

Teaching Inner Discipline to Students:

An Interview with Barbara Coloroso

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This paper introduces Barbara Coloroso's theory of inner discipline as it relates to education and features an interview with her on the subject.

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The purpose of this interview was to expand on Barbara Coloroso's theory of inner discipline and ask relevant questions about implementing this in the classroom. We also discussed how instilling inner discipline in students can impact the larger community far beyond our education system.

Barbara Coloroso is a renowned expert in the field of education and parenting, with emphasis on special education and discipline theory. She holds both a bachelors and masters in special education from the University of Northern Colorado. She began teaching in 1970 and has since gone on to become a globally recognized lecturer and consultant on bullying, education, and her inner discipline theory. She is the author of several internationally bestselling books, including: *kids are worth it! Giving Your Child the Gift of Inner Discipline; Parenting Through Crisis—Helping Kids in Times of Loss, Grief and Change; The Bully, the Bullied, and the*

Bystander—From Pre-School to High School, How Parents and Teachers Can Help Break the Cycle of Violence; and Just Because It's Not Wrong Doesn't Make It Right—From Toddlers to Teens, Teaching Kids to Think and Act Ethically.

In this session, Barbara Coloroso (personal communication, Aug 7, 2015) discusses her theory's applicability in the teacher-student relationship; the challenges of teaching integrated classrooms; how rewards are punishments in disguise; how to increase the success of tutoring and one-on-one instruction; and how to lead a class assertively as a "backbone" teacher.

Informed consent was given by all participants.

PANEL:

CAMERON FILAS [CF]

BARBARA COLOROSO [BC]

CF: Barbara, can you explain your inner discipline theory in a nutshell and how that differs from a traditional punishment regimen?

BC: The words discipline and punishment are often used interchangeably and they simply are not. Punishment is something you do *to* a child. Discipline is something you do *with* a child. Punishment is adult oriented, it's imposed from without, it arouses resentment, and basically teaches kids to respond from three F's: fear, fight back, or flee. Discipline on the other hand, if you go back to the Latin word, means to give life to a child's learning. It shows kids what they've done wrong, gives them ownership of the problem, gives them ways to solve it, and most importantly it does something punishment will never do; it leaves a child's dignity intact. And that's our goal. Second to that, our goal is to help them develop their own inner discipline so that they behave in spite of what others are doing and when no one's looking. These are truly ethical

humans that we're raising; who know how to think, not just what to think; who stand up for values and against injustices; who are not easily led; who don't do to please; who have what Carl Sagan said all three year olds have, the gift of skepticism and wonder, the why and the wow. If we can get the "Wow, look at the rain, look at the rainbow," and, "why," if we can lead that sense and help nurture it through their school years, a sixteen year old who has that sense of wow tends not to harm themselves or others. And the why, when their friends say, "Let's go vandalize that building," they're more ready to say, "Why on earth would I do that?" because you raise them to have their own inner sense of discipline, of self-discipline. But it doesn't just happen.

CF: What are some strategies that can be implemented to help instill this sense of inner discipline in students and children?

BC: It helps if home and school are working together but I've also had people say, "You know, they go home to a lousy situation." I can't control that, but I can control what happens five and a half hours a day in a classroom. In the sense that I can help them by letting them make choices and decisions that are age appropriate and ability appropriate and let them make mistakes that are not life threatening or morally threatening or unhealthy and allow them to experience the consequences of those. I break discipline procedures into three categories: Has the child made a mistake? Have they created mischief? Or, have they caused mayhem? So, people often say to me, "Why would you need discipline for a mistake?" Because, discipline is not punishment; it's giving life to the child's learning. I use the example often in school lectures: a child runs out of art class and unbeknownst to himself his felt tip marker lid has come off and he's marking up the wall, that's a mistake; another child draws tic-tac-toe on the wall, that's mischief; another child writes a kid's name and a gross term next to it, that's mayhem. And the way we treat those with discipline procedures matters. When any kid makes any kind of mistake they have to own it, fix

