20 DISCIPLINARY STRATEGIES
for Working With
CHALLENGING STUDENTS
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WILLIAM N. BENDER
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Introduction

This is the first truly “modern” book on school discipline. While strategies for effective discipline continue to evolve and thousands of books have been written on class discipline, there has been since 2014 an increased emphasis on using fair, effective disciplinary practices in schools (Duncan, 2014). For the first time in history, the federal government challenges schools relative to disciplinary practices that are widely used, such as suspension and expulsion of students, in particular students of color and minority students.

Teachers are, today, expected to become much more involved in disciplinary management, as the response to intervention initiatives has now become best practice around the nation and in Canada (Algozzine, Daunic, & Smith, 2012). Also, the recently evolving instructional practices such as the flipped classroom, project-based learning, response to intervention (RTI), and technology infusion only create different and increasing disciplinary challenges for teachers today. This book, unlike any other yet available, discusses all of those recent issues and trends in order to provide practical disciplinary strategies for each. Further, the book is intended to provide advanced disciplinary strategies for the modern classroom, with serious consideration given to these new disciplinary challenges. The book presents information both on preventative, whole-class/whole-school strategies and more intensive, targeted interventions for practicing teachers to implement.

Many of these strategies have been created recently, and may be new to some practicing teachers, while others may be something teachers have learned about but not directly implemented in their own classes. Still, to be clear, this book is not intended as a level-one book for class management of relatively easy-to-manage behaviors. Rather, this is a practical, how-to guide for tough disciplinary challenges in real classrooms in today’s schools. One thing is certain: no teacher can have too many disciplinary interventions or too much knowledge of preventative disciplinary techniques, and more intensive, focused interventions that are research proven can
help almost all teachers manage the more unique or challenging disciplinary situations experienced in classrooms today.

THE BASICS OF DISCIPLINE

In preparing this book, I assume that the readers know the basics of discipline. For example, consistency in how one manages students is much more important than whether one is hard-nosed on disciplinary matters or more relaxed in one’s disciplinary style. While consistency in disciplinary management is absolutely critical (Bender, 2007), most teachers get that concept during their training in college. Likewise, other basic techniques for discipline, such as setting up one’s classroom to minimize problems (i.e., using the physical space to separate students) or using proximity control to manage mild behavioral disturbances (e.g., kids talking in class), are typically mastered prior to being hired in a teaching position. I do not discuss herein those level-one classroom management strategies at length.

Also, this book is not heavily based in any one discipline theory. Too often in the literature on school discipline, one finds either a book dedicated to generally positive class-climate/classroom-management strategies (the feel-good disciplinary books) or focused, highly targeted behavioral interventions for very difficult-to-manage behaviors. In this book, I avoid that either/or approach to discipline. While I discuss classroom management and interventions for more challenging behaviors, I do not wish to dilute this focus on discipline by a “camouflage” of false choices between the feel-good, positively oriented management techniques or intensive behavioral interventions. Quite frankly, both are essential in classrooms today, and both are included here. I also present the teacher not with theory, but choices from both areas that he can use in real classrooms to alleviate his hardcore disciplinary issues.

This book will be somewhat different from other discipline and classroom-management books in several ways. First, this book draws from the work of Marzano (2003, 2007) in its emphasis on the efficacy of various disciplinary and classroom-management interventions. Much of Dr. Marzano’s research in this area as well as the earlier work in discipline I have personally done (Bender, 2007) informs this work. Specifically, Marzano identifies various questions and several design elements that focus on the areas of class management and discipline, including

- demonstrating “withitness” (intense awareness of all aspects of class functioning)
- applying consequences for lack of adherence to rules and procedures
- acknowledging adherence to rules and procedures.
I stress these in each section of this book. Further, I certainly focus on the emphasis within Marzano’s (2003, 2007) work on showing how teachers adhere to innovative strategies as well as showing evidence of student behavioral change based on those interventions. For all of these strategies, I discuss indicators that allow teachers to measure direct evidence of student behavioral change and provide a number of case studies to help teachers implement these strategies, while generating specific evidence of effectiveness.

