Discipline – An Overview for Early Childhood Teachers

By Alan M. Weber

The subject of discipline is quite likely the most important and difficult one confronting today's teachers. This essay is meant to provide some perspectives and reassurances, with the understanding that there are no easy answers or magic formulas, that any real advice can only be offered in the specific context in which each problem is occurring, and that ultimately discipline comes from the individual relationships and knowledge that the teacher has developed with each child. But there are several guiding principles, and these are what this essay will discuss.

The most basic starting point is to make a distinction between "discipline" and "punishment." The word "discipline" comes from the same root word as "disciple," a learner. Discipline *is* about teaching and learning. It is of necessity a long-term process toward self-discipline, whereby the child begins to develop an understanding of the reasons and means of appropriate behavior. The seeds we plant are intended to grow, as the child becomes more experienced, less egocentric, more self-controlled and more guided by a value system we help build, toward increasingly autonomous moral decision making. The keys to this process are simple things like communication (explanations, reminders and negotiations, where the behavior is negotiable), clarity, consistency, positivism, eliminating causes of negative behavior, a healthy balance between gentleness and firmness, consequences that teach, modeling certainly, and, most of all, trust. The intention is to build up the child's self-esteem, so as to establish high but appropriate self-expectations, not to tear it down, which usually causes acting out behavior. This is all in sharp contrast to punishment, which is essentially the infliction of pain, physical or emotional, in order to achieve a quick fix, an immediate result. Far from leading to self-discipline, it more likely leads to a dependency. Since the child's behavior is predicated on avoidance of punishment (or, conversely, the pursuit of a reward), and there is no necessary understanding of the real reason for the behavior, nor inner drive to achieve it on its own merits, the child will continue to need the hand of the punisher (or rewarder) looming over him/her to "do the right thing." Furthermore, the child will probably be unable to determine what *is* the right thing in new and different situations for which s/he has not been specifically "trained." The reality is that anything that "works" too quickly or too well is probably wrong, that growth and learning do not happen quite so conveniently. One must begin with an acceptance of the fact that discipline takes time, to learn and to succeed, and that one need not and should not step out of character or principle, or resort to extreme or mechanical means, to achieve quick "results," beyond basic safety and fairness.

To apply this distinction to common classroom practices, we can start with the widely applied, and most often misapplied technique called "time out." Now, once upon a time, the universal method of classroom so-called "discipline" was corporal punishment, from rulers to hickory switches to bull whips. Sadly, half of the nation or more currently still allows the hitting of school children in some form. And, it must be noted, hitting children, while it may not always be child abuse, is always wrong. It

teaches nothing, except that violence *is* an acceptable solution to problems, with some proviso, either that the person doing it has to be big enough or feel right enough or have special rights, etc. It is known to cause violent behavior, low self-esteem, humiliation, fear, blind obedience and cycles of family violence. And it simply does not work anyway. It without question deserved, and deserves, to be outlawed. When and where it was banned, teachers, coming from a punishment-oriented perspective, essentially asked, "Well, if we can't hit them, what *can* we do to them?" which led to the widespread application of "time out."

When first envisioned, time out was really intended to be just that: a time out, a chance to take a breather, remove oneself from a situation in which s/he was in over his/her head, and pull oneself together. It was an opportunity to think about what s/he did, not said as a threat but as a learning experience, and to be momentarily and symbolically denied the privilege of group interaction for violating it through destructive behavior, thus teaching him/her to value that privilege and appreciate its responsibilities. (Denial of privilege is among the most appropriate disciplinary tools, but what constitutes a privilege versus a right when it comes to school is a difficult question. Group interaction and freedom beyond what the child can handle constructively for self and others would seem to be such deniable privileges.) It was not meant to be long, embarrassing or painful. There was no "time out chair," looming like the dunce stool or electric chair. No psychologist had yet posed any mechanical and illogical formulas regarding how long the child should be kept sitting as a ratio to his/her age, and it was not expected that teachers would force it roughly on children until they were sufficiently embarrassed, tearful and ostracized, nor that children too young to understand or learn from it would nonetheless be subjected to it. And it was surely not meant to be used mechanically, without individual consideration and in place of communication.