it, learn from it, and move on; it's very simple. If we give teachers that backbone, it provides a lot of flexibility based on the situation, the child, what has actually happened, and what were the consequences. Most times, with mistakes, the mark on the wall needs to be fixed. You can't blame the felt tip marker, you can't blame the teacher, you can't blame the fact that the wall was there, and you just have to own that, "I marked up the wall. I didn't intend to, but I marked up the wall. Now I need to own it. I need to fix it." The janitor can get the scrubbing stuff but the kid needs to scrub it. Learn from it, "I'm going to put my felt tip marker in my bag. I'm going to put a lid on it." And move on. It's over, it's done. That's very different from punitive measures where you put kids' names on the board, you keep them from advancement if they mess up, or you give them stars when they do something great. I'm not into that, at all.

CF: That's a really good example of how to handle, especially in the classroom setting, something that would be considered a mistake. What would you say, if we were to deem that what the child did were mischief or mayhem?

BC: Okay, let's do mischief. I'll give you an example that happened in our own school setting. My son, in second grade, broke a beaver bait jar at the Natural History Museum. Could have been worse. Could have been an irreplaceable dinosaur leg. Very lucky, very replaceable beaver bait jar. He was not punished. He was not paddled, which by the way is still allowed in 25 states in this country. He wasn't sent to the principal's office, which could have been punishment depending on how the principal handled it. He didn't have to write 550 times, "I will not break a beaver bait jar." And he didn't get banned from the next field trip, which sadly happens to a lot of kids with special needs and then they never learn to go on a field trip. Instead his teacher very wisely said, "Joe, you have a serious problem here. I know you can handle it."

CF: And how was that handled?

BC: He had to write a letter to the Natural History Museum. He had to replace the beaver bait jar, which is a trip unto itself; and in case you don't know, beaver bait is female beaver urine. That kid will never break another beaver bait jar. And before he could go on the next field trip there were conditions. He wasn't banned, he just had to have all this done before he could go and have in writing how he would handle it then and now, creatively and constructively on the next field trip. So he was shown what he'd done wrong, given ownership of the problem, and most importantly it did something that punishment never does, it left the child's dignity intact. But the key here is: did they have fun? Yes. And that really upsets people who are into punishment. I am seeing administrators truly discipline a child, but since they're not hanging by their toenails at noon on public display and in pain somebody will say, "You didn't do anything to them," which again is what punishment is. But yes, he had fun. On Saturday morning he got to go with the game warden, got up early, got his knapsack ready. Then the game warden very patiently explained to Joe how he had to collect female beaver urine and the kid's eyes got huge. He looked at me. He looked at his dad who was now smiling. He said to the game warden, "I have to do that?" I thought the game warden's comment was classic, he said, "Well, I didn't break the beaver bait jar." People say to me, "Well wasn't it a mistake that he broke the beaver bait jar?" Nu-uh, he was swinging his backpack when the lady was explaining dinosaur legs. He and his buddy were swinging them. That's mischief. That's the tic-tac-toe on the wall. He didn't mean to break the beaver bait jar but he shouldn't have been swinging his backpack around.

CF: Right, so it still falls under that category of mischief and would not be considered an honest mistake.

BC: That's very different from being in a lab class in high school and accidentally dropping, with no intent at all, a beaker that had caustic material. The kid cannot pick up the caustic

material but he can go get the HAZMAT kit. The teacher can show them how to do it. The student has to replace the beaker. He has to do that experiment borrowing from somebody else, taking one out of the cupboard, or sharing a beaker. And then you move on. That's what a mistake is. The mischief is the beaver bait jar.

CF: How about an example of mayhem?

BC: Let's say a kid wrote a gross term and another kid's name on the wall. You go from the four steps of discipline, and on that third step you do a restorative peace. It's called restorative justice. Restitution, resolution, and reconciliation. The first part is you have to own and fix what you did. You have to take that off the wall and own that you did it. And if it's on the internet that's another whole thing, but still have to try to get it off the internet as best as you can. Then you figure out how you're going to keep it from happening again.

CF: How can work towards keeping that from reoccurring?