DIFFERENTIATED DISCIPLINARY STRATEGIES

This book presents strategies that are differentiated based on both the severity of the disciplinary problem and the specific types of behavioral problems the students exhibit. For example, clingy or attention-seeking students often require different strategies than verbally violent or physically aggressive students (Bender, 2007). Also, strategies for unmotivated kids differ from strategies teachers use with oppositional-defiant or bipolar students. In each case, I present the discipline strategy under discussion as either a “whole-class/whole-school” strategy or as a strategy that is effective for specific types of disciplinary problems. As this indicates, some strategies are effective for some types of problems but not others. In the literature on behavior management and/or class management, this differentiated approach to effective discipline is relatively unique.

Also, the severity of the disciplinary issue may dictate the severity of the intervention strategy necessary. Specifically, you may manage with some minor behavioral problems (e.g., blurt-ing out answers, spreading rumors about others, or whispering in class) by holding daily morning meetings, using teacher’s proximity, or setting clearer behavioral expectations in the class rules. However, more challenging disciplinary problems (overt violence, fighting, verbal assault) often require specific intervention strategies coupled with ongoing, individual behavioral monitoring. So, the level of severity of the disciplinary infraction may indicate the level of intensity of the required intervention. This book presents disciplinary strategies for both less severe and more severe disciplinary problems.

Finally, the book is intended for use in the elementary and middle school grades, but most of these strategies work just as well in the high school classroom.

A THREE-STAGE DISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Every veteran teacher realizes that different disciplinary situations require different teacher responses. For example, two students fighting in the classroom require a different disciplinary response compared to several kids whispering in the back of
the class. As this indicates, disciplinary problems do differ in their severity as well as in the students’ emotional intensity, so these disciplinary problems are likely to require a variety of approaches on the part of teachers. This book addresses that concern with a focus on a three-stage approach to effective discipline. Strategies are in three broad categories:

1. Whole-class/whole-school preventative disciplinary approaches
2. Immediate disciplinary defusing strategies (disciplinary Band-Aids)
3. Targeted disciplinary interventions to decrease specific behavior problems

**Stage One: Whole-Class/Whole-School Prevention**

The whole-class/whole-school strategies, described in Section I of the book, are preventative strategies established in advance of disciplinary problems, and teachers generally use them with the whole class. Preventative strategies simply must be the backbone of school discipline in today’s world, as these are much more effective and time efficient than strategies that take place after a discipline problem occurs. Of course, many of these strategies may serve as a basis for a targeted intervention for one or more students in the class, but in general these are considered more preventative in nature. Further, most of these strategies are quite effective when undertaken as whole-school strategies. Research shows that these whole-class/whole-school strategies alleviate many minor behavioral infractions as well as some major ones.

In my professional development workshops on discipline, teachers often provide various examples of problem behaviors that are a challenge for them, and, as discreetly as I can manage, I then question which of these preventative strategies the teacher has used prior to the problem. While most teachers used some of these ideas, some teachers used them only occasionally and some not at all. Such oversights lead to more discipline problems in these classes.

While this book describes a number of preventative, whole-class/whole-school strategies, teachers should not use them all. Rather, teachers should select the strategies that they are most comfortable with, and implement those, but the key is that all teachers—indeed, all schools—should have one or more of these preventative strategies in place.

The efficacy of the whole-class strategies in the first section can be measured most easily by whole-class indices such as the total number of times a teacher has to “call out,” for attention or by simply charting the number of overt class disruptions for the whole group. In Section I, several examples are provided for
using these preventative strategies to target specific problem behaviors of specific students.

Of course, if these strategies are undertaken as a whole-school effort, many measures of school-wide discipline may be used to assess the efficacy of these strategies. These generally include measures such as reductions in in-school or out-of-school suspensions, disciplinary referrals to the office, reduction in dropouts, and crime on campus. Again, the whole-class/whole-school strategies are a first line of preventative defense against overt discipline problems.

Again, while these strategies are preventative in nature, any of them can likewise be the basis for a targeted intervention for a specific student. One case study in the first section of the book illustrates the use of a whole-class strategy as a targeted intervention. Also, this book presents a chart a bit later in the Introduction, with some general suggestions for use of all of these strategies in particular grade levels.

**Stage Two: Triggers and Band-Aids**

Stage two in this three-stage disciplinary process involves the teacher’s immediate response to misbehavior. Teachers often need to respond to immediate disciplinary infractions in two ways: avoiding triggers that set off disciplinary problems and using immediate response techniques to avoid power plays with students. Therefore, I present guidelines on how to avoid behavioral triggers and provide a set of options on how to respond to an intense disciplinary problem in class such as students cursing each other, fighting, or other critical situations. In such situations, teachers are at a disadvantage in that they are responding to students’ immediate, and often intense, misbehavior. In these cases, teachers must use quick thinking and appropriate tactics to de-escalate a potentially explosive situation, and there are a number of things teachers can do.

