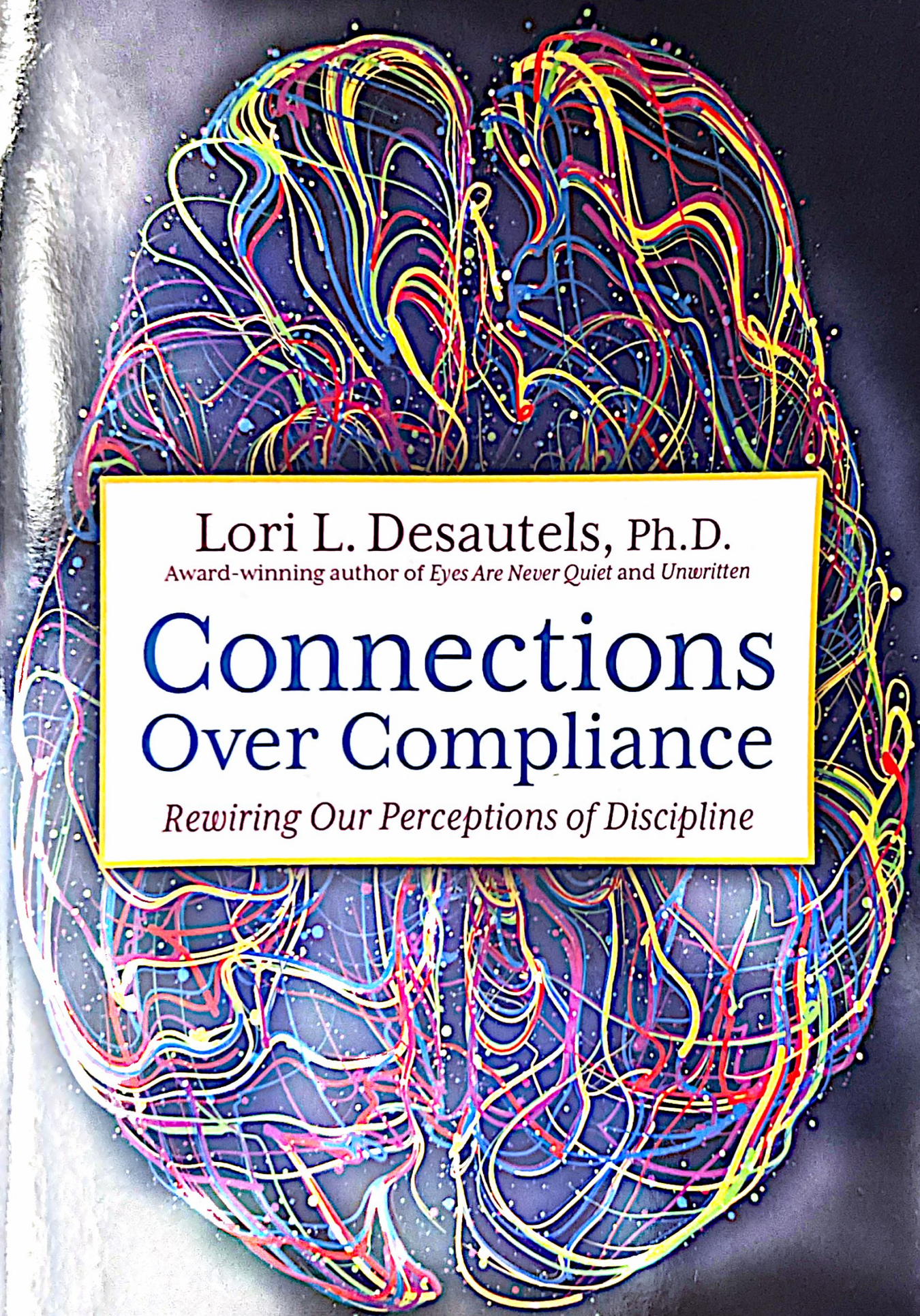
"***Transformational!*** A paradigm shift in education based in **relational neuroscience.**"

—MONA DELAHOOKE, Ph.D., Author of *Beyond Behaviors*



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Award-winning author of *Eyes Are Never Quiet* and *Unwritten*

Connections Over Compliance

Rewiring Our Perceptions of Discipline

INCLUDES TWO-PART PREFACE:

- **A Pandemic Crisis Calls for a Re-Envisioning of Our Educational Systems**
- **Our Brain's Development and the Impact of Implicit Bias and Racial Disparities and Discipline Gaps in Our Schools**

Connections Over Compliance
Rewiring Our Perceptions of Discipline

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Print Edition ISBN: 978-1-948018-89-0

eBook Edition ISBN: 978-1-948018-91-3

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020942539

Edited by Alan K. Lipton

Cover illustration ©Garry Killian | iStock
Black & White Illustrations ©Regan Desautels

Wyatt-MacKenzie Publishing
DEADWOOD, OREGON

CHAPTER 2

Student Behaviors Start with You!

"When we truly care for ourselves, it becomes possible to care more profoundly for other people. The more alert and sensitive we are to our own needs, the more loving and generous we can be toward others."