BC: Most kids will say, "I will never do that again." Well that's what you won't do. Tell me what you will do. This is where your wisdom as an educator comes in. The student says, "Well, I don't know." Maybe you can call her by her given name. Maybe you can give up using the internet for a while, since you spread an ugly rumor about somebody. Maybe you can get on the internet and send another message that you said something ugly about somebody, if they received it to please delete it; if you sent it on would you please send this message on, that what I did was mean and cruel and it was not right to do. Notice there's no, "I'm sorry." I will never demand an, "I'm sorry," because it probably won't be heartfelt. The last part, he harmed or she harmed the kid whose name they called. So when the targeted kid feels comfortable sitting down with the person who wrote these gross terms- and we've said to the targeted kid, "I hear you, I'm here for you, I believe you, you're not in this alone, that was not your fault, what that kid did was

mean, that's their problem, and there are things you can do whenever you see something like that, and there are people you can talk to,"- now we sit down with the targeted kid and the kid who did the mean and cruel thing. And the perpetrator has to say to the targeted kid, "I wrote that name up there. It was mean, it was cruel, it was vicious. I hurt you." If an, "I'm sorry," comes that's fine. But they don't say, "I didn't mean to," because they did. If they have a smirk on their face, we stop it right away because they obviously have no remorse. But if there's a real sense of, "I really did blow this and I hurt you and I know that. This is how I'm going to fix it. What I'd like to do is I'm going to call you by your given name and I'm going to sit in the front of English class so you don't have to even sit near me." Did they come up with those ideas? Probably not. But again, that's where our wisdom as educators is used. What we do, it's not conflict resolution, when there's been a mean and cruel act; what it is, is a restorative peace. We help the target to deal with the horrors that have happened to them and help them understand, "It's not your fault, what they did was mean and cruel, and there are ways you can stand up to that." What we do in that situation is we empower the kid who was targeted and we humble the kid who was unkind. We don't humiliate them, we humble them. Punishment would try to humiliate them; put them on a street corner with a little pig nose or something like some parents have done. I'm not into that. I'm not into humiliating somebody. I'm into humbling them and then helping them move beyond that. And that's what discipline is all about, holding them accountable for what they've done. Now not all mayhem is about mean and cruel. It can be severe vandalism. It can be a one-on-one fight. But in the end what the person who's doing it has to do is the three R's.

CF: Restitution, resolution, and reconciliation. Those are great examples. It seems like there's a lot of these fine lines, but once you really go beyond the surface there are some distinct differences between discipline and punishment; and between humiliation and humbling. And it's

the challenge of both parents and educators to understand those differences and really work on that.

BC: Yes, and discern how you respond. In my *Parenting Through Crisis* book I have a whole chapter on mistakes, mischief, and mayhem.

CF: My follow up question for you, because those were some great examples of how your inner discipline theory could be used in the classroom, would be: What distinct challenges might an educator face that a parent would not?

BC: The fact that we're in a classroom setting. You can't always do a one-on-one with a child immediately. Arthur Eddington, the famous mathematician, said, we used to think if we knew one, we knew two; because one and one is two. But what we're realizing is that we have to study the "and." Because when you put more than one kid in a classroom, the "and" creates a different dynamic and kids behave differently. Even in a bullying scenario, they get caught in what's known as, that Sebastian Haffner, in *Defying Hitler*, wrote, the trap of comradeship. They get trapped and they begin to behave differently. So those are issues that come up that are very different than when you're dealing with one-on-one at home. But there are some other things that I don't want to leave out here. Part of helping kids develop self-discipline is giving them from a very young age, in the classroom or at home, the opportunity to make choices, decisions, and mistakes that are age appropriate and ability appropriate; and constantly increasing that so that when they leave our homes and our schools they're making all of their own decisions and should be responsible for all of their own behavior. And as you increase responsibilities and decisions, you decrease limits and boundaries. As you decrease limits and boundaries it becomes their own inner discipline. So instead of coming down heavy with a hammer, as punishment does, they're learning that, "I am fully capable of making choices and decisions and mistakes and I'm wholly

accountable for what I've done." They begin to believe at a young age that they have agency in their life and that means, "What I do matters." The way we compliment kids: abundant praise, tangible goodies, and our presence for a reward interferes with ethical behavior.