While these quick response tactics (I refer to them as disciplinary Band-Aids) are not likely to effectively curb disciplinary problems over the long term, they can very often prohibit further escalation of potentially explosive situations. This book discusses these tactics at the beginning of Section II.

**Stage Three: Targeted Interventions for Serious Behavioral Problems**

Stage three of this three-step disciplinary plan involves targeted interventions. The disciplinary problems that are the most vexing for teachers often involve extreme misbehavior of only a few students in the class, and specific interventions should be aimed at those disciplinary problems. In today’s classrooms, most teachers have between two and five students with overt disciplinary problems, and it seems they can count on those students to disrupt the flow of teaching and learning in the classroom almost every day. Those students’ disciplinary issues often require
specific, targeted interventions to alleviate the disciplinary concerns. These interventions are, in general, individual in nature and more intensive, and generally require specific daily measurement of behavioral change prior to and during strategy implementation. These individual interventions, in Section II of this book, are therefore intended for the most challenging disciplinary issues that teachers face. Presenting disciplinary strategies in this differentiated fashion allows this book to address the entire range of disciplinary issues teachers face in today’s classrooms.

This book describes each strategy in five to thirteen pages. Strategies in the first section of the book are presented as recommendations for the whole class, and all teachers should seek the two or three tactics here they wish to employ in their classroom. Strategies in the second and third sections are intended as individual applications for specific target students, and several of these present more developed case studies to demonstrate strategy application, complete with a data chart showing the results on the specific individual student’s intervention. Also, each strategy section will include implementation instructions or guidelines for that specific strategy, and these are generally presented in a sidebar or box adjacent to the text.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS IN MODERN DISCIPLINE

The third section of this book presents various trends and issues impacting discipline in the 21st-century classroom, and strategies for each. In today’s classes, the only constant seems to be continual change. With the ongoing move to transform disciplinary policy nationwide (Duncan, 2014), teachers are seeing increased pressures on their time. Further, the infusion of technology, flipped classrooms, and the growth of project-based learning all must be discussed in terms of the specific types of disciplinary issues these trends involve. Clearly, the disciplinary challenges teachers face in these newly developing instructional areas will be changing.

Therefore, the book’s third section presents several challenges for today’s educators, as well as one or more innovative instructional and/or disciplinary approaches to address each challenge. In fact, most teachers may find themselves involved with these challenges in various ways. Again, Section III draws from the seminal work of Marzano (2003, 2007) and Hattie (2013) as well as other influences on discipline such as the recent “Supportive School Discipline Initiative” (US Department of Education, 2011), as Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (2014) promotes.

Section IV of this book includes my recommendations for educators. This is intended to provide guidance as to how teachers and/or administrators might consider disciplinary issues for the next decade. Specifically, I make recommendations
as to how administrators may wish to challenge their faculty to master the increasing complexities of discipline in the classroom, or even consider a shift to one of the innovative instructional approaches that helps address discipline problems in a preventative manner (school-wide morning meetings, flipping the classroom, fully implementing project-based learning or RTI in behavior, etc.). Using these recommendations promises to revitalize the entire school, both in terms of academic achievement and class discipline.

RECOMMENDED APPLICATIONS OF THESE STRATEGIES

Authors can always get into trouble making specific grade-level recommendations for certain strategies or discussing various strategies for specific purposes and not others. For example, as I previously mentioned, almost all of the whole-class/whole-school strategies can serve as the basis for a targeted intervention for one student, even though such implementation is not the basis for most of the descriptions in the literature about those strategies. The plain fact is, you can use almost all of these strategies across a wide grade range and for a variety of purposes, including both preventative measures and targeted interventions.

With that concern noted, I do wish to provide the reader with general suggestions for strategy application in various grades and for various uses. Of course, the book structure addresses that issue in one sense, in the four sections described earlier. However, the chart shown later does provide general guidance on grade-level application and uses for each strategy. These are based on my reading of the collective applications in the literature on discipline, but I also use some educated judgment, and of course, other professionals may make other determinations as to appropriate strategy applications.