EDA LESHAN

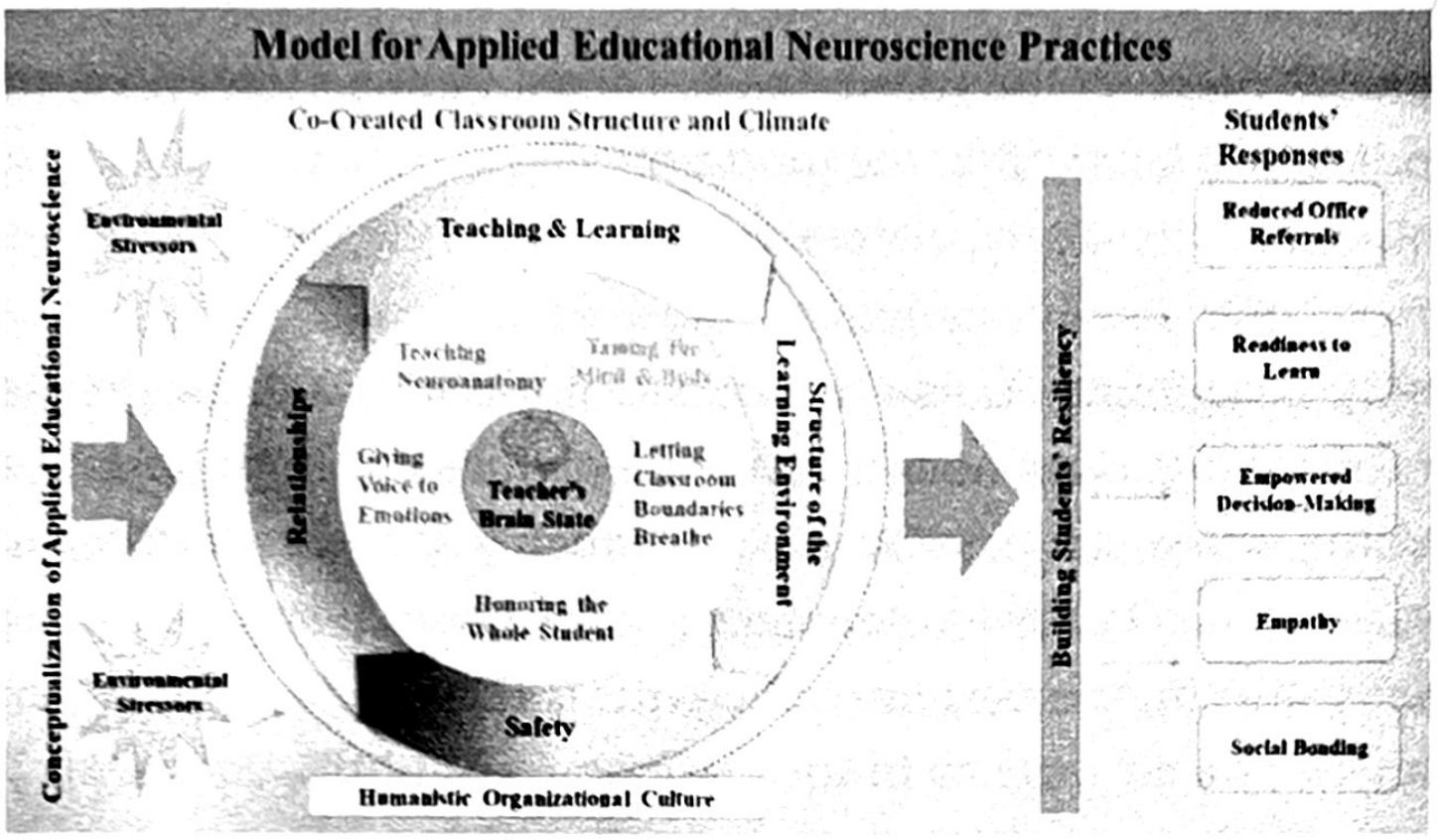
Behavior management is not about students. Behavior management is about the adults. If we are to shift our perceptions of discipline, I feel we need to move away from the words "behavior management," as we are never called to manage another person. Why begin exploring this new perception of discipline with educator and parent brain state? This is important because it's the initial shift in re-envisioning discipline, and it begins with looking under the hood at our own brain state, which consists of personal beliefs, perceptions, and an accumulation of experiences that have generated how we view and implement discipline in this moment. A dysregulated adult cannot regulate a child.

An educator who listens deeply, stays connected through the chaos, and perceives a crisis as an opportunity is the person at the heart of brain-aligned relational discipline. The research originating from the developmental social neurosciences is clear. Secure attachments with a caregiver promote healthy brain development and the ability to emotionally regulate through the child's and adolescent's developing years. Dr. Allen Schore explains the development in this way: "The quality of early attachment is known to affect social relationships later in life. Therefore, it is conceivable that the level of opiate activity in a mother and her infant may not only affect behaviors during infancy but may also affect the development of an individual's style of engaging and seeking out supportive relationships later in life."[1]

We can no longer discuss and explore discipline and behavior management without considering the brain state of the adult and the relational temperature between student and educator. As Dr. Bruce Perry states, "The key to the success of any educational experience is the capacity to 'get to the cortex.' Yet, each year, nearly one-third of all children attending U.S. public schools will have significantly impaired cortical functioning and behavioral challenges due to abuse, neglect, domestic violence, poverty, and other adversities."[2] Understanding the effects of trauma and adversity on a child's brain and how these effects alter the ability to learn and behave is essential to improving our public education system, which is currently facing a significant increase with the mental and emotional health needs of our students. These emotional and mental challenges often show up as negative behaviors. Children who have experienced significant adversity and trauma will be in a persistent state of alarm and will often be unable to focus and concentrate when they walk into our classrooms and schools. We now are beginning to understand that when students are in this survival brain state, everything they perceive as unsafe and unfamiliar becomes a threat! In this survival state, relational brain-aligned discipline must start with the educator's brain state.

Being aware and adjusting my tone of voice, posture, and facial expression can either soothe or unintentionally escalate a child's or adolescent's activated stress response systems. Because of this, students will pay more attention to a teacher's nonverbal cues. How I care for my brain state and ability to regulate my own emotions is critical in implementing a relational brain-aligned and preventive discipline framework. Educator brain state and co-regulation are at the heart of relational discipline. We begin to build sustainable relationships, mutual respect, and trust through emotional attunement described as a dyadic comforting conversation between educator and student. The truth is that we work harder for people we like, and when students feel respected and trust us, we are helping to shape brain architecture that produces their reasoning, regulation, problem-solving, and attentional skills. When children remain in alarm states, cognitive learning is impaired.

The following graphic created by our colleague Dr. Shelia Dennis shares the pathway to resiliency through the application of these relational practices. It illustrates how teacher brain state can drive this shift in our thinking and belief systems, creating a new lens through which we can perceive—and embrace—relational discipline!



Brain-aligned relational discipline embraces the knowledge and understanding that discipline is an expression of a compassionate presence, warm demanding, and guidance without coercion. Discipline is not something we do to students; it is something we want to develop within them. The foundation for this new perception of school discipline is grounded in the social neurosciences speaking to attachment, co-regulation, educator brain state, and the strengthening of touch points, which are relationship and connection moments in our children's and adolescents' lives. Students spend over 13,000 hours in school; educators during this time have an opportunity to create a culture and climate conducive to the biosocial needs of human growth and development.