But with the punishment mentality strong in our schools, what could be a form of discipline is usually not applied as such, and as a result many agencies and programs have banned the use of this potentially useful tool. We see all too often the same child being repeatedly and mechanically "put in time out," which should tell teachers, one, that it is not working, and, two, that that child's senses of self and belonging are being squashed. To be appropriate and effective, time out (which perhaps we now need to call something else) must be applied individually. For one child, the most appropriate place might be the teacher's lap, as s/he would otherwise be too guilty or devastated or afraid. Another child might need to sit by him/herself for a brief period to settle down and think. Even so, one such child one might be able to talk with immediately and send her/him on her/his merry way, whereas another such child might be too angry to hear the teacher or use the conversation constructively and would need some time alone first. One child might be able to get up when s/he considers her/himself ready, but another child would need to be told when s/he appeared ready, as s/he might not yet be able to make that determination or sufficiently appreciate the responsibility. One child may be on the teacher's lap for comfort, while another might be there for restraint. Equal treatment does not mean the same treatment. And consequences do not have to be painful to be useful, and in fact *should* not be, since pain is neither a good teacher nor fair for someone just learning.

Another over- and misused technique that needs some discussion is the common reliance on apologizing, "saying your sorry." In and of itself, there is nothing really

wrong with this, if it is simply the encouraging of children to do this, especially by modeling, asking and praising when it is witnessed. But requiring it is something else, and a something else which is beset with problems. First, it is teaching children to lie, since egocentric young children would seldom actually feel sorry. Second, it is providing them with "magic words," words with the power to make things go away so that there is really no need to emphasize thinking *before* one acts and the hurt is done. Third, it can damage pride. A child who really does not fully understand what was so wrong about what s/he did and does not quite feel the remorse desired is backed into a corner by the teacher, who insists that either s/he apologize or s/he cannot move on. This puts the child in a conflicted position: to go against what s/he feels and believes to get what s/he wants or to stand firm and get in deeper. Fourth, it puts words in children's mouths. Although this might seem relatively harmless, we generally try to encourage self-expression, for children to develop their own way of expressing their perspectives and feelings, rather than copying and memorizing, and responding to situations mechanically. Fifth, and most importantly, it puts the onus on the wrong child. The child who did the hurting has already expressed him/herself, albeit not appropriately. It is the child who was hurt who should be encouraged to express him/herself now, and that is the person to whom the teacher should go first. The wronged child should be supported in saying, in his/her own words, something to the effect that s/he does not like being hurt and not to do that to him/her anymore. It is amazing to jaded adults how well this usually works, how much more meaningful this is to hear from other children rather than the adults. And children should be encouraged, and mediated as needed, to come up with their own resolutions to conflicts, as long as the resolution is a fair and constructive one. But if the teacher is rushing in and imposing a mechanical response by the aggressor and no action by the one who should be non-aggressively asserting her/himself, none of that will happen.

And, finally, we have the gold stars and stickers epidemic. The origination of this trend is a bit different. In the field of special education, a gold stars/stickers chart would be a form of "behavior modification." "Behavior mod" was and is designed for children with serious impairments, such as ADHD or autism, which cause extra barriers in a child's being able to understand or execute appropriate behavior in a self-motivated way. They, of course, want to "be good," to conform to expected behaviors, but it is simply too hard, and they need that extra incentive, something tangible, that "brass ring" to reach for, temporarily it is hoped, to help him/her achieve specific goals. When teachers became aware of this technique, it was generally figured that if we can control and mold these children, we can do the same to all children. So these charts and bribes and such proliferated, and their limitations and dangers have most often been overlooked. They can create materialism, wherein the child does "the right thing" for the bribe, not for the right reason, and then comes to expect to be similarly rewarded for every effort or action or else will not do them. The child can lose self-motivation, and rely more and more on the judgments and responses of others. The child may become manipulative, trying to get attention when doing something rewardable, or else sneaky, trying to find ways to get away with unrewardable or punishable actions. These charts can become competitive, and highly judgmental; what behaviors from what child should be paid for and why? For whom is this being done; is the child learning anything about what appropriate behavior is and why we do it, or is this merely to make the teacher's needs and whims more easily accomplished? And is it fair? For one child, it might be a tremendous achievement to

not hit or sit still for five minutes; is that child being expected to perform based on his/her own standards and limitations or those of the class? If s/he does not get rewarded as much as the others what is being said to him/her; if everyone always gets the same stars or checks, what do they mean?

