



LEARNING DISABILITIES and Challenging Behaviors

**A Guide to
Intervention
and Classroom
Management**

**Nancy Mather
Sam Goldstein**

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AND CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS**



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A Guide to Intervention and Classroom Management

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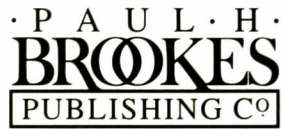
by

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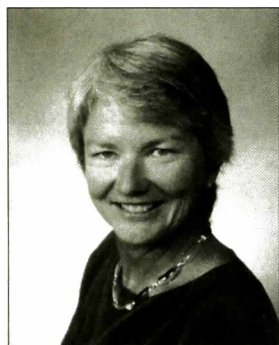
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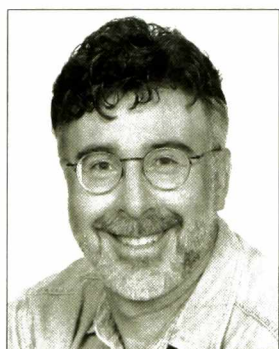
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PREFACE

In the United States of America, the rise of formal education helped citizens obtain material wealth and power. As the country became increasingly more industrialized, school became an important method through which to prepare citizens for becoming functional members of society. The central role of our schools was and continues to be to prepare children for a successful future. In 1838, three women enrolled in the first teacher training program. The initial goal of the program was to provide teachers with the skills necessary to be effective educators. From that point through the 1950s, effective education meant teaching students reading, writing, and mathematics; however, as the technological pace of our society has increased, more than these basic academic skills are required for a comprehensive education.

Research with early elementary school students reveals an interesting phenomenon that we refer to as *instinctual optimism*. Despite failing to complete a puzzle, most first-grade students confidently reported that if they were given another chance, they would be able to complete the puzzle successfully. Yet, by the end of elementary school, many students do not predict that they will experience future success following failure. This is particularly true for one of every five children who struggle in school due to learning, behavior, or emotional problems. School experience for these children has further reinforced their perceptions of their own inadequacy.

What variables contribute to this change of heart and view of self? Some would suggest that this transformation in attitude is simply a process of maturation. Young students lack the capacity to assess their capabilities accurately, and, when facing a problem, they are naïve about the probability of success. Yet, this very same research can be viewed from the perspective that school experiences negatively alter students' self-confidence. If this is the case, we are missing a valuable opportunity with many students—the chance to help children develop a resilient, optimistic view of self, an essential component for life success (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001).

Although the new millennium brings promises of an unlimited technological, scientific, and cultural future, it is also apparent that as a society we are experiencing increasing problems with preparing our youth for this future. Competency in reading, writing, and mathematics is simply not enough. Violence, vandalism, increased school drop-out rates, and mental health problems among our students signify this problem. The burden of preparing children for the future has and must be increasingly borne on the shoulders of educators. Our schools must find a way to educate all students efficiently and effectively by providing them with knowledge and instilling in them qualities of resilience, qualities that will help them be confident and know how to overcome the daily adversities that they must face.

To accomplish this goal, educators must begin looking at children differently. Rather than viewing the learning, emotional, and behavior problems that some children experience as somehow setting them apart from others, educators must view these problems on a continuum. This requires a shift from a categorical model of differences to a model that acknowledges that the majority of children's school problems result from variations in abilities and environmental influences. Children with slow learning rates, for example, learn through the same processes as others, but they require more time to do so. Children with attentional problems do pay attention, just not to the same degree as other children in the classroom. They respond to the same types of strategies and interventions that other children do, but they need more assistance in developing essential self-control skills.

In 1997, we developed a model to explain the extrinsic and intrinsic factors that affect school performance (Goldstein & Mather, 1998). This model emphasized the underlying

behaviors and skills that contribute to efficient learning. The first step toward the development of an appropriate educational plan is to understand a child's learning abilities, emotions, and behaviors. This understanding can be gained through careful observation and consideration of a child's abilities and any significant environmental influences.

We are confident that the material in this book will increase your understanding of children's learning and behavioral difficulties and how a child's abilities contribute to classroom successes and failures. We also describe and explain many common childhood problems such as anxiety and attention deficit. Throughout the book, we suggest many specific strategies to use with students who struggle. Using this book, you can help ensure that more students are successfully educated and prepared for their future and that they develop a resilient, optimistic view of self and their surrounding world. With best wishes,

Nancy Mather, Ph.D.

Sam Goldstein, Ph.D.

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- Brooks, R., & Goldstein, S. (2001). *Raising resilient children: Fostering strength, hope, and optimism in your child*. New York: Contemporary Books.
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