We traditionally and historically have implemented punishment and coercion techniques into our discipline practices, hoping that a bit of power, control, discomfort, or pain will change the students' behaviors. This is far from what occurs, as the most recent research shares. When we are disciplining children and adolescents who carry

in pain-based behaviors, traditional discipline can inadvertently escalate negative behaviors in both teacher and student, as survival brains cannot process rewards, consequences, or reason.

Our understanding continues to deepen in the knowledge that all behavior is communication. I have learned that the discipline of a student begins with my own state of mind, and that the chronic negative behaviors we observe so often are the results of brains bathed in pain. The students who need the most connection and understanding will ask for it in the most unloving ways.

June

A year ago, my course release at the University brought me to our fifth-grade classroom in the Indianapolis Public Schools. I was teaching two mornings a week, introducing students to their neuroanatomy and brain development. From my perspective, I was using novelty and high-engagement activities, absolutely enjoying every moment as a co-teacher in the classroom—until this moment. This moment began on a Wednesday morning with our entire class gathered in groups and tables of four. Walking the room, checking in with each group as they worked on the activity, I heard a thunderous crash followed by loud yelling as I jerked back around in alarm. One of the class's quietest, most introverted boys was lying on the floor next to his crumpled glasses. I ran over to him, crouched beside him, and looked up to see June (not her real name), a young adolescent girl twice the size of this boy, standing over both of us with her fist in the air. In that moment, as my heart continued to pound loudly, my ears rang, and the saliva left my mouth, I started screaming questions at her. "What did you do? What just happened?! Why did you do this?" "Fuck you," she screamed back at me. I raised my voice again and told her to leave the classroom, trembling and pointing to the door. I did not take a deep breath. I did not regulate my own nervous system. I unintentionally escalated her anger and most likely her fear ... all over again. I was completely dysregulated and shaking! We all felt high emotions as the classroom became increasingly chaotic. I had very little to no reasoning ability in that moment, as my prefrontal cortex had gone offline. I'd forgotten about pain-based

behavior and everything that I'd been teaching and presenting for the past few years.

Emotions are contagious. We all see and experience this when we unintentionally enter a power struggle or conflict with a student. Behavior management isn't about the student; it's about *me*. If I'm feeling rough and dysregulated, I become the mirror and reflection for those students who become increasingly irritated, defiant, oppositional, or shut down. Many of our most emotionally challenging students are walking into our classrooms and schools carrying in so much pain. That pain is often misunderstood and seen as intentional disrespect, indifference, or deviant behavior. Much pain must be met with much love, and this begins with us. We must care and attend to our own brain states and emotional barometers if we're to meet our students where they are in their brain development. When a student walks into class feeling distrustful and unsafe, we must meet them with connection, creating an environment where they are seen, felt, and heard.

This can be so challenging, as we can unknowingly interpret students' actions and words through our own emotional filters that our history of beliefs and past experience may have distorted. The awareness of how our own private logic is filled with experiences, relationships, pain, biases, and embedded belief systems is a critical part of the brain-aligned relational discipline process with our students. Self-reflection on the part of the educator is the cornerstone for relational discipline that begins creating new pathways for resiliency.

Educator Brain States

As I think about the opening quote of this chapter, I have never been more aware of how not only our own self-care affects our emotional, physical, and mental health, but also how the adversities and trauma of our children and others can create a secondary firestorm inside our own nervous systems as we re-experience the life adversities we thought we'd overcome. Secondary traumatic stress coupled with emotional fatigue profoundly affects our experiences of everyday life and relationships. When we are constantly attuning to negative

emotion, co-regulating students who are agitated, buffering the pain-based behaviors that trigger children and adolescents, *and* resetting boundaries with challenging behaviors and emotions from others, we often carry these worries into our perceptions, thoughts, and daily life experiences.

As Franciscan priest Richard Rohr states, "Our own pain can either transform us or we transmit it. Nobody benefits when we mirror the behaviors of children and adolescents in pain."[3]

All of this creates an emotional contagion of sorts, which is capable of slowly diminishing our sense of agency and purpose inside our own lives. We forget, moreover, that this emotional contagion is a part of our social survival, as our brains are social organs sensing and detecting the range of emotions and sensations we intuit from others in all moments. We are neurobiologically wired for attachment and relationships, and we are constantly reading the nonverbal and verbal communication cues of others as we evaluate what feels safe, familiar, threatening, distressing, hopeless, or exhausting.

Time and time again, I have experienced this process as an educator and a mother. I have felt my own emotions escalate when I unintentionally entered a conflict with a child or adolescent who had triggered me, activating my survival protective and defensive instincts so that my thinking and reasoning were shut down. This is exactly what happened to me on that Wednesday morning a year ago with our fifth-grade students. I was furious, sparked, and began asking questions and using words in the very moment of the chaos, which was only activating June's stress response and elevating my own! Words are not effective or even heard when spoken from this survival state of mind, and on those days of unintentional conflict, I left school feeling emotionally spent and somewhat hopeless. What we have learned through the years is that there is no easy way to "fix" our students. The behaviors triggered by toxic stress and trauma are not remediated quickly. Young people that bring high levels of stress, adversity, and trauma often take three steps backward for every two steps forward. Staying connected and regulated through a conflict is at the core of educator well-being and brain-aligned relational discipline.

For the past few years, we've sat beside educators in a variety of schools from around the country. "Exhaustion peppered with hopelessness," is an apt description for the emotional state of those who work with our students. At the risk of repeating myself, it seems impossible to teach a student the mandated academic standards when the student's brain is wired for survival, which means that the students are prepared to protect, defend, flee, and fight the minute they walk into the school.

Teaching is an organic process, and schools are living systems. When we say that our most troubled children and adolescents create "discipline" issues in our schools, it's an acknowledgment that young people in pain often act out their pain in our schools. When we attempt to control these children and adolescents, what we get instead is an escalation of their inappropriate behaviors. This can quickly spiral out of control, and the culture of the school—the health of that living system—becomes negatively affected. In these environments, troubled students are punished at excessive rates and are often expelled to nowhere.