CF: There's an upcoming question about rewards and their usefulness, but what I'm hearing from you now is that rewards can lead to unethical behavior?

BC: What it tends to do is make wonderful henchmen for bullies. So when the high status social bully says to all the other girls, "I don't like the new girl. If you want to be in my group don't eat lunch with her." I want a really self-disciplined ethical human being be the one to say, "That's mean. That's cruel." And have the courage, and it takes courage, to go sit next to the new girl; because she's going to do that at cost. There's not going to be any scratch-and-sniff stickers, stars, lunch with the principal, or catch them being good awards. What she'll probably get is, "Old miss goody two shoes," or, "You're next." And I want a student, when their friends say, "Look at that kid over there, different skin color, religion, gender, physical or mental ability. Let's go mess them up." I want the inner disciplined student to be the one to say, "No." When the burden's heavy, when their friends say, "What are you chicken? What? Do you like them?" No. Then how do we begin to do that? Giving them choices, decisions, and holding them accountable for their mistakes; by teaching them to care deeply about other human beings, to share generously their gifts, and to help willingly. Those are all integral parts. We can't just have discipline in the classroom. We have to create a more genuinely caring environment where it's conducive for kids to care deeply and share generously and help willingly. James Nachtwey, the great war photographer, said, do good because good is good to do, it's good for you and it's good for the person you're doing it for. And whenever you enhance a child's sense of self, it enhances

their sense of self-discipline as well. So it's not just what we do, it's what we invite children to do.

CF: Stop me if I'm putting words in your mouth but what I'm getting from your answer to that question, about what challenges an educator might face that a parent wouldn't, is that it's a classroom setting so there's a lot more kids; but also, we need to, as educators, from a young age at the earliest levels of school, really focus on giving children the ability to make decisions and be responsible for their own behavior.

BC: Exactly. If you look at *kids are worth it!* you'll see bribes and threats, rewards and punishments, and the alternatives to those. Instead of abundant praise you want encouragement, you want feedback, and you want a sense of deep caring, and discipline: those four things. The encouragement is, "I believe in you, I trust in you, I know you can handle this, you're listened to, you're cared for, you're very important to me." They need to hear that every single day, in lots of ways. The feedback comes in three C's: compliments, comments, and constructive criticism. The best compliment you can give a child is, "Thank you." We don't need all these abundant praises and catch them being good awards because the flip of that is, "If I don't get caught, what I did wasn't bad." But they do need to be thanked. Thank you for walking the dog, he's been inside all day and look how happy he is to be outside. Thank you for watering that plant, it was wilting and now it's standing up strong. Thank you for inviting the new kid to sit at the lunch table so he could feel a part of the crowd. What you are doing is stroking the deed not the kid, being very specific to the deed, and letting that child know what his or her action did for a dog or plant or for the new kid. We don't do that often enough. And yes, you can get excited. We get excited when a five year old makes it down the hill without the training wheels touching. We get excited when a sixteen year old makes it around the parking lot without popping the clutch. The little kid

finally gets through a maze that he's struggled with or a math problem and you feel excited. But it's their excitement that you mimic and mirror. Praise dependent kids don't get excited until you get excited, and I don't want praise dependent kids. So you need to give them compliments.

They also need good solid instruction on what it means to be an ethical human being, what it means to care about others, share generously, and help willingly. They need to know how to read and write and do arithmetic. It all fits as a piece of the puzzle. It isn't just that we're going to have well-disciplined kids who don't know how to read. And then the third C, in the feedback, is constructive criticism. I don't tell kids, "That's wrong," very often. Usually it's, "That's not right," because it's open to two things: it's bigger than right and wrong, and it invites a kid to fix it. If two girls make up a game only two can play, because they didn't want the other girl to play with them because she had the gall to play with the new girl the day before, there's nothing wrong with making up a game only two can play, but it's not right if your intent is to exclude somebody. That's important. The next thing is caring deeply about other human beings, and sharing generously, and helping willingly, which are the antidotes to hating and hoarding and harming. And the last is discipline. So you put that whole package together: encouragement, feedback, deep caring, and discipline. And that's key, in a classroom setting, if we can keep those four things in mind.

