
The results of this study provide support for classroom management techniques that base themselves on intrinsic motivation for students to act responsibly, make adequate progress and excel. Conscious Discipline®, with its relationship to emotional intelligence, results in a shift toward more positive classroom climates and provides inherent benefits to students and teachers. A three-group, two dimension discriminate analysis produced results showing significant positive changes in the way that teachers who used Conscious Discipline® viewed their ability to create positive change in classroom climate.
On improving school climate: Reducing reliance on rewards and punishment

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of training early childhood teachers in an emotional intelligence and classroom management program titled Conscious Discipline®. There were eight one-day workshops administered monthly from September through April to an initial group of more than 200 participants. In order to assess attitudinal changes, teachers answered a survey about their school climate and classroom management methods. The survey was initially given in September to participants (n=206) consisting of pre-kindergarten through sixth grade teachers with no exposure to the Conscious Discipline workshops and then in April to a subset of the group who completed the workshop (n=117). The statistical discriminant analysis found significant improvement in the teachers’ perceptions of school climate and in their knowledge and use of these new classroom management techniques (p < .05). It was demonstrated that the untrained group was unaware of the social relationship and cultural principles of Conscious Discipline that include releasing external control, embracing conflict resolution and implementing a more emotionally targeted reward structure in the classroom. These initial participants also simultaneously expressed being unsatisfied with their school climate. The teachers who had completed the workshops were further broken into those who were highly committed to using the Conscious Discipline skills versus those who were not fully utilizing their lessons. They all exhibited a heightened feeling of school climate compared to initial pre-workshop attitudes. Improvement in student/teacher relationships (r=.325) and in mutual support among teachers (r=.306) were correlated with discriminant analysis scores for the post-workshop teachers (i.e. those trained in Conscious Discipline felt better about those aspects of the school climate than the untrained teachers). Interestingly, the more fully-engaged teachers scored
somewhat lower on this school climate dimension than those teachers who were only minimally using Conscious Discipline techniques.
INTRODUCTION

Researchers have documented the pervasive negative impacts of certain reward systems (Kohn, 1993). Rewards and punishments are most educational system’s common mechanisms for social control. Rewards are systematically embedded in many classroom management programs. The pop-behaviorist approach, simplistically implemented, becomes some form of “catch them being good.” An example of using techniques of positive behavior interventions and supports would be to acknowledge the good behavior of students by a trip to the principal’s office to receive a token to be traded for a small prize such as ice cream at lunch. The research from these approaches is generally measured by reduction in discipline referrals to explain its success (Horner, Sugai, & Todd, 2001). Kohn presented a great deal of research stating that the use of rewards ruptures relationships, ignores underlying reasons for behavior, discourages risk-taking and undermines interest in the task at hand. In order to adopt a classroom approach that dismisses petty reward structures, re-education of teachers needs to occur. This permits teachers to create an environment that thrives on an alternate behavior process by developing more emotional intelligence. Gignac (2006) warns that an investigation involving emotional intelligence (EI) is “...a relatively new area of research, which is based on measures of EI that are in their infancy, in comparison to measures of intellectual intelligence.” (p. 1576). Progress in areas generally agreed to constitute emotional intelligence (see Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995) often requires participation in a professional development activity. Of interest in this present study are the attitudinal changes and altered perception of the school climate that occur among teachers who attend this type of training.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Haynes, Emmons & Comer (1994) define school climate as “the quality and consistency of interpersonal interactions within the school community that influence children’s cognitive, social and psychological development (p. 322).” At school, children cultivate interpersonal skills, discover and refine values, and struggle with vulnerabilities. As such, schools must provide a safe environment for optimal outcomes in terms of academics, character development, and emotional intelligence. A review of the literature on school climate reveals many interesting connections between the social microcosm of the school and its students’ personal and intellectual growth. School climate has been linked to improved student behavior and academic achievement (Lehr & Christenson, 2002), student learning (Hoy & Sabo, 1998), student failure (Comer, 1993), student behavior and delinquency (Pink, 1982), absenteeism (Reid, 1983), student suspension (Wu et. al., 1982) and low school motivation (Goodenow & Grady, 1994). A preponderance of research suggests that a positive, supportive school climate has been deemed appropriate in improving educational quality and creating safer schools.