Stress is contagious. Toxic levels of it, when carried into our schools by students who have experienced high levels of adversity in their lives, can dramatically affect the entire culture and emotional climate of a school. Decades ago, Nicholas Long, the founder of the Life Space Crisis Intervention Institute and leader in the field of mental health and special education for more than 50 years, made the connection between a troubled child's behavior and adults' reactions towards that behavior. According to Long, "Kids in stress create in us their feelings, and if we are not trained to this process, we (the adult) will mirror their behaviors."[4] Long also argues that when a student is stressed, those emotions will also reflect in the adult. If the adult is neither trained nor prepared to accept their own counter-aggressive feelings, the adult will act on them, in effect mirroring the student's behavior. He offers several reasons that adults become counter-aggressive with the young people they serve. These can include, for example, the adult being caught in the student's conflict cycle, or the adult's reaction to being in a bad mood. Other reasons are the adult's perception of having their value system or

beliefs violated by a student, or even the adult's feeling of rejection and hopelessness.[5]

Teachers, administrators, and all adults working with traumatized children and youth must become intentional and reflective in their actions if they are to succeed in helping to heal our most wounded students. To do so, we must be extremely cautious not to treat children and youth in pain with pain-based discipline techniques. As Bessel van der Kolk warns, "Faced with a range of challenging behaviors, caregivers have a tendency to deal with their frustration by retaliating in ways that often uncannily repeat the children's early trauma."[6] It is critically important for adults working with traumatized students to remember that the motivation for change in our most troubled children and youth depends on the adult's ability to communicate respectfully in times of crisis and extreme stress.

Professor William Morse of the University of Michigan shared this with teachers in training: "The day you forget that under some life circumstances, you could have ended up like your most troubled student is the day you should quit. You will have lost your ability to respond with empathy."[7]

What can we do to elevate our own sense of purpose, connection, and well-being? This question is personal and needs to be answered by each of us. Although this book cannot provide a recipe for well-being, this chapter offers some self-reflective and mindful practices that will allow educators to increase their effectiveness working in high-stress environments with students who carry deep pain into classrooms and schools.

June Continued...

Last year on that Wednesday morning when June shoved her classmate onto the floor, I was unprepared emotionally to co-regulate with her. Co-regulation is modeling the behaviors we want to see from our students, and I will discuss this at length in the following chapters. What I needed to do before I gave consequences or even attempted to discipline was to breathe deeply for a few seconds or a minute and then shift my facial expression, posture, and tone of voice as I approached her, suggesting we both get some air and walk.

I did not.

From personal and professional experiences, I have learned that force, anger, and sarcasm only deepen the wounds when we communicate with children and adolescents who have experienced significant adversity. Until we meet a child with understanding and authenticity, we will rarely experience or see an intrinsic desire to learn or feel her excitement from a fresh discovery. Author and teacher Parker Palmer states: "Teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart, even breaks the heart—and the more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be. The courage to teach is the courage to keep one's heart open for the questions, the mystery, and in those very moments when the heart feels full to capacity."[8]

When we inadvertently take the "soul" out of education, we are left with a skeletal caricature that distorts and diminishes the significance of the beating hearts inside our classrooms. Education is much more than content acquisition and test scores. It is the vehicle that drives us to question, creates curiosity, and can bring us to an *understanding* about ourselves and the world around us. When we discover meaning and relevance in our own lives, we can fill the emptiness and voids in our students' lives, and this is relational discipline.

Brea Thomas, a former graduate student and secondary educator, shares these words of soulful teaching as she learns about herself each day through time spent with her students:

> There is meaning in a hug—and hugs can be verbal, not just physical. This is what I've learned in my few years as a high school English teacher. This notion guides me as I maneuver through this hypersensitive time period in schools when even sideways hugs or complimentary pats on the back are scrutinized. Though there might be tremendous, and even necessary, restrictions on human caring, I like to challenge myself to address this idea of how to show students that we, the teachers, really care, and that they, the students, truly matter to us.
>
> It sounds cheesy to us, perhaps, to say that "we care" or that "someone matters," because we're living in times of

cynicism and distrust. I reflected on this dilemma last August as I began the year with multiple intelligence surveys and interpersonal activities to "get to know" my students.

How can I tell them, I brainstormed, without sounding cheesy, that their smiles and frowns matter; their puzzled and inquisitive brows matter; their sighs and chuckles and complaints matter to me, and guide my daily teaching? Indeed, every caring teacher will consent to the fact that the verbals and nonverbals of her/his students get packed away and shuffled home, along with grading and lesson plans, to be analyzed and strategically reworked for the next day.

So, after issuing a three-page syllabus to my 11th Grade AP/IB Language students on Day 2 of last school year, following introductory exercises and "get to know yous" (as all teachers in our department are advised to do), I noticed that my students were flipping their noses and contorting their faces into the "I don't care—she must not care, either" look. So, I decided to write them a poem that would let them know how much I cared.

Night Letter to My Students

I jolt from slumber, and begin the day's ascent
A sprinter on the track,
A bloom reaching for the sun,
only to stand in my pjs
an ordinary teacher
enveloped by mini mountains of papers and books.
If I were eighteen, I might be pondering
the colors of my nail polish, and the true meaning of the text
message that my friend just sent me,
and the cruelty of a snooze button that won't last for eternity.
But as it is, I am simply awake,
a teacher in pjs, thought-full
still sensing your distress from the day before
and the furrowing of your brows

and the immensity of the accelerated tasks before us.
The apple cinnamon candles lull me forward
from slumber to coffee, from oatmeal to lunch-packing
and I rampage the kitchen to soothe the morning hunger
mountains in my belly.
iTunes have followed me out and down the porch steps
and humming them, I start the engine thinking
It's a Beautiful Day as morning's potential curls her lips
into a smile.
The smell of my mums
waves good luck as I'm off to our garden
of classics and classes and clases de classicus ...
and there's something about the streetlights
torching against the darkness that makes me emboldened
to continue goading you to torch brightly, effervescently
but perhaps you aren't even listening
perhaps the droll or daunting of the day, of so many dreams
has you checked-out or singing a different tune—
specs of chalk dust, flecks of markers and pen ink
and she wants us to have binders?
But this is all that I want to do—
Tell you that in all of this ... apples and dust, classics and
classes ...
and binders
There is meaning, I promise.

