what schools might look like. I have in mind people like Dewey and Piaget, but also Marilyn Watson, Eric Schaps, and their colleagues at the Developmental Studies Center; Constance Kamii and Rheta DeVries and Lilian Katz; Rich
Ryan and Ed Deci at the University of Rochester; the late John Nicholls; and a lot of other educators and researchers committed to creating more democratic, collaborative schools.

I'm also indebted to the children and adults I've worked with over the years: students in my own classrooms, participants in my workshops (especially those who made me question my assumptions and practices), and teachers and administrators who let me into their classrooms and schools so I could watch. Naturally, none of these individuals, including those named above, should be held responsible for anything you are about to read. Just because they've had an impact on my thinking doesn't mean they would agree with my every thought.

Then there are the people who directly contributed to the book itself. Ron Brandt surely didn't have to throw his weight behind a project so controversial, but he did, and I'm grateful. Thanks also to Julie Houtz for her painstaking editing, and to the others on the ASCD staff who supported the book's production in various ways. Finally, I owe a giant debt of gratitude to the folks who have taken the trouble to read this book in manuscript form and offer their criticisms and suggestions: Bill Greene (who never fails me in this capacity and never fails to amaze me with the cogency of his comments), Alisa Kohn (who never fails to amaze me, period), Lisa Lahey, and Cynthia McDermott.

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**Kohn, Alfie. 1996. Excerpt from “Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community”**

### Chapter 1

#### THE NATURE OF CHILDREN

The evidence increasingly points to an innate disposition [in children] to be responsive to the plight of other people. ... Creating people who are socially responsive does not totally depend on parents and teachers. Such socializing agents have an ally within the child.

—MARTIN HOFFMAN (1986)

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#### SELF-CENTERED AND POWER-DRUNK

Every teacher has a theory. Even the educator who cares only about practical strategies, whose mantra is “Hey, whatever works,” is operating under a set of assumptions about human nature, about children, about that child sitting over there, about why that child did what she did just now. These assumptions color everything that happens in classrooms, from the texts that are assigned to the texture of casual interactions with students.

Despite their significance, such theories are rarely made explicit. No one comes out and says, “The reason I run the class this way is because I assume children are basically untrustworthy.” But precisely because they have such a profound impact on every aspect of education, it is crucial to expose these beliefs and decide whether they can survive careful scrutiny. By the same token, whenever a consultant on discipline offers advice, we should hold that prescription up to
the light, much as we might search for a hidden watermark on a sheet of paper. What is he or she assuming about kids—and, by extension, about all people?

In particular, we need to be on the lookout for profoundly negative theories about the motives and capabilities of children, which frequently animate discussions about classroom management. Let's consider the hidden premises of some familiar assertions.

"If the teacher isn't in control of the classroom, the most likely result is chaos." Counterposing control to chaos, apart from calling up memories of the television series Get Smart, has the effect of ruling out any other possibilities. But this isn't an error in logic so much as it is a statement about one's view of the people in the classroom. It says that students—or perhaps humans in general—must be tightly regulated if they are to do anything productive. Notice that this doesn't merely speak to the value of having some structure to their activities; it says that external control is necessary, and without it, students are unlikely to learn or to act decently.*

"Children need to be told exactly what the adult expects of them, as well as what will happen if they don't do what they're told." These twin assumptions, both corollaries of the preceding one, are staples of the classroom management field. They speak volumes about the orientation of the person who holds them. They hint of disaster if students are asked to reflect on how they should conduct themselves instead of simply being told. They suggest that even broad guidelines are insufficient; what is necessary are precise instructions on how to behave. They imply that requests and explanations are never sufficient, that reasonable expectations won't be honored without threats of punishment. The kind of people for whom these things are true would not be much fun to spend time with, which may help to explain the way folks who hold these beliefs tend to act around children.

* It is theoretically possible that someone who believes this might add that it's true mostly because of what has been done to students up until now. The more common assumption, however, is that this is just the way kids are.

"You need to give positive reinforcement to a child who does something nice if you want him to keep acting that way." This common defense of praise seems to imply that the only reason a child would ever demonstrate kindness is to be rewarded with the approval of an adult. To talk about the need to "reinforce" a behavior suggests that the behavior would disappear in the absence of that reinforcement. Orthodox behaviorists believe this is true of everything. Lots of educators seem to believe it's true specifically of helpful acts. If qualities like generosity must be propped up by verbal rewards, they must be unnatural, which is to say that human beings left on their own are concerned only about themselves.

