SECOND EDITION

SOLVING DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS

STRATEGIES FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS
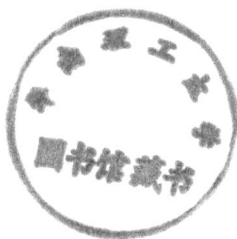
Charles H. Wolfgang and

Carl D. Glickman

Details a wide range of discipline models and techniques and shows how to choose the best approach to solving each discipline problem.

Solving Discipline Problems

Strategies for Classroom Teachers

Second Edition

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Solving
Discipline
Problems

Dedicated to our children: **Ellen Louise Wolfgang,**
Jennifer Sonya Glickman, and **Rachel Adelle Glickman,**
for daily reaffirming our optimism about the
next generation.

Preface

This book is for teachers! Teachers are on the frontlines in dealing with student misbehavior. Because teachers know their students, themselves, and their classrooms better than anyone else, they can make the wisest decisions about the most appropriate ways to respond to misbehaving students. The historic practice of having outside experts telling teachers what is best for them will no longer do.

If we as authors succeed in the pages to follow, teachers will come to realize that they are the true professionals holding the real power for taking discipline actions. This book, consequently, becomes a comprehensive resource guide of strategies, procedures, and possible actions.

The second edition of *Solving Discipline Problems* is updated in many ways. First, the popular *Assertiveness Model* has been added to the other models (Chapter 9). Secondly, new chapters have been added on selecting teacher discipline behaviors according to teacher values (Chapter 13) and degrees of seriousness of student misbehavior (Chapter 14). In addition, the chapter on using a professional team approach (Chapter 15) has been significantly altered to reflect the latest wisdom gained from recent case studies in public schools. Finally, a new chapter (16) on classroom management has been added to enable teachers to think more about classroom preventive practices.

The additions to and reorganization of this second edition remain true to the original purpose of trying to provide classroom teachers with a "rainbow" of discipline models and techniques to permit them to move beyond a singular approach in handling classroom behavior problems. Teachers are encouraged to make key decisions on what will be most helpful to them with their particular classroom and with their particular students.

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge the persons who have helped make the second edition of this book a reality. Special mention to our reviewers Joyce Putnam and Sam Sinicropi who went beyond the call of duty in providing clear and constructive feedback to us. Also, thanks are extended to our editor Hiram Howard and the staff of Allyn and Bacon, Elydia Siegel and the staff at Superscript Associates, and Gayle Rogers for putting special attention into the production of this book. We would like to acknowledge also the teachers and other school personnel across the United States and Canada who have participated with us in workshops and courses in field testing our ideas. They have given us honest advice on what works in the classroom and, as a result, have greatly influenced the revisions contained in this new edition.

We would like to thank our spouses Mary Ellen Wolfgang and Sara Orton Glickman for being our partners. Finally, we mean to immodestly thank each other. Working from afar with concentrations on different levels of schooling has challenged us to share perspectives in creating a balanced book on classroom discipline. We are pleased to offer this book with the hope that it will increase the professional growth of teachers and the well-being of students.

"Don't worry, Alfred, it takes time to get a handle on class control."

Cartoon by Ford Button

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Introduction:
Reaching the
Breaking Point

Mr. Erelan is a steady, easy-going "salt of the earth" type of man who has been a seventh-grade teacher for nine years. At the age of thirty-two he has established himself as a good teacher in the eyes of his students' parents, his fellow teachers, and school administrators. He has a reputation as a strong classroom manager. Students have traditionally responded to his friendly, calm manner with appropriately restrained behavior. They banter easily with him and seem to have true affection and respect for him.

This year, however, has been a difficult one for Mr. Erelan. As a result of redistricting, the school where he teaches has many new students from the other side of town. Many of them come from low-income homes; they are also used to the tight-fisted discipline of their former school. Most of the new students respond well to Mr. Erelan, but one student, Sophia, is constantly challenging him. Sophia is an older student, having been retained one year. She is an indifferent learner, does not speak often, and is quick to lash out physically at others. Frequently she refuses to follow Mr. Erelan's directives. When Mr. Erelan tells Sophia to stop something she is doing (talking, dropping books, or bothering others), she ignores him and continues with her activities. When he resorts to physical restraint, Sophia loses all control and begins yelling, thrashing her arms, and flailing at him.