Strategy 6 provides a good example of the pitfalls of making these types of recommendations, so it presents a variety of quiet-time and meditative interventions. Both quiet time and meditation have been recently discussed as whole-school interventions for the middle and upper grades, whereas one early version of the same strategy (Turtle Time) was discussed as a whole-class strategy from kindergarten through grade three. But while this strategy is primarily a preventative strategy, you could certainly use it for a targeted intervention as well. Therefore, in the upcoming chart on page 9, I include information for possible uses and recommended uses for each strategy, and if a strategy lends itself to use as a targeted intervention, I show that also.

USING THIS BOOK

This book is intended to be a resource of strategies for class management and discipline for teachers and administrators at various grade levels, and as such, I encourage teachers to skip around and select those strategies that they wish to
employ based on the different disciplinary challenges they face. However, newer, somewhat less experienced teachers often assume that specific disciplinary challenges may be more serious, so I do encourage all teachers to give some attention to the whole-class/whole-school management strategies section, as these management practices can very often alleviate even some of the more serious disciplinary infractions. For example, holding a morning meeting and encouraging open discussion of ongoing disciplinary problems in such a meeting can help alleviate discipline problems of even the toughest youth, as those students see and hear their peers respond negatively to their behaviors in the meeting discussion.

Next, teachers should use the reference list to further explore strategies they wish to implement. Each strategy includes references, typically as a name and date in parentheses. Using those, and the full reference list at the back of the book, teachers can easily find the online references, online videos, or other articles that discuss the strategy. Using information in this book and those references, teachers will be prepared to implement any of the strategies herein.

Next, the response to intervention (RTI) initiative has swept across the United States since 2005 (Bender, 2012a), and almost all teachers in the primary, elementary, and middle grades have now received some professional development on RTI. This book should be helpful for RTI in behavioral improvement for individual students because the strategies and interventions herein are very appropriate for use in RTI procedures. For example, the interventions and data-charting procedures I demonstrate, particularly in Section II, are exactly the types of interventions and data collection recommended for progress monitoring of RTI interventions to curb inappropriate behaviors. More on this in Section III.

Finally, I do invite all educators to communicate directly with me on their thoughts relative to these strategies. I use a Twitter account as a professional learning network (@williambender1) exclusively for educational content. There, I provide recommendations for teachers to read online articles and interesting strategies, with a focus on a number of topics including discipline in the schools, project-based learning, response to intervention, technology in the classroom, and so on. To book me for professional development around this topic, contact me at bookings@learningsciences.com.

I hope this book is helpful to you. You do a critically important job, and I’d like to be of some small assistance in that. Also, I’d like to thank you for allowing me to play a small part in the important work you are doing for your students across the United States of America, Canada, and around the world!
## Strategy Applications for Specific Grade Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Preventative Applications</th>
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<td>Peer Pressure</td>
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<td>Group Contingency</td>
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<td>Self-Regulation/Goal Setting</td>
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A teacher’s ability to manage students is as critical in teaching as the teacher’s knowledge of the subject. Without effective management of students, little learning will take place, even when the teacher is highly knowledgeable of the subject content. While most teachers pick up the basics of class management in their teaching preparation courses, most veteran teachers would agree that they often face disciplinary situations in the real world of teaching that they have never encountered previously in their student teaching internships. Simply stated, a one-semester student teaching rarely offers the opportunity to deal with as many types of disciplinary problems as today’s teacher will encounter.

In this section, I present a variety of preventative whole-class/whole-school strategies that will help curb disciplinary problems before they occur. I primarily describe these strategies as whole-class because it takes the entire class to implement them. For example, teachers cannot implement a morning meeting (see Strategy 2) without the involvement of the whole class. Further, individual teachers can undertake any of these strategies in his class, even if other teachers in the school are not doing so. Therefore, these are techniques that teachers should consider building into the fabric of their classes from the first day of school. I do not recommend that teachers should employ all of these techniques in any single classroom. Rather, teachers should find two or three of these preventative class-management strategies and build those into their class, as the basis of preventative discipline.

However, I also recommend for school-wide implementation each of the strategies in this section of the book. In most examples in the literature (e.g., descriptions of quiet time, conflict resolution, and peer mediation), these strategies tend to be implemented school-wide rather than in a single class, which is why I use the phrase whole-class or whole-school.