Teachers sometimes reward the entire class if they are "good," leading to some kind of special snack or party, but what about the child who might lose points for the group, and what about the psychological risks of connecting food to behavior? Conversely, we often see the ominous names on the blackboard tactic, with checks next to them denoting "bad" behavior, or else the threatening "three strikes and you're out" method, which even the adult legal system is in some localities reconsidering for having too much rigidity and unfairness. None of this is to say that some children might not benefit from the temporary use of an individualized incentive system, designed professionally through evaluation and teamwork. But usually it is done cavalierly, for everyone regardless of whether self-motivated behavior or behavior motivated, as needed, by more human incentives like a hug, a high five, a word of praise or a word of belief in her/him, is even a possibility. It is all mostly a matter of control and convenience, and, once again, the desire for immediate results, instant gratification for the teacher.

Discipline, if done constructively and effectively, is hard work, it takes long and it is most often intangible. It is really not even a matter of techniques at all. It is certainly not how loud one shouts (and often, actually, a soft voice carries more power); it is more the quality of the voice that comes out. First and foremost, one has to believe s/he has the moral authority to discipline, that it is not taking something away from children but giving them something (safety, fairness, self-discipline, ourselves as the adults so they can be free to be children, etc.). It is that confidence, gained through belief and experience, that will most often inspire compliance. The first time one tries, s/he might feel uncomfortable and disillusioned, and the child, who has never heard a "no" from her/him before, might well respond negatively. But when that child comes back to her/him minutes later closer and more trusting than ever before, the teacher will start to see that children need and want limits. They do not want to be out of control, and they want to trust in the adults, they want to know that the adults will protect and guide them but will not lose control or who they are in the process. Setting limits is probably the hardest function teachers generally have to perform (along with communicating with parents). It is an especially hard role for an idealistic beginning teacher, particularly one who has never been in a position of authority before, and that is okay, s/he should allow her/himself the necessary opportunity to grow into it gradually. Even if the environment is not "perfect" at first, children will generally respond to good efforts and intentions, and it is better to try what one can do based on good principles and introspective efforts than to become something either unnatural or distasteful to oneself. Ideally, one might be able to work under a mentor for awhile so as to not have to shoulder the burdens of such particularly tricky and maturity-dependent functions as discipline and parent communication too quickly. But if one is unable to begin in a position like that or does not have a good model to defer to, one should trust oneself to use a combination of instincts, learnings, growth and relationships in generally beneficial ways. And just because someone else may have more experience or get better "results" does not mean that they are necessarily acting more in the interests of the children. Ultimately, it is

probably better that a new teacher begins too "soft" and learns to be "tough" along the way than starting by acting tough and trying to soften.

The trick is to find that balance between gentleness and firmness. Firmness without the gentleness leads to a tyranny, gentleness without the firmness leads to an anarchy; the two qualities, far from being contradictory, need each other. One must find that place where the limits are not too tight and not too wide. If one draws them too tightly, one has a classroom of "ruleitis," where there is a rule for everything, even unnecessary things. Children do not have choices about things they should and need to have, they cannot express themselves freely and as individuals and they cannot learn the true purpose of rules. If one draws them too broadly, needed rules are missing, the classroom is chaotic and potentially dangerous, children have choices about things they should not have, and they still cannot learn the true purpose of rules. Each teacher must find where that middle ground is for her/him. But it starts with three basic rules: "You cannot do anything to hurt others," "You cannot do anything to hurt yourself," and "You cannot do anything to hurt the environment/destroy property." And from there, one must do two things. The first step is to turn these general guidelines into specific rules. One of the best ways in which to do this is through a classroom "town meeting." Children can be asked what they think the rules are and why they exist. Surely they have heard them enough to be able to come up with most of them, a list to which the teacher could append ones that might come to mind less, ones that might have to do with name calling, standing on furniture or running out of the room or away from the group. If children are involved in this process, it becomes clearer to them where rules come from and the purpose they serve, and they are more likely to comply with them and to discuss modifying them where they are not as appropriate, necessary, fair or clear as they should be. The second part is to turn them from negative to positive.