"At the heart of moral education is the need to help people control their impulses." The virtue of self-restraint—or at least the decision to give special emphasis to it—has historically been preached by those with a decidedly dark view of human nature, from Saint Augustine to the present day. In fact, at least three assumptions seem to be at work: first, that we are all at war with ourselves, torn between our desires and our reason (or social norms); second, that these desires are fundamentally selfish, aggressive, or otherwise unpleasant; and third, that these desires are very strong, constantly threatening to overpower us.

What goes by the name of "character education" has enjoyed something of a resurgence in the mid-1990s, and we would do well to understand just what beliefs about human nature are driving the movement, or at least some of its most prominent advocates. Give them credit for candor, anyway; there is no need to speculate about hidden assumptions here. A "comprehensive approach to character education" is based on a somewhat dim view of human nature," acknowledges William Kilpatrick (1992, p. 96). That view includes the assumptions that "the natural thing to do in most situations is to take the easy way out" (p. 25) and that "most behavior problems are the result of sheer 'willfulness' on the part of children" (p. 249). "Character education . . . sees children as self-centered," says Kevin Ryan (1989, p. 16) and, according to Edward Wynne (1989, p. 25), is grounded in the work of theorists who share a "somewhat pessimistic view of human nature."
Mainstream writings on discipline differ from the dominant approach to character education mostly in that the former rarely own up to being based on a dim view of human nature. But here's what they do say:

- "Working independently is a euphemism" for higher rates of disruption and time off task. "In other words, while the cat's away, the mice will play" (Jones 1979, p. 30).
- "When [students] succeed in littering or in writing on walls, they feel encouraged to challenge other, more sacred, rules like the prohibition against assaulting fellow students" (Toby 1993/94, p. 8).
- "Children are not innately motivated to behave in school" (Canter and Canter 1992, p. 7). (See Appendix 2.)
- Does offering a reward for compliance constitute a bribe? "Sure—that's how motivation operates. . . When people cooperate with us, they do what we want because doing so serves their purposes in some way" (Bluestein 1988, p. 117).¹
- Without the "powerful reinforcement" of recognition, "students will likely revert to less cooperative ways" (Albert 1992a, p. 93).

The last declaration is offered as part of a program called Cooperative Discipline, whose author's favorite metaphor for describing students is that they dangle a rope in front of teachers, trying to lure us into an unproductive conflict. We must learn not to take the bait, which is to say we must resist the basic inclination of children (namely, to interrupt the learning process). Elsewhere in this program, we are introduced to a 1st grader who "just can't seem to concentrate" on his assignments even though he "can sit in the block corner for hours." The author's description of the child reads, in its entirety: "What a powerful manipulator!" (Albert 1989, p. 47).

Rudolf Dreikurs, whose theories and techniques have been incorporated into a number of popular discipline programs, observed that "every educator's approach to the educational process is based on a certain concept of human nature" (Dreikurs, Grunwald, and Pepper 1982, p. 8). His own concept was, to a significant extent, borrowed from the psychology of Alfred Adler. Along with some dubious claims about the significance of birth order,² Adler offered a theory of behavior as fundamentally goal-directed, and he argued that social interest, a desire to belong, is a central human goal. At times, Dreikurs seemed to endorse a benign view of children consistent with this Adlerian principle, saying that misbehavior represents a misguided attempt to feel significant and that kids who make trouble are mostly just discouraged.

But when Dreikurs and his associates began to address specific scenarios in homes and classrooms, their comments reflected a remarkably different view of children and their motives. In case after case, Dreikurs attributed anything that went wrong in a classroom to a child's unreasonable demand for attention. Thus, he argued, adults should never give a child attention "when he is seeking it" (Dreikurs and Cassel 1972, p. 36).³

Dreikurs's second favorite explanation for inappropriate behavior was the child's drive for power or superiority. Apparently, the possibility never occurred to him that a struggle to come out on top might be initiated by an adult, or that the child's need for power may reflect the objective situation of powerlessness that students usually face. Dreikurs's world was one populated by "power-drunk children" (Dreikurs and Grey 1968, p. 55) and defiantly "inattentive students" (p. 134). Doodling on desks is the act of "destructive children" (p. 162); if 1st graders come to blows, it is just because kids of that age "love to fight" (p. 154). Students who are late (p. 108) or fail to "heed instructions or to carry out assignments are doing this to get attention or want to show their power to do anything they want without anyone stopping them" (p. 193).