Because these strategies are generally preventative in nature, I recommend that educators begin school-wide implementation of at least two or three of them. I cannot overemphasize the importance of preventative strategies in today’s schools.
In today’s education climate, all schools must spend the time and resources to undertake the preventative strategies of their choice. Given that these strategies are considered best practices in the 21st-century school, every member of the school faculty should implement at least a few of these strategies school-wide, as use of best practices places one in the most defensible position should some negative “news-catching” disciplinary event occur in the schools. I therefore have a dual specific recommendation here: First, administrators should ensure that they implement at least two of these whole-class/whole-school disciplinary strategies school-wide. These preventative efforts will alleviate many behavioral problems and show that the school is ahead of the curve in managing disciplinary issues.

Next, teachers should individually work to implement at least two of these whole-class/whole-school strategies, if these are not done on a school-wide basis in that particular school. Also, I suggest that teachers in such situations approach their department chairpersons and school administrators and recommend two or more of these strategies for school-wide implementation.

The specific class-wide/school-wide strategies include

**Strategy 1:** Creating a Positive Class Climate for Effective Discipline
**Strategy 2:** Morning Meetings to Improve Behavior
**Strategy 3:** Teaching With Movement to Curb Problem Behaviors
**Strategy 4:** A Classroom Respect Policy: Rules for My Class
**Strategy 5:** Adult Mentoring to Reach Unreachable Kids
**Strategy 6:** Quiet Time and Meditation
**Strategy 7:** Conflict Resolution Training
**Strategy 8:** Peer Mediation in the Schools
Strategy 1

Creating a Positive Class Climate for Effective Discipline

WHAT IS CLASSROOM CLIMATE?
Perhaps no single aspect of discipline captures Marzano’s concept of withitness better than class climate (Marzano, 2003, 2007). Withitness represents an intense, immediate awareness of, and response to, various situations within the classroom. Teachers who practice withitness are highly aware of and respond immediately to situations in which problem behaviors may occur (Marzano, 2003). Sometimes this is referred to as situational awareness and involves not only understanding the overt relationships in the class (teacher/student) but also the more subtle relationships (student/student). This also includes the teacher’s understanding of how students in the class actually perceive the class interactions (Hattie, 2013), because students will behave in a certain way based on their perceptions of the dynamics of the class more so than the obvious class roles (Hattie, 2013). Certainly, a full knowledge of the class climate and the impact of that climate on each student in the room is one expression of withitness.

“Classroom climate” is a construct that has been discussed fairly widely in the educational literature in the past twenty years (Brand, 2011; Hattie, 2013; Miller & Cunningham, 2011; Pianta, La Pero, Payne, Cox, & Bradley, 2002; Sousa, 2009). Sometimes referred to as “school climate,” I prefer the term class climate, as this term suggests that teacher efforts are primary in the development of an appropriate environment for learning. In general, classroom climate deals with the students’ or parents’ sense of safety within the class, as well as the emotional impact of a particular learning environment (Bender, 2007). Class climate issues involve such questions as

- Are students and teacher happy to be in the classroom?
- Does everyone seem to enjoy themselves?
- Is the teacher stressing academics and social learning in a positive, enjoyable way?
- Does everyone feel valued in the class?
- Do all students feel that they can contribute meaningfully to the class?
While the class climate construct is typically limited to the emotional impact of the classroom, the term school climate is much broader and encompasses issues such as teacher/administrator relationships, bus supervision of students, and other outside-of-class social interactions (Brand, 2011; Loukas, 2007). For this book, I limit the discussion to class climate because that is the environment in which teachers exert the most influence over behavioral issues.

Another aspect of class climate involves student perception. Classrooms that students perceive to be predominately punitive in nature will not facilitate the development of positive, respectful relationships and are quite likely to involve more disciplinary infractions than classes in which teachers have attended, carefully and strategically, to class climate issues (Hattie, 2013). In such punitive classes, students will not enjoy their learning as much—if at all—and teachers will be much more likely to burn out in their profession much more quickly. Rather, in effective classrooms, the teacher is likely to be very concerned with how students and other teachers perceive their own value in the context of the classroom (Hattie, 2013; Loukas, 2007; Sousa, 2009). In fact, the most effective classrooms are those in which everyone feels valued and where the various emotional needs of all the students and the teacher are met (Bender, 2007; Brand, 2011; Miller, 2011; Pianta et al., 2002).