Professional communication carries with it certain obligations, and there are some important changes that teachers can make in their way of communicating that may seem unnatural at first but which can make all the difference. One is to practice "active listening," which is a series of techniques to more effectively hear children and to show them that they are being heard. (Such techniques include eye contact, physical contact, getting down to the children's level, smiling, nodding, going "uh huh" or "I see" or paraphrasing back to the child what is being heard.) Another is to eliminate from one's vocabulary the words "good" and "bad," words which carry too much vagueness, judgmentalism and power to serve constructive communication. (Calling a child "bad" is certainly out of the question; calling a behavior "bad" is no substitute for objective and specific information. Telling a child to "be good" has similar drawbacks: Needing something concrete to grasp onto and not having it, children will reach for whatever in their experience they can associate with "being good," and will inevitably come up with things like not causing problems for the adults, not being noticed or getting in the way, not having needs or feelings or individuality, sitting or talking or eating in some arbitrary proscribed manner, conforming to expectations that are often mysterious until after the fact, etc. Surely these are not the lessons we wish to impart, so, again, it would be better to be specific as to how the so-called "good" behavior might be making someone feel or affecting the functioning of the class, rather than merely characterizing it.)

The primary reason, though, for bringing up the subject of changes in communication style is to advocate for a conscious shift to positive language. Negative

language, in the form of constant "no's," "don't's," "stop's," etc., causes many problems. First, it conveys negative expectations and creates a negative environment, often leading children to act in a manner reflecting such negativity. Second, it fails to tell children what they *can* do, what they *should* do, and the resultant negative behavior might simply be because of a lack of clarity as to the expectations. Third, it invites power struggles, which are better avoided or saved for when absolutely needed ("Pick your battles."). Simply put, if there is no compelling reason for saying no, do not say it. Where we win power struggles, we risk squashing the child's pride and autonomy; where we lose them, we risk undermining our appropriate authority and giving children power that could scare or endanger them. (It should be mentioned that power struggles are especially lethal with toddlers, whose developmental requirements revolve particularly around pride and autonomy, and distraction would be a very valuable tool for the teacher. With older children, however, it is more advisable to deal directly, albeit constructively, with behavioral issues than to seek to avoid them entirely as learning experiences. This, of course, is unless the child is too consumed in anger or anguish at the time to be able to deal with it at all, in which case distraction would remain an available tool.) In regard to power struggles and "picking battles," it is important to understand that once we have told a child something, we have to be ready to follow through. Letting it drop would send a mixed message that would greatly undermine future attempts at discipline, except where we realize that we made a mistake in setting the expectation or engaging in the power struggle and are able to admit and explain the mistake to the child so that s/he is left with no confusion. So it is critically important to be clear within ourselves beforehand as to where our lines are, what we expect and how we will react to various situations, and, obviously, to not speak without thinking or considering follow through or precedents.

Fourth and finally, negative communication could well lead to children tuning us out, and to the dis-empowering of what could and should be important words. When they are heard too often, words like "no," "don't," "stop," etc. start to lose their meaning, and when they are truly needed, such as when a child is running into traffic or about to hurt another child, etc., they may not be as reliable. Similarly, we tell children to "use their words (not their fists)," and, as said before, there is special power in children hearing messages like "Don't hit me. I don't like it" from each other rather than from the adults. But if we have overused such words, then we most likely will have disempowered the words and the children relying on them, who will then have to up the ante somehow. For all of these reasons, we should attempt to turn the phrases into positive language. "Stop screaming" can easily become "Please use an indoor voice." "Don't run" can readily be turned into "We have to walk indoors." "Stop spilling the sand" can instantly become "The sand belongs in the sand table." There are, however, a few directions which are more awkward to turn into positive phrasing. Many programs aware of this principle have tried to change "No hitting" into something less negative." In some cases, the result is "Please keep your hands to yourself," which, unfortunately, changes the rule into something broad and cold that seems to imply that hugging is not allowed either. One school came up with "We use happy hands," which I am not sure conveys any useful message at all. About the best variation I have seen was "We use our hands for helping, not for hurting" in my son's school, but the positive part seemingly still needed to be modified by the "not" to be effective. And I think there is a reason for all of this. If the

rule is important enough, because it involves a matter of safety and/or rights, then it probably needs the negative. By the time a teacher were to rephrase "Don't run into the street" into something like "Middles of the street are for white lines," it would probably be too late. The point is, if the only times children heard these so-called "negative" words were when the situation were either one of immediate safety or moral imperative, then the child would be learning something about relative moral weight and the words would not be over- or frivolously used. Even a toddler might well be directed away from the electrical outlet or choking hazard by a well chosen "no" that is not often heard and thereby makes this situation qualitatively different to him/her from most others.