Haynes, Emmons & Ben-Avie (1997) suggested 15 key components of a healthy, supportive school climate: achievement motivation, collaborative decision making, equity and fairness, general school climate, order and discipline, parent involvement, school-community relations, staff dedication to student learning, staff expectations, leadership, school building, sharing of resources, caring and sensitivity, student interpersonal relations, student-teacher relations. For these 15 supportive components to exist all members (administrators, teachers,
parents, staff and students) of the school must possess a set of cooperative values that calls for shared power, a set of social and emotional skills that facilitate healthy interpersonal interactions, and self-regulation and conflict resolution skills to handle disagreements. These social competence skills are rarely taught in teacher preparation programs. Whether a teacher possesses these skills or not would be determined by how they were parented, past relationships, and media diet.

The publication of *A Nation at Risk* (United States, 1983) and other reports of the 1980’s led educators in a new research direction in regards to motivation. The reinforcement-behavioral perspective of the 1970’s was redirected toward a cognitive-interpretive one (McCaslin, 2003). Brandt (1992) indicates in his article that educators like renowned Hank Levin worked diligently to transform schools. According to Brandt (1992), Levin’s Accelerated Schools model achieved an “internal transformation of culture.” A program titled Conscious Discipline® follows the tenets of this direction. Its goals include transforming the school environment via training of elementary school teachers in an emotional intelligence and classroom management process. The objective of this training was to provide teachers with procedures, attitudes and understanding that enhance their own emotional intelligence, so that the teacher may then move from an external model of classroom management (based on tangible rewards and imposed punishments) to a relational-cultural view of classroom management (based on a positive cooperative class climate and conflict resolution). The target audience or agent for intervention is the teacher, thus aiming for the “internal transformation” sought by Levin.
Conscious Discipline was developed by Bailey (1994, 2001). It integrates the principles of classroom management, emotional intelligence and character education into one seamless process. Teachers practicing Conscious Discipline create a positive school climate called the “School Family” and learn specific ways to transform conflict into opportunities to teach social-emotional life skills. The focus is on a cognitive, interpretive approach to motivation, by emphasizing long-term development of pro-social behavior while de-emphasizing rewards and punishment. Conscious Discipline delineates areas related to self-control that are essential to master in order for teachers to be able to change their perception of conflict. There are seven basic skills of discipline designed to help teachers alter their response to conflict which helps build a sense of the School Family.

The ultimate goal of Conscious Discipline is to provide systemic change within schools. The program brings improvement by first raising the teachers’ emotional intelligence via specific skills so that they may, in turn, pass these emotional skills on to the children in their care. At the core of the training is to instill a shift from a competitive, behavioral “catch them being good” model of classroom management to a cultural relationship model in which teachers create a respectful, responsible school climate where all members thrive and want to “do good” all the time.

The theory of the creation of a global School Family is that the management, the emotional intelligence and the character education pieces of a functioning classroom become aspects of each other instead of separate add-on programs. The School Family becomes the internal motivation system in the classroom as opposed to the typical external motivators like
treasure boxes, point systems and other behavior-tracking programs. Students’ motivation comes from the internal pleasure experienced by helping others, feeling cared for, and existing in an environment that offers safety and unconditional positive regard to all its members. Motivation also stems from the internal angst students feel when they treat others poorly or do not contribute their equitable part to nurturing the School Family. In short, children are motivated by: caring, connection, contribution, and the empowerment of conflict resolution.

The program is called “Conscious” Discipline because it fosters the development of consciousness towards one’s own mental models of learning, of teaching, and of self. Marzano (2003) determined via the statistical method of meta analysis, that the mental model of classroom management has the largest effect on reducing classroom disruptions, greater than rules and procedures, teacher-student relationships or disciplinary interventions. Langer has addressed mental set, or consciousness, at length (1989; Langer & Rodin, 1976; Langer & Weinman, 1981). Conscious Discipline offers an educational process to help adults and children become more aware of their thoughts, feelings and actions, and the consequences of each on themselves and others.

There is a growing body of scientifically-based research supporting the strong impact that enhanced social and emotional behaviors can have on success in school. This research is so strong that a 17-state partnership created a document entitled “Findings from the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative.” This report indicates that research concluded that “healthy social-emotional development is the foundation for cognitive development. And, without saying, cognitive development is essential for academic progress.” (p. 62). This present paper looks at
the Conscious Discipline workshop participants and seeks to quantify the effects of the Conscious Discipline training program on the attitudes and perceptions related to school climate (School Family) of the trained teachers.