Mr. Erelan is near the end of his rope. Yesterday, Sophia struck one of her classmates, and when Mr. Erelan intervened, she swore at him. This morning, when she entered the classroom, she immediately grabbed a fellow student's comic book and tore it to shreds. Mr. Erelan ran over, saying "Sophia, go sit in the corner," but Sophia refused. When he started to pull her

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out of her seat, Sophia exploded, knocking her chair to the floor, striking out at Mr. Erelan and then spitting at him. She finally broke away, ran out of the classroom, and disappeared down the corridor.

Mr. Erelan felt he had had enough. He told the class that he needed to step out of the room for a minute. Slipping into the hall, he leaned against the wall and tried to regain his composure. He thought of how hopeless the situation with Sophia had become. He felt totally incapable of helping her. Not only that, but her behavior prevented him from working with any of the other students. He could not bear to think about having the entire school year disrupted by Sophia and her problems.

Does this example seem exaggerated? Unfortunately, it is not. It is a rare classroom teacher who has not had to deal with a Sophia or, even worse, with many Sophias. We venture to say that the reader can readily identify one or more children in his or her own classroom who are providing a similar experience and creating similar concerns. What prompts us to say this? The National Education Association (NEA),[1] reports that in 1981, 36 percent of teachers said they would probably not go into teaching if they had to decide again. This percentage is nearly twice the percentage of teachers who felt that way in 1976 and nearly three times the percentage of such teachers in 1971. A major reason given for this response was "negative student attitudes and discipline."

Growing discontent with disruptive behavior in the classroom has been cited by the Gallup Poll as the public's number one school concern.[2] A leading educational journal has devoted an entire issue to this subject,[3] and a new term, "the battered teacher,"[4] has been coined. All of this documentation, however, does not bring the issue home as clearly as seeing a teacher like Mr. Erelan standing alone in a school hallway, trying to compose himself.

Being teachers ourselves, we have had firsthand experiences with depression stemming from feelings of inadequacy in coping with a particular child. We know the reality of having this child constantly in one's thoughts day and night, of losing sleep in dread of facing the next school morning, and hoping that a weekend or vacation could last forever. Again, it might be thought that we are overstating the problem, and perhaps to some individual readers we are; however, in our experiences as teachers of children and of other teachers we are convinced that this is the most common issue faced by those who work with children. We are assuming throughout this book that the reader has had or can anticipate a similar plight and wishes to learn of various ways not only to cope with disruptive children but to become a *proactive* agent in helping these children grow and attain more socialized behavior. We hope that in this way teachers will gain some personal satisfaction and a better night's sleep as well.

WHY IS DISRUPTIVE STUDENT BEHAVIOR
SUCH A PROBLEM TODAY?

In an earlier time (according to the cited NEA report) when teachers seemed to be more satisfied with their profession, a teacher might have been able to get along by using techniques learned from experiences with his or her public school teachers or from experiences gathered through an undergraduate teacher-training program. Teachers by and large worked with staid, homogeneous populations of students who could be expected to behave as previous youngsters did. Students in any one particular school generally came from the same family backgrounds, the same socioeconomic class, the same race, and often the same culture and religion. Techniques that worked with one child could be expected to have similar effects with others.

As the saying goes, "The times have changed." Public schools now contain a heterogeneous mix of youngsters. With increased mobility of families, we have in almost every neighborhood, families that come from various geographical regions and various cultures. Court-ordered desegregation has furthered this change. Also, public laws have added to the heterogeneous school mix, putting children with special needs, who were once separated from the regular classroom, into the regular classroom (mainstreaming). It can be safely said that as classrooms have become more heterogeneous, teachers have become increasingly discontent with their lives. More behavioral conflicts have erupted, with teachers discovering that their once "sure methods" no longer are working.

Please do not misunderstand us. We believe that heterogeneity is a healthy trend, one that is compatible with a democratic society. We do not advocate solving the issue of conflict in the classroom by suggesting that we retreat to homogeneous classrooms. This would be a simplistic effort to try to turn back the clock as well as to nullify some of this nation's hard-won civil and social advances. Instead, the answer lies in accepting the fact that working with diverse children who have different needs and styles is desirable and that teachers need to be educated in ways of making their own behaviors more compatible with such diversity.