Perhaps even more important than positive discipline is preventive discipline. We want to make disciplinary problems less frequent, less likely, less severe and less attractive. And this involves everything in our program. The classroom arrangement is relevant in many ways. We should establish vantage points from which the whole classroom is clearly observable. We should develop a classroom which is attractive, so that children will feel good about themselves and about their property. Our classroom should be filled with things to occupy children productively, but should avoid being overstimulating and disorganized. It should provide enough room so that children are not congested and can express themselves, but should avoid large open spaces except where gross motor activity is encouraged. The daily schedule is similarly connected to preventive discipline. Children should not be asked to sit or wait or contain themselves for too long. There should be sufficient time for physical exercise, time(s) when the children do not have to use indoor voices, walk and be otherwise restricted by the arbitrary and somewhat unnatural demands of walls and furniture. There should also be time for relaxation, and a generally relaxed feel to the day. And there should be sufficient freedom, in balance with appropriate responsibility, to the group, to the materials, to the pets, etc. In fact, there needs to be a general alternating pattern of balance, whereby one (relatively short) sitting time is followed by a time allowing movement, one time requiring limitation or restraint is followed by one in which children have appropriately free expression, one time lacking in structure is followed by one in which some is provided, one time wherein the focus is on the group is followed by one wherein individuality is encouraged, etc.

Within the schedule, particular attention must be paid to the transitions, the changes in routine (clean-up, dressing/undressing, hand washing, etc.) that are often quite difficult for children, some particularly so. Transitions must be kept simple and clear, children need to be given a warning before they are to occur so that they might prepare themselves, unnecessary line-ups and unnecessary transitions themselves should be avoided, and transitions should be conveyed to the children as purposeful and pleasant rather than chores to be rushed through. It is often especially hard for children to clean up from free play to move on to group time, which is understandable, but it is the teacher's responsibility to make sure that the group time for which this child has to sacrifice is a meaningful, enjoyable and not too long one wherein the child can express her/himself while still having social responsibilities. When the class goes on a walking trip, the common model is one teacher in front, one in back for safety and cohesiveness. That is also the model one should envision for transitions. One teacher should be the magnet, pulling children into the "next" and giving them something to do and someone to supervise them once they have transitioned, with the other teacher serving as the gatherer,

helping individuals finish up from the "last" and point them toward the "next." With these understandings, transitions will quickly become internalized and effective, rather than the source of chaos, rebellion and acting out. But for some, like some with autism, ADHD or emotional/behavioral disorders, these are times of such difficulty, such ungroundedness, that special attention and consideration must be given, and, certainly, consistency is of the utmost importance.

Then there is the curriculum. Yes, children should be kept busy. But the curriculum has more obligations than simply that. The curriculum needs to be appropriate, so that children are not unnecessarily frustrated and demoralized. It needs to be fun, and personally motivating and including. And there should be particular attention, arguably primary attention given to social and emotional development, in the activities, themes and goals for the program, and a focus on cooperative learning rather than that which is isolating or competitive. Finally, there is the teacher role. The teacher needs to be a vigilant supervisor and, as we have said, effective limit setter. But s/he also needs to be an exemplary role model, demonstrating the behaviors and values being asked of the children. In conjunction with this, s/he needs to work on building an environment wherein positive behavior is the attractive, noticed and prevailing one. In such an environment, children can also be models for one another, bringing each other into the fold (which is very different from teachers manipulatively and competitively pointing children out as models that others should imitate or avoid). And s/he must also be a nurturer, someone who makes children feel secure and trusting, okay to be themselves, and valued, respected and included, and who gives the attention children require so that they will not be tempted to seek out negative attention. It is very important to "catch" children when they are acting positively, especially those children who are so often used to being caught doing otherwise. Giving vigilant positive attention, assigning appropriate ego-boosting and energy-channeling responsibility and allowing increasing autonomy as children internalize the tools we provide them and show they can handle and use such autonomy healthily are the ingredients that form a reliable recipe for behavioral growth. These, briefly, are some of the things we can do to stem problems before they ever occur, and that set the tone for an environment of constructive and effective discipline. And this brings us back to where we began, the keys to building such an environment.