Dreikurs was disgusted by "the lengths to which children will go when they pretend to read but actually refuse to do so" (Dreikurs 1968, p. 152). He even remarked that "there is only a quantitative difference between . . . the 'normal' American child . . . [who] does not take a bath, refuses to do his homework, and so on . . . [and] the juvenile delinquent, who is openly at war with society" (Dreikurs 1968, p. 6). Adler's contention that children have a basic need to be part of a group became, in Dreikurs's hands, not reassurance about their motives but an invitation to rely on peer pressure as a way of controlling nonconformists (see Chapter 4). And a child who "resent(s)
being discussed by the class" in this way was written off as someone who usually "takes all rights for himself and never grants the same rights to others. Often this child has serious behavioral problems" (Dreikurs et al. 1982, p. 167).4

Not long ago, an elementary principal in Wisconsin whose staff had been trained in the “STEP” program, a Dreikurs derivative, explained to me the philosophy they had adopted: "Kids have reasons for misbehaving and the idea is not to give them what they want." At the time, having accepted on faith what others had told me about the value of Dreikurs’s work, I viewed her summary as an almost comical misreading of what she had been taught. Gradually, as I read that work for myself, I came to see that the problem lay less with her formulation than with the theory itself.

I linger on the views of Dreikurs—and, indeed, will return to his writings at several points in this book—because of the scope of his influence on contemporary educators. But the larger point here is not so much what he, or any other individual, believes. Rather, it is that we need to look carefully at what we are doing, and what classroom management theorists recommend, to determine the assumptions about children from which these practices emerge.

AUSPICIOUS CIRCLES

We can often predict the way an adult will treat children simply from knowing what she believes about them. Someone who thinks that kids are always trying to get away with something is likely to believe that we adults must overcome these unsavory motives, force children to obey the rules, and see to it that they are punished when they don’t. Indeed, research has shown that a dark view of human nature tends to be associated with controlling and punitive strategies (Clayton 1985). Truly, what we believe matters.

But even when an educator or consultant has nothing at all to say about the nature of children, his practices or prescriptions may speak for him. Because practice follows from theory, we can often derive theory from practice. Marilyn Watson has observed that discipline plans typically seem to proceed from the assumption that

Thomas Hobbes’s famous characterization of life also applies to children: they are nasty, brutish, and short. One example of this, Watson continues, is the policy of arranging for students to experience what Dreikurs called “logical consequences.” This practice is predicated on the disturbing and disrespectful assumption that children need to feel pain before they will stop behaving badly.5 Something similar may be implicit in the very idea of “discipline” or classroom “management.”

To take this idea another step, the practices that flow from a teacher’s beliefs tend to elicit certain things from students. Label a particular child a troublemaker and watch him become one. View children in general as self-centered, and that is exactly the way they will come to act. Treat students “as if they need to be controlled” and you “may well undermine their natural predispositions to develop self-controls and internalized commitments to upholding cultural norms and values” (Watson 1984, p. 42).

Watch what happens when students escape temporarily from a teacher who thinks along these lines and has relied on tactics of control. When they are at lunch, in music or art class, on the bus, or in the hands of a substitute—in fact, whenever they are out of sight of the controller—the students may well explode. It doesn’t take a degree in psychology to figure out that they may be trying to reclaim some of the autonomy that has been denied them.

But now notice what happens when this teacher discovers what has happened in her absence. Does she stop dead in her tracks and say to herself: “Whoa. I guess I need to take a hard look at these (negative) assumptions and (coercive) practices. Just look at the effect they’re having? Hardly. She announces triumphantly, “You see? You see what these kids are like? Give ‘em an inch and they’ll take a mile!” And she proceeds to respond with tighter control, tougher discipline, more coercion—and, above all, less trust.

The good news is that a more positive view of students has real-world consequences that are just as powerful. You may remember the so-called Pygmalion effect, documented in the 1960s, which showed that when teachers were led to believe that their students had extraordinary intellectual potential, these average students really did end up achieving impressively in their classes. Well, teachers
who assume that children are capable of acting virtuously can likewise set into motion a self-fulfilling prophecy. They can create an "auspicious" circle rather than the more familiar vicious one. Thus, if a teacher trusts her students to make decisions, they will act very differently from those in her colleague's classroom if left on their own; typically, they will act responsibly and go right on with their learning (DeVries and Zan 1994, Hyman 1990).

This is compelling evidence that such a teacher is not just being naive or romantic in her assumptions, as the cynic may claim. (Of course, the cynic invariably denies being cynical and insists he is just being "realistic"). But what exactly does this more positive theory look like?