EDUCATOR BREA THOMAS

After reading this poem to my students, I noticed that some of them opened up—not, I believe, as a result of any poetic devices or exquisite linguistics, but because I opened up to them and made my caring transparent and personal. The rest of that initial week of school, I heard fewer moans and groans about books and early lessons, and I even received a few statements of appreciation from them.

So, what did I learn from this 15-minute homework exercise for myself, and the 15 minutes that it took to share this

simplistic poem with my students? I learned that caring for another is not a manufactured process or action. It is organic; it is a way of living and breathing each day, hoping for positive results from selfless efforts. This is serving; this is teaching.

I share this poem and words from Brea because her self-reflection with her students is not only healthy for resetting her own sense of calm and regulated brain state, but this is also an example of relational discipline on the front end—preventive relational discipline. Brea took a risk and shared a part of herself. She modeled the behaviors she wanted to see from her students. This is an example of self-care and modeling the conversations that these adolescents had rarely experienced in their developing years. I will share more of these self-reflective strategies at the end of this chapter to emphasize that relational discipline is not something that we *do to* students, but something we want to *create within* them, and this occurs when we sit by their side reflecting on our own adversities, traumas, and resiliency.

June and the Journey

Leaving our fifth-grade class on that Wednesday late morning, I felt defeated and somewhat incapable of continuing with my presentations to educator audiences on emotional contagion and pain-based behaviors. Pulling into my driveway, I mindlessly jumped out of the car and began walking. I walked and walked, quite possibly trying to regulate my own nervous system, thinking about what went wrong! I saw June's eyes in my mind. I remembered the shouting. I remembered a blank empty stare. I remembered seeing through those dark, pain-filled eyes. Taking a deep breath, I sat on a large rock by our neighborhood's creek, remembering that empathy and kindness are learned in the human brain just like reading or math, but they must be taught with opportunities and experiences that provide repetition and practice. As I thought back on the last few hours with the students and June, I knew that June hadn't been consistently exposed to the experiences and skills of kindness and

empathy within her foster home environments over the past several years. Her 12 years had been filled with toxic levels of stress and with people and experiences that did not feel safe or trusting. Few adults in her young life had been consistently kind, emotionally available and present.

June was suspended after that Wednesday morning, and I was unable to connect with her until the following week. I knew that her suspension wouldn't change any of her behaviors, that this type of punishment would most likely reinforce what she was already experiencing, and that she already knew this sad personal "truth" at a gut level: "Adults are not to be trusted." Returning the following week, I came into the classroom and asked June if she would take a walk with me. She accepted my invitation, and we left the room and began silently walking to the school's courtyard.

When I felt we had established a rhythm, a calm cadence as we moved through the courtyard, I began to share. "June, I made a huge mistake last week when I saw you so angry. I was more scared than angry, and I didn't know what to do! I yelled at you, and now I realize that I upset you more. I am so sorry, June, and I'm wondering if we could talk about a plan for what we can do together when we both feel our brains becoming hot and triggered."

We continued this conversation as we walked. I asked for her suggestions and ideas about what she could do at those times when she began to feel edgy and rough, and I wrote some of her ideas on a scrap of paper. She instantly related to "edgy and rough," words that describe sensations rather than feelings. I was sharing with her the languages of adversity, and I began to discuss the coping strategies that could be a part of her language of resiliency. I knew that by talking with her when our brains were feeling calm and by asking for her voice and choices, I was also building a relationship and subtly giving her experiences and ideas to ponder. It wasn't a solution or a fix, but I was helping to create an environment that would begin to feel much safer and offering her opportunities to notice when she began feeling edgy and rough. We were taking small steps on an untraveled path, but we both had some hope as we continued to test the choppy, unpredictable waters in the following days and weeks.

When we know better, we do better.

I wish I could write a happier ending about my experiences with June, but I cannot. Several weeks after this incident, June unexpectedly moved into another foster home and left the school. I didn't have an opportunity to say goodbye, and as I write these words, I'm left with a lump in my throat and feelings of concern, uncertainty, and hope.

We educators are much like our students in that we also need a safe place to do our work. We, too, need connection from those around us! When we feel felt, heard, and safe, our sense of purpose and agency improves and flourishes. A regulated and calm staff and school has a much better relational opportunity with students than a school that feels fragmented, censored, threatened, or filled with stress.

Dr. Dan Siegel, author, motivational speaker, and psychiatrist, explains an important relational skill inherent in all people called *emotional contagion*. We all seem to automatically sense another person's internal state of mind. This interconnectedness is based on the neurological connections from mirror neurons that activate when we experience actions or words from one another. When I watch a sad movie, I cry even though what I'm seeing isn't a part of my personal experience. We yawn when we observe yawning in others. These examples are the results of activated mirror neurons. In *Mindsight*, his most recent book, Dan Siegel explains: "The internal states of others—from joy and play to sadness and fear—directly affect our own state of mind. This contagion can even make us interpret unrelated events with an uncertain bias—so for example, after we've been around someone who is depressed, we interpret someone else's seriousness as sadness ... Our awareness of another person's state of mind depends on how well we know our own—we notice the belly fill with laughter at a party or with sadness at the funeral home. This is the main reason that people who are more aware of their bodies have been found to be more empathetic."[9]

In conclusion, when we are aware and open to our own feelings and emotions, the primary pathway for how well we resonate with

others and sense their states of mind and accompanying feelings is wide open.

I once read that the vital difference between a good teacher and a superior teacher is the one who self-reflects. After reading the notions and research from Dr. Siegel, I feel this statement could lead to compelling positive changes in *how* we relate and therefore reach out to all students, but especially those who dare us to teach and trust them. Do we reflect and think about how we perceive the world? Do we transfer our own emotions subconsciously or consciously onto those who walk into our classrooms each day? I think these questions are worth thinking about as we examine and explore compassionate relational educator and student well-being inside our schools.