Good discipline is based on good communication. At the start of the school year, the teacher will do a lot of talking, a lot of explaining and discussing and reminding. Only when the rules and expectations are clearly established and firmly internalized can communicative shortcuts such as "You know why" or even a look be taken. "Because I said so," by the way, is never a legitimate reason. Better that the child is asked why s/he thinks the rule exists or the behavior is expected. The goal should always be communication rather than the cutting off of such. Good communication also means clarity. The teacher needs to think out each step and reason for each expectation, because only if s/he understands what precisely is being asked and why will the children be able to get it. There cannot be too many directions at once, nor expectations that are unreasonable for the age or the individuals. Good communication also means negotiation, an important life skill. Offering choices in the way or time an expectation can be fulfilled is an effective and respectful approach to compliance, but the teacher should be careful to explicitly distinguish negotiable expectations from those which

involve safety and fairness, which are non-negotiable. Children should be encouraged to come up with their own solutions to interpersonal problems and their own plans for compliance, again as long as such resolutions are fair, constructive and as timely as necessary.

Consistency is another indispensable criterion of an appropriate approach to discipline. What constitutes desired or unacceptable behavior cannot be different depending upon which teacher the child is interacting with, the mood the teacher is in, the time of day, whether it is in the classroom or out in public, how convenient following through might be, how entertaining the child might be, etc. Teachers usually see testing as a "bad" thing, but children test to find out. They test themselves, each other, the environment and certainly us. Where they get clear and consistent responses, they need not test further. But if the responses do not provide concrete answers about what is expected, where the limits are, what will happen when they are crossed and how we will react, children well may go on testing forever. Maintaining that consistency is hard work, but it pays off. Once again, there will be a lot of talking about and focusing on rules and routines and expectations and such at the beginning of the year, and many teachers are tempted to rush or skip over that to get to the "real teaching." But not only is this the most "real" aspect of teaching, a crucial contribution to the child's real life, if it is not given the time and effort it requires, it will never be established and internalized, and will always interfere with attempts to "teach" anything else. It is advisable to start a little tighter and simpler at the beginning of the year, with less options and more control at first. Children can thereby earn freedom and autonomy as they, individually and collectively, show their ability to use the tools provided and express them in non-destructive ways. This is a much better message than tightening and usurping an environment wherein children got out of control or made poor choices, providing a message to them of failure and dependency. The goal of the teacher is always to make her/himself less and less necessary as children learn, grow and internalize what we provide them to use in their own constructive ways.

Maybe the trickiest aspect of discipline has to do with the matter of consequences. The line between discipline and punishment can very legitimately become blurred here. The first point to be made is that a consequence need not be "negative." A discussion, a reminder, a word of support, a question, a look, etc. are all consequences in the broader sense. Only when a behavior is intentional or persistent, or when reminders have been exhausted and "You know why" is a legitimate response, do we need to go to "step two," more formal consequences. In that event, the goal is to think up consequences that teach rather than blindly punish or reward. The natural consequences of a child's behavior would often be the best teacher, but we cannot allow, for example, a child to suffer the retaliation or ostracism that his/her anti-social behavior might "deserve," or the harm brought about by reckless or self-destructive actions. We cannot allow children to hit each other back, we cannot bite a child to make him/her understand that it causes pain, we cannot let a child be hurt and then reply with a "That's good for you." There are times when we do have to substitute logical consequences that do not harm, endanger or diminish children. If a child is spilling sand out of the sand table with intention or disregard, rather than yelling to "Stop spilling the sand" or threatening the child with deprivation of snack or free play, a positive and logical, "If you do not try to keep the sand in the sand table, you will not be able to play in it for the rest of the day."

Discipline should not be carried over from day to day; young children forget, and they are entitled to fresh starts. A logical consequence for hurting, as we have examined before, might be the brief and symbolic denial of the privilege of the immediate interpersonal activity because the child has violated and taken for granted that privilege. Consequences should never involve food, sleep, exercise, self-respect or general belonging. Sometimes this endeavor can be quite a challenge.