CF: Absolutely. I really liked your phrase, to focus on- and it's such a nuance, but it makes sense- it's not that it's wrong; it's that it's not right. If something is wrong it means it's broken and you messed up and it's over. There's no fixing it. I think that's kind of a golden nugget right there, for educators. It's not that it's wrong; it's that it's not right. Obviously, just in saying that implies that it can be made right. My next question for you is that, in higher education today, future teachers, like me, are often taught the age old method of training students into good

behavior through rewards. So punishment as a deterrent tends to be frowned upon, they don't tell you to paddle kids anymore, but rewards are no problem. I know you've discussed that rewards are essentially punishments in disguise, correct?

BC: Yeah, bribes and threats are the flip side of the same coin; and they don't buy us much, rewards and punishments. I am amazed that we have this heavy emphasis on praise when we realize punishment doesn't work. I think the problem is we haven't adequately given educators a productive alternative to rewards and punishments, because they do work. They work short term and they get kids to be very compliant. But I don't want compliant kids. In a democracy that's the last thing we need. We want kids standing up for values and against injustices. Not easily led, not doing to please. Being able to stand up for that little girl or boy in the classroom.

CF: Right, because if we're just giving them the gold star because they did something they're not concerned about why they did it, or whether it was good or not, they're just concerned about the self-advancement. I remember last semester I had a teacher, and I kind of got into it with them because I had been reading your book, and they were saying, "We don't punish kids, but we want to reward them. We can give them stickers or candy when they do something good." I brought it up to them that it's really just a punishment in disguise because if you say, "You're going to get a piece of candy or gold star for doing something," it's just like saying, "if you don't do this I'm going to take this away from you."

BC: We're fighting a battle here. And it's one that's worth fighting. Alfie Kohn wrote a book on it, *Punished by Rewards*. He was not for it, but many people now recognize that he was spot on. If you go to his website, he's got wonderful articles on bribes and threats and rewards and punishments and why they interfere with ethical behavior.

CF: I remember I've been taught about Alfie Kohn in many of my education classes but I didn't know he had articles on punishment and rewards; that's great. So in my discussion with my teacher, where I mentioned that rewards are really just punishments in disguise, they weren't really listening- they weren't having it. They were very adamant that rewards are good and they gave me some examples and I struggled with this, so I'm going to ask you what you think about it.

BC: Sure.

CF: This is still what's taught to future educators today: Rewards are good. You don't necessarily punish but rewards are just fine; they're A-Okay. The example she gave me was that, "After people get out into the real world, rewards are still used very often." For example, they said, [going with my proposed idea that rewards are punishments], "Telling employees that they'll get a bonus for doing xyz is similar to saying they'll have their bonuses taken away if they don't comply." I had to pause for a moment, and struggled with this, because it is true, they made a valid point that everywhere else in the world today- or at least in many situations we could point out- it's very common that the rewards system is in use.

BC: You're right. But I would have come back and said to them, "Are you in favor of merit pay?" That based on how well your students do, is whether you get paid this year or not. When you get kept or not, just solely based on their scores. And what if a group of kids comes in that are just lousy students? It's your problem. I don't think they'd be really impressed. That's why they have tenure. That's why professors fought merit pay. Besides they went home and did the dishes. They didn't get paid for that. Not everything do we get paid for. We happen to have an economic system. But does it make it right that Donald Trump, who doesn't work a day in his life, is a billionaire because of his manipulations, the way he's operated hedge funds and the

like? And you go to work and you don't make near that amount of money. It's not fair, but it's the way the economic system works. Somebody working at McDonald's, or in the beet fields, working as hard as you or me, during that same 24 hour period makes one-third of what we make. So using the economic system is dangerous. Then I'd say to them, "Do you get paid for doing the dishes or doing the laundry at home? I don't think so." We compare work to school where they're not comparable.