In my own life, I must listen deeply when I ask my students, family, or friends: *What can I do? How can I help you? What do you need?* Only when listening deeply am I able to observe and then understand the meaning of a response beyond the uttered words, inappropriate gestures, or angry behaviors. Forfeiting deep listening, I fall back to the ways of correction or coercion, rapidly searching for solutions and quick fixes. It is difficult to listen and then rest with the discomfort of not knowing. Sharing some of this discomfort with our students seeds an authentic trust and mutual respect.

Educator Resilience Strategies and Interventions

In this section, I will share strategies and practices that have the potential to calm and regulate our own nervous systems and dysregulated brain states as we interface with our colleagues and students each day. When I'm caring for myself even in the smallest of ways, my students and those around me benefit greatly because I can begin to approach them from a place of calm, relatable connection. In the Resource Section of this book, my co-instructor and graduate assistant Courtney Boyle created an eBook of regulation strategies for all educators to use when we have only a minute or two to regain our calm before addressing an escalating disagreement or power struggle. These regulatory strategies have been sectioned into three categories that align with brain function, including regulation, connection, and

cortical strategies. We thank our graduate students at Butler University (cohort 4) for creating this list, and we hope you will all find it very helpful in attuning to your own self-care and well-being.

Language of Adversity and Resilience

This past year, I asked my graduate students, many of whom are educators, to reflect upon their languages of adversity and resiliency. Our languages of adversity are the repetitive words, sentences, or even nonverbal reactions that we habitually activate when we are feeling rough and upset. What are the words you constantly hear or repeat in your own life when experiences and people disappoint you, or when you disappoint or are angry with yourself? This is our language of adversity! There are patterns, repetitions, and often behaviors that we activate when feeling sad, lonely, anxious, frustrated, sharp, edgy, angry, or enraged. And when we hear the patterns from these words, we are indirectly asking for or needing experiences or activities that will provide a sense of relief and ease. Maybe our language is telling us we need more connection, touch, pressure, clarity, movement, some space or time, warmth, or coolness. Maybe we need to be heard with warm eye contact. Maybe we need alone time and some quiet. All behavior is communication! Recognizing and writing out or noting our own languages of adversity can be calming and comforting.

Following is a chart that one of my graduate students created after our Tuesday night class when the educators shared and explored their own languages of adversity and resilience, adding how they meet their students with these languages when emotional challenges are present. This exercise in recognizing our own languages of adversity and resilience is a powerful strategy in self-reflection and healing the pain and hurt that is often picked up during moments of conflict with children and youth, who are carrying their own pain and adversity.

Examples of Adversity and Resilience Languages

As a school leader or administrator, it is critical to model "connection" with your staff. Educator well-being is intimately tied to the workplace environment, and those in a leadership position have a powerful opportunity to deepen relationships with staff and educators. The following statements are examples of touch points—words to promote safe and secure attachments—which create compassionate leadership in so many ways. This is where brain-aligned relational discipline begins. When we as a staff become emotionally attuned and attentive to one another, our students will experience this emotional contagion as well. Imagine if we shared these statements with our students when we are feeling calm and regulated!

Language of Adversity Internal/External Verbal/Nonverbal	Language of Resilience Internal/External Verbal/Nonverbal	How Do You Meet the Student in Regulation?
I am quiet and reserved when I am upset.	When I speak through it, talk about it with those I trust, and process it, I can overcome it.	Talking with students when they are regulated is critical. Learn and know the signs of how their body, heart, and mind are presenting when they are feeling dysregulated. I am learning how each child calms down differently.
My neck becomes red and blotchy, and I am shorter with my words.	Connections and relationships with others. Allowing myself time to recharge when needed. I talk it out, sometimes with myself.	Opportunity to be present, listen, and work with at-risk students. With this opportunity, we can model effective strategies, work with students to create essential agreements, or at least components that they could accept, but only when they are calm.
I am quick to blame. "You're not listening!"	I can name what is going on with me. I can verbalize what is happening in my brain for my students.	I also need to establish students' own routine to follow when they are also feeling the stress and the adversity in the classroom.

Language of Adversity Internal/External Verbal/Nonverbal	Language of Resilience Internal/External Verbal/Nonverbal	How Do You Meet the Student in Regulation?
"I'm overwhelmed," "I'll figure this out," "I just need a minute," or I will just fall silent.	Taking time for myself. Getting on the treadmill helps with stress release.	Find out what works well when they are experiencing stress.
"You don't run the show here."	I invite my class to take deep breaths with me.	When they say, "I don't care," they may be really saying, "Nothing matters; whatever you say just adds to the troubles."
"It is what it is." I isolate myself.	Serenity Prayer	"I am in your corner."
I can't stop thinking about whatever it is that I'm stressed about.	I voice my feelings; modeling behavior which transfers to them and allows the classroom to be a safe place to display and work through feelings.	Front loading information; their best is my only expectation. Working through the really tough stuff together before expecting them to conquer it alone.
"You can't, you're not good enough to ..."	"I got this." "We got this." Modeling positive self-talk.	Touch points of connection with other adults who can regulate a student throughout the day.
My body tenses up and pulls in ... tight, tense, and contracted.	Is it a "true" stressor or perceived? Use tools from cognitive behavioral therapy. Yoga and setting big goals to help me feel successful.	Model behavior—get down on their level—meeting them in the brain state they are in. Be with them in their frustration.
Tension, anxiety, jabs to my self-worth.	Being gentle with myself and others. Gentleness is not permissiveness.	"I look into my children's eyes a little longer and hold tight to their hug a little longer when they are dysregulated."
Frustrated, exhausted.	Respond; before being dismissive, share.	Amygdala Reset Area, yoga, self-awareness.