One of the most difficult misbehaviors to handle is the refusal to try to keep quiet or on one's cot during nap time. First, we have to realize that this can be difficult for a young child. Nap time can dredge up all sorts of anxieties, over separation, nightmares or bedwetting. If the environment does not promote relaxation and trust, it will be that much more difficult to help children to let go and at least try to fall asleep. Obviously, children cannot and should not be intimidated or threatened into going to sleep (any more than babies should cry themselves to sleep, but that's a different story), and we are hampered by the need for quiet and calm from doing much of anything strategically. But one might employ a logic that goes like this: "If you don't stay on your cot now, then you will have to stay on your cot and rest later, while the other children are playing," because, "you need the rest to get the energy you'll need, and you didn't get it when you were supposed to," or, "you didn't do what we are supposed to do during rest time, so you'll have to practice it when I can give you more help." Hey, it well may not work, but it sets the right tone and message, assuming it is a reasonable expectation that that child remain on his/her cot and try to sleep. Otherwise, more emphasis should be placed on the aspect of not disturbing others who need their sleep or relaxation. As a process, discipline does *not* have to work immediately. I am not sure how many biting toddlers have had their biting "cured" by providing a basket of carrot and celery sticks and telling them that they may bite that but not children, but something is learned in the process regardless. In that case, an alternative provides the lesson. But there is another fundamental difference, a reality of discipline that this article cannot avoid.

This article should not end on a naïve note. The teacher *is* responsible to guarantee safety and establish reasonable order. To that extent, there is not always the luxury of a long-term process, as in the case of a child with a severe biting problem. Children who may be in some jeopardy or discomfort cannot always afford it, and neither can the child who jeopardizes and discomforts them. It is not expected that that child will learn overnight how to control him/herself or why s/he should behave differently, but s/he has to be stopped nonetheless. In essence, we have to do that *for* him/her while s/he is learning to do it him/herself. (This is in fact our role in many areas, to substitute for children's sense of conscience, cause and effect, justice, self-awareness, self-control, self-esteem, etc. where they are not sufficiently developed but are nevertheless required by the life situation, thus helping the child learn how to eventually do it autonomously.) The children have to be protected from him/her and s/he from him/herself. With a child with such poor impulse control or aggressive tendencies, we would soon have parents pushing for the child's expulsion and a rush to label and perhaps even drug him/her. These are grave consequences for the child, and we would have failed in our responsibility. But we cannot fail in our other basic responsibility either: to uphold the safety and welfare of all of the children. In essence, we would have to develop strategies to buy time, while we did engage in the longer term process of understanding the child, of helping the child to begin to understand and of building constructive relationships with the child and between

the children. We cannot and should not try to circumvent that process, and must maintain the primary focus on the needs and feelings that underlie behavior, but without "excusing" or failing to deal with the behavior on its own merits and its own ramifications. We would quite likely have to assign a staff member to shadow such a child, so that someone is close by to prevent harm and talk the child through situations tangibly. We would have to work together to develop strategies for the short and long term, and perhaps in some cases something of the nature of a temporary star chart would be justifiable. We would be trying to keep the child with us (rather than rejecting him/her) and keep his/her self-esteem and social acceptance in tact, while we began to help the child develop the perspectives, tools and inner controls needed to function with more autonomy and stability.

Ultimately, it all comes down to us, to our caring, our integrity, our optimism, our persistence and our skill. It comes down to us, first and foremost in the disciplinary process, as a role model, someone who practices what s/he "preaches," who tangibly demonstrates the expectations that would perhaps otherwise be too amorphous and untrustworthy. Without that critical ingredient, attempts at discipline would be hypocritical and doomed. And it comes down to the quality of the relationships we establish with children. It comes down to understanding children, developmentally and individually, to start to know what is appropriate to expect of them, what is important to know about them and how is effective to work with them. It comes down to accepting children. That does not mean accepting everything they do, but it means accepting them, along with the inescapable fact that what they do is a product of what they have individually inherited and experienced, that the causes of their misbehavior are not for faulting but for finding. It comes down to respecting and valuing and trusting children, and planting the seeds for them to learn to respect and value themselves and one another. It comes down to children understanding and respecting and trusting us, and we accepting and respecting and trusting ourselves in what well could be the most difficult, the most important and the most rewarding job a teacher can have.