CF: You bring up a really good point with that merit pay. I think that really puts the spotlight right on the issue and brings it back in to the field of education. It says, when this is being taught to undergraduate students who will soon be teachers themselves, that rewards are okay because it happens elsewhere in the world, but then at the same time, exactly like you said, teacher's will complain, "We don't want our pay based on our students' test scores. We don't want our pay based on this or that."

BC: Nobody will take special needs kids in their classroom. They'll be punished for it because those kids are not going to advance at the same rate. We're also seeing it where merit pay is based on how much you improve their scores. But you have very bright kids that are already doing very well, and you don't increase those scores a certain percentage which is impossible, because they're already doing so well, you're going to get punished. Good teachers will get punished. And that's exactly the word, punishment.

CF: A lot of classrooms today are a lot more integrated, which have the students with learning and emotional disabilities- or either/or, or sometimes both- in what way could the inner discipline theory be applied to these students? What I'm trying to say is, is there an alternate approach which might work better? And I'm talking about the kids who aren't necessarily on the same learning curve as their peers. So maybe their peers are reading at a tenth grade level and

they're reading at a much lower level; or perhaps they have a harder time controlling their behavior in the classroom. Let's talk about that.

BC: Well, I'm a special education teacher. My degrees are in LD, ED, and MR [learning disabled, emotionally disabled, and mental retardation; respectively]. The original work that I did was done for kids with special needs and I translated it into working with normal kids. So, it came in reverse. The only difference is, when you talk about a "backbone" classroom, you have to have smaller vertebrae; more of them. So you break it into smaller steps. So then whether it's academically, socially, or work-study wise, you have to break it into smaller steps for them. And still hold them accountable. But recognize that in the differences they have we have to adapt some things. But I don't change disciplining them; giving life to their learning. We don't rescue them because they marked on the wall and they can't very easily fix it. We give them ways to fix it so they have the satisfaction of knowing they can correct their own mistakes. You don't change what you do; you break it into smaller segments for learning. When you're into punishment you really have to modify, based on their IEP. But when you're into discipline you don't.

CF: You brought up a great point about IEP's, and I think it makes perfect sense to allow for accommodations while still instilling discipline. Teachers have a responsibility to teach discipline, however it needs to be broken down, to all students. It's about the students.

BC: Yeah. We've got to remember, in high school, people will say, "Well, I teach math. And I've got 40 kids." No. You're teaching 40 kids math. You're teaching kids math. And if you have to make accommodations for each one of those kids, you do it in a way that all can learn through. Because don't you want that kid to learn math? Maybe they will need some help outside of class. Maybe they will need to have a tutor. But it's a kid. And we have to remember that. We're

teaching kids the subject; we're not teaching the subject. If you think you're teaching the subject go teach an online course somewhere. My bias came through just there [laughter].

CF: That's a great nugget, "You're not teaching the subject, you're teaching the kids." You brought up a good point that sometimes, if you have these large classroom sizes, kids might need that tutoring or the one-on-one instruction sessions, because maybe they're behind in certain subjects or they're not keeping up with their peers. What would you say is the most important thing to practice when providing tutoring or one-on-one instruction with an individual student, especially considering they might also need that additional support emotionally and educationally speaking?

BC: That's why, as a special education teacher, we need to keep tabs on kids when they're integrated into the classroom; because teachers can't do it alone. Regular classroom teachers can't do it alone. We need to be there to support them. The parents need to be there to support them. The outside community needs to be there to support them. Do we have university students that are willing to come in and freely tutor kids who need help? Are you willing to do some of your work that you're trained and very skilled at, are you willing to do that? Kids need to know that there are other people in the community that care about them; that they do matter.

CF: So the support from both parents and community is what you would say is the most important thing when considering tutoring and that one-on-one instruction?

BC: That we are willing as a community. Maybe retired teachers would like to donate their time in the classroom. We've got to be willing to say, "These kids matter," and not to fight them off. Because they don't go away, they grow up. We're in this all together. We have to remember that. As Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu said, we're interdependent, interrelated, interconnected, all of us in various generations; we're in this mess together. Those kids matter. And if we don't vote a

bond issue; if we don't vote for more services for kids; what kind of message are we sending?