Language of Adversity Internal/External Verbal/Nonverbal	Language of Resilience Internal/External Verbal/Nonverbal	How Do You Meet the Student in Regulation?
Anxiety and anger go hand in hand. Triggers are feeling left out, misunderstood, and dismissed. Knowing these is helpful.	Reach out; find help. We don't realize how much pain we may be in. Talk about behavior, talk about mental health, talk about behavior and the brain.	Observe, notice, go easy and slow. Consistency, caring, connection, and follow through.
Shut down, don't talk, not interacting.	Time and space. Solace in humor. Use more touch points with others so that I can talk about it.	Talking to students away from class about issues they face when they come to school. Create a plan with academic/emotional support.
"Are you kidding me?" "Here we go again!" "I don't have time for this!"	Breathe, don't let the new moment be confused with experience. Ask myself WHO AM I BEING and is this in alignment? What's missing; trust, partnership, and play. "You've got this!"	Staying curious about what makes a student "tick." Maintain calm, steady movements and tone. Partnering with a parent and demonstrating that I'm not giving up on the student.
Talking fast, pacing, then silence.	I'm more prepared for the adversity now. I can breathe, meditate, or color and use art in different ways.	We have to move to the tune and rhythm of the student, instead of moving to our own.
Short, shallow breaths, and I start to babble.	Learning about professional boundaries and saying no; stretch and breathe.	Give them space. Let them speak. Talk in calm, low voice. Sit beside them. Drawing a picture of your feelings and sensations.
"I just need a break." "I'm tired."	Holding weekends sacred. Sleep. Set boundaries, say no.	Classroom mantra, "We can do hard things," works well if someone says, "This is too hard." Spacing out work so it's manageable, and checking in more frequently with feedback that is neutral.
TIRED. TIRED. TIRED. TIRED.	Put less pressure on myself. 90-Second Rule. "I'm glad that feeling of anger is temporary!"	15-minute mindful sessions (magic carpet ride), yoga poses, coloring, breathing.

Language of Adversity Internal/External Verbal/Nonverbal	Language of Resilience Internal/External Verbal/Nonverbal	How Do You Meet the Student in Regulation?
Increased heart rate and ringing in ears. "Where are we going?" I look at glass half empty!	Understand that there are things in life I cannot plan or prepare for. Stay in the moment rather than worry.	Scheduled breaks in Amygdala Reset Room. In-class whole group movement and breathing. Take a step further to see data related to tracking focused attention practices and hopefully fewer nurse visits/calls to office.
Dissociation, internal expressions.	Deep breathing, what was my part? What are my triggers, how do I release them? Look to trusted friends, and professionals.	Adult/student interaction; looking at stillness to regulate vs. activity. Balance app on phone. Helper for younger grades.

Resilience Touch Points: Statements for Deepening Relationships With Staff and Students

- I respect you and trust you for who you are. There is nothing you could do to change that!
- I may have been asking of you what you are not comfortable sharing or doing. Please help me to understand.
- I will give you the space you need. That is important to me.
- I too feel rough on some days and have probably taken my own frustrations out on you. I am sorry. I am going to be very aware of my own feelings just as I have asked of you.
- It must feel confusing and overwhelming when there is so much asked of you.
- I am so sorry.
- What do you need?
- How can I help you?
- What can we do to make this better?

Remember to Breathe

Deep breaths and movement calm our stress response systems, lowering our heart rates, blood pressure, and respiration. Deep breathing on a regular basis is critical to positive emotion, clarity of thought, and emotional regulation. When we use breathing or focused attention practices to quiet the emotional center of our brains, we activate neural circuits in the brain that strengthen the flow of oxygen and glucose through the prefrontal cortex. Each day, make it a practice to breathe intentionally.

1. Two-minute stress release: Before falling asleep, first thing in the morning, or whenever you need it, take two minutes to breathe deeply. Place one hand on your chest and the other on your forehead. As you inhale, feel the pressure of your hands on your skin, and then exhale out a worry or concern that has recently taken up space in your brain. Each time you inhale and exhale, try to extend the exhale by two or three seconds. Reflecting on your two minutes, ask yourself: Can I personally change this worrisome experience or thought? How much of it is in my control? How much of it is out of my control?

2. The deep-dive breath: This is a kundalini yoga breath practice and visualization. Inhale for four counts, hold for four, and exhale slowly for four counts. You can increase the holding of breath by a few seconds once you find the rhythm of the exercise. As you rhythmically find this breath, each time you inhale imagine diving deeper into a pool of blue water. As you complete your last breath and exhale, imagine yourself floating to the surface, renewed and weightless.

3. Energizing breath: This one, also from kundalini yoga, may seem a little odd, but give it a try. Pant like a dog with your mouth open and your tongue out for 30 seconds, while trying to take three energizing pant-breaths per second. Then continue for another 30 seconds with your mouth closed as you take short belly breaths through your nose with one hand on the belly. After a full minute, switch to the deep-dive breathing above. This is an excellent tech-

nique to use before you walk into school. There are many health benefits to this yoga breath.[10]

4. Calming sound: The right sound can be very powerful for engaging a calm response. For example, I listen almost daily to a recording of Tibetan bowls and chimes to clear my mind. You can find this—or nature or water sounds, if you prefer—on YouTube. Any sound that you associate with a calm state of mind will work.

5. Space for reflection: In your office, classroom, or at home, create an area that's just right for your personal relaxation. Consider details such as furniture, pillows, lighting, pictures, a gratitude journal, music, art, and snacks. Make sure that you regularly relax in this special space for at least a few minutes. In your classroom, you might just have a plant or some flowers, some hand lotion, or your gratitude journal. Take a minute or two in this space for a few deep breaths, a sip of water, or writing down a thought or feeling. One benefit of creating this space is to model an intentional calming practice for your students.

6. Peer support: Partner with a colleague to share and reflect on a challenging day, hour, or week. Be present with your partner for 7 to 10 minutes two or three times a week, or as often as you both agree. In these few minutes together, practice validating what you're hearing from each other—listen to learn, not to respond. Ask one another a very important question and listen deeply to the answer: "What's most important to you in this situation?" As you listen, you begin to co-regulate, calming each other's stress response systems. In *Beyond Engagement*, Brady Wilson writes that when we feel attention being paid to us, our bodies produce more of the neurohormone oxytocin, which produces a sense of trust and bonding.[11]

I am closing this chapter with a letter that I've written from the heart. Every educator needs to acknowledge that they have embarked on a hero's journey, whether it's their first year in the classroom or their third decade of shaping students' lives. I want to honor the

discovery that they make—or could be making—every day: although they are here to teach, they are also here to learn. It's an ongoing process that takes them from confusion to clarity, from vulnerability to empowerment, from the mystery of who their students are to the revelation of who they are as teachers. This process will repeat many times, and each time through, they need to recognize that they aren't just going in circles. They are ascending in an upward spiral!