We can compare the interaction of a symphony conductor with the orchestra to a teacher working in today's heterogeneous classroom. If the conductor gives the same signs to each musician, regardless of the tone and timbre of instrument played, then the sound that emanates from all the players would be, at best, monotonous and flat or more totally discordant. Trained and competent conductors know how to give different signals to various musicians to elicit the full quality of each instrument and player. As a result, the listener hears a dynamic mix of intensity and diversity that merges

into an exciting blend of harmonious sound. So it can be with the classroom teacher. The use of the same approach to every child would be stifling and inadequate. A vital classroom of developing children is created by a teacher who varies strategies suitable for each youngster. The end result is an optimal environment of individual children working cooperatively with each other.

THE TEACHER'S NEVER-ENDING TASK

Working with students is a never-ending process. Teachers truly care about their students and want to provide them with the best possible learning experiences. However, unlike some professionals, educators have difficulty gaining a sense of satisfaction from what they do. If one has a wall to build, then one can go about doing the necessary construction, and in time the wall is done. However, a child is never "finished." Teachers can never be satisfied that a child has reached his or her optimal level. The teacher must always strive to improve each student's situation. No wonder teaching is such a demanding profession, and one where the teacher finds it extremely hard to close the classroom door at four in the afternoon and forget about school until the next morning! Children are never "done." This endless process is the ultimate beauty and ultimate frustration of our profession.

When a teacher encounters an extremely disruptive student, whatever sense of class achievement that has been previously attained begins to erode. Not only is the particular child's school life unhappy, but his or her actions scream for the teacher's constant attention. Such attention pulls the teacher away from what he or she desires to do with the other children. The teacher is caught betwixt and between. Is it fair to give one child so much attention that it works to the disadvantage of the others? Or should the disruptive child be simply ignored or even isolated in another area? The reality of most schools requires that the teacher attend to the disruptive child. The teacher then must live with the guilt engendered by not spending as much time as he or she would want to with the other students. This guilt continues to compound. After all, if the teacher has decided to focus energy and attention on one child at the sacrifice of the others, the expectation would be to attain positive results and be able to return in short course to the rest of the classroom. To focus one's energies on one child and then to see no improvement, or even perhaps to witness a deterioration of the situation, brings the teacher to the breaking point and to the previously mentioned stage of helplessness.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Let us attempt to answer this question honestly. A cavalry of soldiers and horses is not likely to come charging down the hill to the teacher's rescue. Unless a disruptive child suddenly moves out of town (perhaps with the teacher paying the moving expenses!), it is most likely that the child is in the teacher's classroom to stay. The guidance counselor, the school psychologist, the school nurse, and the principal may offer some help, but it is the teacher who bears the brunt of the responsibility for the child.

The teacher must call upon many internal resources and skills to deal with the situation. The teacher has been through an undergraduate teacher training program and perhaps a graduate program as well. He or she may think back to courses in child psychology or classroom management. In most cases, such courses deal with the general dimensions of children's behavior and do not offer much help in specific application. On the other hand, the teacher may have been in a program that did stress certain specific applications such as behavior modification, student-centered counseling, or value clarification. If the teacher has been trained in a specific approach, or in no approach, the same problem will still exist. The teacher has a limited range of techniques for dealing with the limitless range of behaviors in children.

The more resourceful teacher who is aware of his or her limitations will try to extend his or her "bag of tricks" by keeping current on the latest expert advice. The teacher may browse through a bookstore for professionals or talk with colleagues about the newest approach. More than likely (as evidenced by the huge number of books sold), a glossy paperback will be purchased— one that gives assurance on its cover of providing "the answer" to working with children. Whether that book is entitled *T.E.T.: Teacher Effectiveness Training*, *Discipline Without Tears*, *Schools Without Failure*, *Transactional Analysis*, *Behavior Modification*, or is some other popular book, the teacher will have in hand a concrete approach to use. Again, however, the teacher remains limited. The specific approach that is read about and then implemented may or may not work. *The reason the newly learned technique may not work is that such popular books espouse one approach to working with all children*. It is our conviction that children are different and what works for one child will not be the same as the approach that works for another.

For this reason, what we will attempt to do in this book is to provide teachers with a practical demonstration and illustration of each of the major approaches to working with disruptive children. We do this by providing an eclectic *Teacher Behavior Continuum* (TBC) that encompasses all of the various behaviors and shows how the continuum can be used in different ways for different youngsters. In other words, our purpose is to acquaint the