We've got to believe we're connected. We're not us and them.

CF: Going back to punishment versus discipline- and I've seen this a couple times, I've been to a few schools doing internships for my undergraduate studies- in some instances a student may prove to be completely unresponsive to attempts at keeping them on task. They might be causing a class-wide disruption. We'll call it mischief or mayhem. At what point do you have to send them to principal or counselor's office?

BC: If the kid is so out of control that they are not able to learn and they are interfering with the ability of other kids' to get on. You know first of all I have to have good skills in the classroom, and a lot of that can be avoided. But it's a two-way thing here. If a kid's totally out of control or being vicious to another kid, I can't deal with that in a 40-minute session. The counselor or administrator needs to deal with it; there is a place for that.

CF: Absolutely. That's a great point because it shows the reality of being a teacher. We want to have the one-on-one discipline to help students learn from their mistakes and learn from their mischief and whatnot, but it's not always possible in large class sizes in just a 40-minute span.

BC: No, and sometimes they need more than we can ever give them in a classroom. Their needs are too great. We've forgotten, when we did integrated classrooms that sometimes kids need even more. They have a right to a good education. That didn't mean it had to be fulltime in a regular classroom. I think we made the mistake of assuming it does.

CF: It's a little disheartening to think about, that that's how our education system is. And it's been ingrained for so long. I think most educators, the vast majority I would say, are in it for the right reasons and they care about the kids and they want the kids to be successful and they know the techniques, like, "Don't do to the kids, you do with them." But I think sometimes it just gets

lost in the fast paced, “Here comes the next group of kids, everybody sit down, I’m teaching you this.” And I think over time, that’s why we hear about these burnout rates of new teachers after a few years. Maybe in the future we’ll see less of that.

BC: We’ll keep working at it. We’ve got kids and we’ve got to deal with it right now. The reality is we have to deal with it right now. We can look at future training, we have to adapt, but what are we going to do when school starts in September? Can we make that commitment? Can we be right there for kids?

CF: So in your books and other publications you talk about the three types of authority figures: brickwall, jellyfish, and backbone. Teachers obviously want to strive to that state of assertiveness without being an authoritarian and without too much leniency. So what’s a good way that you’ve found, for teachers to regularly self-assess whether they’re hitting that sweet spot, that middle ground of being a backbone?

BC: First of all, it’s not a middle ground. Back in the old days there were some people who did authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive; and basically called that a middle ground. Brickwall, jellyfish, and backbone are more from the humanistic point of view. It’s not a middle ground. You don’t take a little bit of brickwall and a little bit of jellyfish and it makes a backbone.

Brickwall is rigid and controlling; so nothing from that do you want to take. And jellyfish is no structure; laissez-faire. Backbone, if you look at a backbone, it gives you flexibility you don’t get from a rigid brick wall, and we need to be flexible when we’re working with kids. But it also gives us an environment that’s conducive to creative, constructive, and responsible activity you don’t get from a jellyfish. And we need both. We need flexibility and an environment that invites creative, constructive, and responsible activity. And you aren’t the first to ever merge those two. But it’s very much from a behaviorist point of view, and that’s what is taught in our schools, the

difference is there. So from the humanist point of view you look at the authoritarian, very controlling manipulator, there's not a whole lot of good in that; nor is there in the laissez-faire. What you want is that backbone, where you can flesh out the answers basically. It's a living entity, you flesh out the answers. There are no flat answers there. How do you know you're doing it? Are you giving kids opportunities to make choices, decisions, and mistakes? Holding them accountable to that? Are you giving them opportunities to increase responsibilities and decision making, and decrease limits and boundaries? Are you holding them accountable when they make mistakes, mischief, and mayhem? That's a backbone model. Are you teaching kids how to think, not what to think? There's a whole list in the book, and I don't have it memorized, if you can check those off and see what areas you need to improve. Look and see, "Am I little more brickwall in some of these areas and how can I change that? How can I be more effectively backbone?"

CF: Those were some great self-assessment questions. That wraps it up. Thank you very much for your time, Barbara.

BC: Thank you. Those were very thoughtful questions and I enjoyed it.