This is my letter of love and hope to all of them—to all of you!

To My Pre-Service Educators and to
All New and Seasoned Educators

I am writing this letter from grace, my own mistakes, life experiences, and the contrast that 30 years in education has taught me. As I write these words, our world is undergoing a very tumultuous, frightening, and unknown time with the coronavirus sweeping across our globe, creating a pandemic of disease, great fear, and unpredictability. We have only just begun to understand the ramifications of this virus, as schools have closed, businesses and communities are shutting down, retreating into an unknown landscape as millions of families and communities have more questions and fear than answers and hope.

Although the research has continuously shared the growing challenges of the mental and emotional health needs of our nation's youth, we are now layering this new viral adversity inside the fragility of the emotional and mental health challenges facing so many children, adolescents, educators, and families in this time!

I once thought that becoming a teacher meant that my expertise in the chosen or general subject matter would be assessed and revered no matter the time period, grade level, or educational institution. I once was taught that it took one effective teacher to change a school climate. I once thought that becoming a teacher meant that I would need to be the expert not only in the academic arena, but an expert in behaviors, discipline, and fixing what I deemed broken.

I was nervous about not being able to control my class, losing the power struggle especially on the days I was observed by administra-

tion. I once thought that when a student lashed out at me, I was ineffective, and they needed harsher consequences. I once thought my preparation in higher education prepared me for all the obstacles I would face in the classroom. I once thought that, faced with challenging days, I was the only one feeling it or experiencing it, so I needed to put on a strong face and armor up!

What I have learned, am learning, and want to share are these notions.

I am teaching a spirit pulsating with its own signature–my student. My agenda, beliefs, worries, and challenges are mine and not my student's. I am learning to respond to the sensations and feelings of my students without labeling, fixing, or adjusting in any way during the moment of intense conflict. I have found myself so conditioned to lecture, threaten, or demand respect through words that I have left my own brain and body state out of the relational equation. I am learning that relationships matter more than any technique, strategy, or practice I invoke. I am learning that discipline is meeting the student in their agenda and paying attention to mine! I am learning that I have held beliefs, values, and assumptions that I have not examined and have unintentionally projected those onto my students.

It is no surprise we have fallen into a myth of what teaching is or should be because so many of us have neglected our own inner landscape. Psychologist and author Dr. Shefali Tsabary shares these words about parenting, and I feel they are so appropriate for teachers. "How can we feel the beat of their hearts and the spirit within when we have unintentionally lost our inner compass? Our children (students) pay a heavy price when we lack consciousness. Over-indulged, over-medicated, and over-labeled, many of our students (children and adolescents) are unhappy, and despite our best intentions, we often unintentionally bind them to the emotional inheritance we received from our parents, unconsciously holding them to the legacy of all ancestors past. The nature of unconsciousness is such that until it's metabolized, it will seep through generation after generation. Only through awareness can the cycles of pain end in our families and in our schools."[12]

I have learned to pay attention to my thoughts, feelings, sensations, doubts, and fears. I have learned to try and calm my own heart and mind during chaos and conflict. I have learned that emotions are deeply contagious and that my perceptions can leak into every student I sit beside. I am learning that teaching, like parenting, is not a science but a complex relational art form that is constantly moving, changing, and allowing us to see conflicts as powerful moments of growth for both teacher and student. I am learning that no matter the age of a human being, our perceived self-images are limitless, and it is often our expectations and childhood experiences that hold us captive to these inaccurate inner visions of ourselves!

In this time of teaching and learning, am I allowing myself the grace to learn more about myself with every encounter with a student?

In this time, can I challenge and *be* with my own fears and doubts, knowing that every relationship with a student is sacred and teaching me more about myself?

- ✳ All children are born with a pure and loving essence, and this new lens for discipline calls us to attune and attend to their *being* and not just their doing.
- ✳ I want to thank myself for showing up every day with an open heart and mind, as I thank my students for being a part of this classroom.
- ✳ I want to thank my students every day for teaching me no matter how difficult the lesson.
- ✳ I am learning that when I begin to trust the essence of every student, they begin to see their inner worlds as worthy and good, no matter what happens on the outside.
- ✳ I am learning to acknowledge the smallest of smiles, gestures, showing up in class, walking in the door each day as a miraculous gift that I will hold in my mind and heart, knowing that the teaching and learning process is an evolutionary journey!

Conclusion

Research in the social neurosciences has demonstrated how emotions and learning are intimately connected and processed in the brain. The story of the educator is about emotions and cognition. The message from social and affective neuroscience is clear: No longer can we focus solely on the individual student's academic level to analyze effective strategies for classroom instruction, discipline, and behaviors. Teachers and students interact and learn from one another in ways that cannot be understood by examining only the cold cognitive aspects of academic skills. When we look inward and explore the adversities, obstacles, passions, and life processes of our own lives, we model this reflective practice for our students and their pain-filled experiences. It is in this space of self-reflection that we might subtly alter how we present ourselves inside our classrooms, allowing us to return to the joy of teaching. This is operationalized relational discipline.

In the Resource Section of this book, you'll find the print version of an eBook of brain-aligned strategies for educators created by educators. Our graduate students in the applied educational neuroscience cohort created this book of approximately one-minute practices and strategies to implement on the spot and in the moment. I hope that you will not only enjoy these regulation strategies, but that you will share some of these with students, modeling the practices that calm all brains for learning, teaching, and leadership. I would encourage you to build three or four of these regulation practices into a routine that you can implement in moments when you begin to feel agitated, rough, and moving toward a dysregulated state.

I love these words from Dr. Mona Delahooke: "Our emotional tone is the 'raw material' that allows us to help children with behavioral challenges. This raw material that we each embrace is transmitted through our body language. When we feel safe, we have soft eyes, a prosodic voice, and a relaxed posture."[13]

I'd like to finish with this thought: Where you place your eyes and mind is what you will see and experience.