

## **BOOK REVIEWS**

### **Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community**

**by Alfie Kohn**

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Kohn's *Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community* contains eight power-packed, thought-provoking chapters that address the issues of so-called "carrots and sticks" classroom management systems. The information presented urges us to critically consider the systems stemming from these theories which influence classroom practice. The book discusses the long-term effects (or lack thereof) of using external rewards, implementing punishments, and only employing teacher-directed instruction. These traditional (and common) methodologies are compared to the non-traditional approaches believed to help us avoid the desire for compliance from our students and move us more towards a picture of true classroom community.

The claims made by Kohn in this book may seem to counter many people's beliefs, but this is largely due to the system we have been conditioned to both endure in our educational experiences and promote in our own classrooms. The text reveals the true nature of the classroom management systems typically employed in most classrooms, all which share the common thread of one purpose: compliance from students. When our traditional management techniques are juxtaposed with the ideologies of a classroom community, the less reasonable and more flawed our customary techniques appear.

While there are no magical formulas within this book and nor is there a 'five-step plan' included that paves the way for an easy shift into nontraditional classroom setups, Kohn still offers us what he refers to as "prerequisites" to building a community. Like most successes in the educational field, building a community takes both time and commitment. The kind of community to strive for, he suggests, is one that goes beyond just getting to know your students during morning meetings or at the beginning of the school year. It ties into the purpose and presentation of your curriculum. Allowing students to have a voice and make

choices regarding their academic experiences is highly significant to building community.

If we want to create a class, and world, full of learners who engage in collaborative discussions, conscious decision making, and critical thinking, then we must cease to only expect and plead for compliance. Instead, is it not important to help promote autonomy? The moment that we decide that the needs of our students trump our own internal “need” for power, the way our classrooms are operated will drastically change—for the better. Only when we begin to relinquish our “power” and hand it over to those whose minds we are striving to cultivate can we truly shift the climates of our classrooms from that of compliance to community.

*Beyond Discipline* speaks extensively and poignantly about the flaws in our education system, particularly in regards to how behavior is addressed and the “rule of law” under which classrooms are operated, but it also gives us a glimmer of hope—a depiction of what could be. What starts out as a revolutionary idea (ridding ourselves of any former ideas about the “management” of classrooms and the behaviors that occur within them), may actually serve as the impetus that drives us to reform of the education system. Whether you selected this book because its contents are controversial and clash with your beliefs, or you chose the book because it echoes the principles you stand for, the text entices.

### Reviewer details

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