**ASSESSING CLASS CLIMATE**

For this reason, effective teachers must be concerned with how students and parents perceive their own value in the context of the classroom. It is important to use various informal assessments that allow the concerned educator to gauge the classroom climate in any setting from the various perspectives of those within that setting (Brand, 2011; Loukas, 2007; Pianta et al., 2002). Therefore, I advocate that each teacher spend some time toward the beginning of each year to actually assess the climate in their classes using one of the procedures below. Certainly teachers can utilize student inventories and questionnaires, but a simple questionnaire for parents who visit the classroom might also provide some insights into class climate (Bender, 2007).

Overall, such assessment is not a time-consuming process and can be accomplished rather informally, but the potential insights such an assessment can provide are critical (Pianta et al., 2002). Teachers may find that these informal assessment data seem to reaffirm insights the teacher already has about how
Strategy 1: Creating a Positive Class Climate for Effective Discipline

Students perceive the class. However, frequently such assessments can show teachers critical areas to which they must attend. For example, teachers might find that the quiet student who rarely demonstrates any disciplinary problems at all is actually feeling quite alienated, and may even be contemplating suicide. In that case, the assessment of class climate can provide critical information on which the teacher can take action.

Further, with some assessment data in hand, teachers can work to improve the climate in their classes. Sometimes simple things can dramatically improve class climate; for example, providing students a choice of assignments or using “peer buddy” learning on some in-class assignments can make a tremendous difference in how connected students feel with each other. Certainly the use of 21st-century social networking in the class will often result in students having a richer class learning experience and valuing their learning experience more highly.

Students’ Assessment of Class Climate

A number of authors provide informal assessments for capturing students’ perceptions of class climate (Bender, 2007; Brand, 2011; Sousa, 2009). As one option, teachers may consider a simple survey of students concerning how they sense the classroom. The brief informal measure in Figure 1.1 offers the teacher the option of checking on how students experience their classroom environment (Bender, 2007; Sousa, 2009). Of course, using informal inventories also provides teachers with the opportunity to add more indicators that are specific to their own class.

Interpretation of Surveys of Class Climate

Given the way this particular assessment is structured, lower scores are much more desirable and indicate a much healthier class climate overall than higher scores. Teachers may simply wish to average the score for each indicator (taking the average out to two decimal places), and then scan those data to determine overall indications of class climate for each question.

However, another advantage of informal student surveys to assess class climate involves the multiple levels of data interpretation they provide. While teachers should aggregate the data, as I noted above, teachers should also look at individual responses from some of their more challenging students. In particular, teachers should use these data to determine the emotional well-being of individual students with behavioral problems and take action to improve those students’ class climate experience, when possible. I present some ideas for that later in this section.
Figure 1.1: Assessing Students’ Comfort in the Class

Directions: On this sheet, circle the number that represents the extent to which you are worried about this.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Concern</th>
<th>Not worried about this</th>
<th>Hardly worried about this</th>
<th>Worried about this</th>
<th>Very worried about this</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students picking on me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falling in my schoolwork</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher not liking me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being made fun of</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being different from others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding classmates for joint projects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not understanding my work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students picking a fight with me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting into trouble</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Losing my way between classes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with peer buddies in class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding friends to sit with in the cafeteria</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being sent to the principal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing what is expected</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which clubs/teams to join</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parents’ Perceptions of Class Climate

Another group of individuals who are highly motivated to explore class climate are the parents of students in the class. While measures of parental perceptions of class climate can help teachers foster positive relationships with parents, these measures are a bit less influential on disciplinary issues within the class than are measures of student perceptions of class climate. However, there are many instances in which teachers may wish to assess a parent’s perception of the class, and teachers may use a simple questionnaire or survey for that purpose, such as the one found in Figure 1.2.

Among the things that parents want to see in the classroom, perhaps the comfort level of students is paramount. Parents want to see happy, engaged students interacting with their peers and their teacher. They want to perceive that the students are comfortable in their relationships with the teacher and with other adults (e.g., paraprofessionals) in the class. Therefore, I included on the questionnaire several indicators of student happiness.

Go to www.learningsciences.com/bookresources to download figures and tables.
Strategy 1: Creating a Positive Class Climate for Effective Discipline

**Figure 1.2:** Parent Questionnaire on Class Climate

**Directions:** Answer each question with a yes or no, and then write a brief note on that particular question if you’d like. It is better to answer questions fairly quickly, without intense reflection.