To reject a sour view of human nature, one predicated on the assumption that people are inherently selfish or aggressive, is not necessarily to assume that evil is illusory and everyone means well. We do not have to cast our lot with Carl Rogers—or Mr. Rogers, for that matter. Rather, we might proceed from the premise that humans are as capable of generosity and empathy as they are of looking out for Number One, as inclined (all things being equal) to help as to hurt.

Scores of studies from developmental and social psychology support exactly this conclusion and challenge the beliefs reviewed at the beginning of this chapter—that children will act generously only when reinforced for doing so, that people are motivated exclusively by self-interest, that students need to be controlled, and so on. Elsewhere, I have reviewed this literature in some detail (Kohn 1990a). For our purposes here, it may be enough to cite the conclusion of some of the leading researchers in the field of child development, whose own work at the National Institute of Mental Health confirms what other studies have found:

Even children as young as 2 years old have (a) the cognitive capacity to interpret the physical and psychological states of others, (b) the emotional capacity to affectively experience the other's state, and (c) the behavioral repertoire that permits the possibility of trying to alleviate discomfort in others. These are the capabilities that, we believe, underlie children's caring behavior in the presence of another person's distress. . . . Young children seem to show patterns of moral internalization that are not simply fear based or solely responsive to parental commands. Rather, there are signs that children feel responsible for (as well as connected to and dependent on) others at a very young age (Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, Wagner, and Chapman 1992, pp. 127, 135).

When children do not act in a way consistent with these capacities, we might therefore come to a very different conclusion than that reached by the cynic. "Thoughtless" actions may be just what that word implies: attributable to a lack of thought, or skills. Children who act unkindly may be unaware of the effects of their actions on others, or unable to act otherwise. Carolyn Edwards (1986, pp. 40-41) offers the example of a group of four- and five-year-olds disparaging a three-year-old boy in their class who was physically as large as they were but, not surprisingly, lacked some of their skills. Were they being cruel? On the contrary, these children, given their level of cognitive development, were simply unable to understand that a child of their own size might not be as old, and thus as advanced in other respects.

Even older children may act in troubling ways because they are wanting for the sort of warm, caring relationships that enable and incline people to act more compassionately. They may have learned to rely on power rather than reason, to exhibit aggression rather than compassion, because this is what they have seen adults do—and perhaps what has been done to them. "Give 'em an inch and they'll take a mile" mostly describes the behavior of people who have hitherto been given only inches.

Our attention might well be focused on what children—and, by extension, adults—require for optimal functioning. Distilling a large quantity of psychological theory and research, Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (1990) have proposed three universal human needs: autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Autonomy refers not to privacy but to self-determination, the experience of oneself as the origin of decisions rather than as the victim of things outside one's control. Relatedness means a need for connection to others, for belonging and love and affirmation. Finally, the presence of compe-
tence on this list suggests that all of us take pleasure from learning new things, from acquiring skills and putting them to use.\(^6\)

I offer this list not as the last word on human needs, but as a reasonable beginning of such a discussion. Make up your own list, if you like. What matters is that our first questions about students are: What do they require in order to flourish? and How can we provide those things?—as opposed to, say, How can we make them do what we want? The implication of thinking along these lines is that if students disappoint us, it is almost always because they are missing something they need. While this way of framing the issue isn't quite the same as saying everyone is basically good, it is far more of a departure from the assumptions described earlier, the ones on which discipline plans so often rest.

The educator who takes to heart all these lessons about human nature doesn't assume that he can stand off to the side while children automatically grow into responsible adults. Rather, he models and explains and shows them he cares. He works with them so they will become better problem solvers and helps them see how their actions affect others. When children seem obnoxious, he is more inclined (depending on circumstances and the limits of his patience) to think in terms of providing guidance rather than enforcing rules. He views children who have trouble treating others with care or respect as needing help, just as children who have trouble solving math problems need help.

Furthermore, he is likely to follow the advice of Nel Noddings and attribute to students the best possible motive consistent with the facts (also see Molnar and Lindquist 1989). He knows we are most likely to help students develop good values by assuming whenever possible that they were already motivated by these values—rather than ascribing an ambiguous action to a diabolical desire to make trouble. He challenges himself and his colleagues to think twice before pigeonholing a particular student as a behavior problem or attributing sinister motives to children in general.

And he does what he can to help students create a sense of community in the classroom, to construct a place where they feel trusted and respected and empowered. We will return to these ideas in later chapters after looking closely at more traditional discipline programs. For now it is enough to realize that these programs tend to be associated with a jaded view of children and human nature, and that a more optimistic perspective is both more accurate and more likely to generate practices that work.