- How does the class feel? Welcoming? Intimidating? ________________
- Who is talking? Teacher? Students? ________________________________________
- Is the teacher smiling? ________________________________________________
- Are the kids working on their assigned tasks? ________________________________
- Are multiple learning tasks ongoing? ______________________________________
- Are any kids quietly whispering? Does the teacher respond? How? __________

- Do students seem happy? ________________________________________________
- Do students seem friendly toward each other? ________________________________
- Does the teacher speak respectfully to students? _____________________________
- Do students speak respectfully to each other? ________________________________
- Do you see any bullying in the class? ______________________________________
- What disciplinary procedures are in evidence (e.g., rules posted, good behavior charts)? ______________

- Are kids of different races working together? ______________________________
- Are there displays of student work in the class? _____________________________
- Do the students seek out the teacher for help with a problem? ________________
- Do the students seek out other students for help with a problem? ______________
- Is the classroom generally pleasing to look at? ______________________________
- Are you happy your child is in this class? Why? _____________________________

In general, I do not recommend widespread assessment of parents’ perception of class climate, unless the entire school faculty and administration wish to make some changes in that regard. Rather, the teacher can use the questionnaire in Figure 1.2 with individual parents who visit the classroom, particularly if their child is demonstrating behavioral problems. If that parent sees that the class climate is positive overall, she may be somewhat more willing to work with the teacher in helping alleviate some of her child’s behavioral disturbances. Of course, parents must realize that this informal measure is not a summation of how effective a teacher may be with all children. Rather, parents might wish to use this measure as a discussion starter with their child’s teacher for next year to begin a dialogue about what seems to work with their child.

Go to www.learningsciences.com/bookresources to download figures and tables.
HOW DO I IMPROVE CLASS CLIMATE?

Collecting data on class climate simply for the sake of collecting data is not at all helpful. Rather, teachers must be in a position to effect change toward a more positive classroom experience for all students.

First, if a particular student’s individual responses indicate a negative perception of the class, the teacher should plan instructional opportunities to make the student’s learning experiences more positive. If a particular child’s responses indicate a sense of aloneness, perhaps the teacher could formulate specific cooperative learning opportunities (e.g., cooperative group work on a major project) for the class that would facilitate more positive social interactions for that student. Teachers may wish to talk directly with the student about forming friendships with others in the class who share similar interests. As another option, the teacher could subtly preselect a potential friend with similar social characteristics as the target student (e.g., perhaps another shy person for a particularly timid student or another “rowdy” person for an active or boisterous student). The teacher may then arrange a special opportunity for the pair to work together as peer buddies.

In addition to individual student efforts, Uhlig (2014) describes a school-wide effort to improve the climate for the entire student body. At D.C. Everest Middle School in Wausau, Wisconsin, when students return for the second school semester, each student is greeted with a “happy note” on his locker. The notes present a positive message such as “Just be you! No one can change who you are,” “Stay positive today,” “You look great.” The notes were written by two school clubs, as part of the anti-bullying effort at the school, and most of the students respond quite positively. The principal, Mr. Casey Nye, says the notes are “. . . one piece to a whole bunch of things we’re doing to make this a positive environment. It’s about establishing a [positive school] culture in the long run” (Uhlig, 2014).

Other schools in Utah and Wisconsin have also utilized this happy note idea to improve school climate (Uhlig, 2014). In particular, I want to present this idea in this book because individual teachers can easily do this two or three times each year! Teachers may wish to write the first happy notes themselves, but later they could use students in the class to write happy notes for others.

SUMMARY

As these examples indicate, teachers can implement many things to improve class climate, either for specific troubled students in the class or for the class as a whole. One thing is certain: when teachers strive to make the class climate as positive as possible for all students, including those who present disciplinary challenges, everyone in the class will benefit (Brand, 2011; Uhlig, 2014).
Marzano’s perspective (2003, 2007) emphasizes withitness as one essential element for effective class discipline, and there are few more impressive ways for teachers to demonstrate withitness than by increasing their own knowledge of how students collectively experience their classroom. In that sense, an assessment of class climate may be the first step for many teachers to become more with-it. Consideration of class climate, and perhaps assessment thereof, is therefore recommended for classrooms across all grade levels. Such assessment may show ways in which teachers can enhance their class climate with relative little effort.