METHOD

Participants

More than two hundred pre-kindergarten through 6th grade teachers in four elementary schools and four early childhood centers in Florida signed up for the Conscious Discipline workshops. Four different educators conducted the school training. All of them had been trained and were employed directly by Dr. Becky Bailey. The workshop model consisted of a one-day overview of Conscious Discipline followed by once per month training for seven months over the course of the academic school year. The program consisted of acquisition of basic skills related to self-control leading to command of actions associated with conflict resolution and improved emotional intelligence within the classroom. One specific skill was introduced in each of the seven months. Elementary school number 8 and early childhood center number 4 missed the overview due to a hurricane. In order to assess attitudinal changes a survey (discussed in the Survey section) was administered initially in September, 2001, and then again in April, 2002. Since answering the survey was voluntary as was attendance at the workshops, 206 surveys were filled out in September and 117 were completed in April. Demographics related to grade level taught and experience are shown via means and standard errors in Table 1.
Procedures

Due to similarities in demographics the eight schools were collapsed into four entities with entity 1* comprised of elementary school 1 and early childhood center 5; 2* of elementary school 2 and early childhood center 6; 3* of elementary school 3 and early childhood center 7; 4* of elementary school 4 and early childhood center 8 (see Table 1).

The survey sample sizes include teachers who left one or more questions unanswered on the survey instrument. The multivariate statistical procedure of discriminant analysis (Morrison, 2005) was determined to be an appropriate method and these types of missing values hamper its execution. The solution was to replace those few missing values with the median value of the teacher’s four statistically nearest neighbors. There were very few cases where a teacher omitted any but a few answers to the 45 questions. The worst case being that one of the variables (survey questions) was missing 13 values from a total of 323 cases (i.e. the 206 September responses and the 117 April responses). Thus, missing value estimates should minimally affect results.
Traditionally, discriminant analysis assumes that data arises from a multi-normal distribution, but remains robust despite departures from this assumption. Obviously, with ranked (answers being 1 through 5) rather than continuous data, there is an issue, but univariate plots reveal unimodal and mostly symmetric distributions, easing worries. The goal of discriminant analysis is to discover a linear function of the survey responses that generates a composite score for each teacher participant. When the discriminant analysis does its job well then the score is a clear-cut indicator of which group the teacher participant belongs. In the case of this research, this means whether he or she is in group 0 (exhibits no characteristics of exposure/embracing tenets of Conscious Discipline training), is in group 1 (exhibits traits of partial exposure/embracing tenets of Conscious Discipline), is in group 2 (exhibits high level of exposure/embracing tenets of Conscious Discipline). The score is derived from the survey answers that are associated with school climate and classroom management and thus if the delineation is marked (i.e. statistically significant) this proves that a teacher’s school climate assessment and their involvement with the emotional intelligence program are intimately intertwined. Closer examination of the scores can reveal which components of the survey (and thus the social climate) are most highly correlated with the use of Conscious Discipline.

Survey

One of the goals of the Conscious Discipline program is to help teachers enhance social and emotional skills of children and thus enhance the overall school climate. A 1987 report by Arter identified 42 separate school climate surveys. More have been developed since then
In order to measure the overall school climate, a survey was used that was adapted from the Development Studies Center as reported by their researchers Roberts, Hom & Battistich (1995). They developed and validated an instrument designed to measure teachers’ and students’ perceptions of their school climate (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997). Their original survey consisted of 39 student-sense-of-school-community scale items and 15 teacher-sense-of-school-community items. The 15 queries dealing with teacher-sense-of-school-community were included in the current study’s survey. Interspersed were an additional 30 questions directly addressing the objectives and target outcomes of Conscious Discipline.

The 15 environment questions from Roberts, Hom, & Battistich measured teachers’ opinions about their own students’ classroom participation and behavior, their own comfort levels, colleague relationships and the principal’s involvement at the school. The 30 Conscious Discipline items measured the teacher’s own use of reward systems, teaching/learning locus of responsibility, job satisfaction and level of support for innovation. Teachers responded to the survey by answering either 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree) or 5 (strongly agree) to each statement.

Analysis

Three types of Conscious Discipline usage groups were identified. There was the pre-training group (September) with no exposure (group 0). An additional survey question appeared
on the post survey (April): “What percentage of Conscious Discipline (CD) are you practicing in your classroom?” This allowed for a group that admitted to less than 50% (group 1) versus those who declared more than 50% (group 2).

Discriminant analyses was conducted separately on each of our four school entities to assess the separation of our three groups via SPSS (1999). The objectives were:

1) Determine statistically significant linear discriminant functions, i.e. weighted combinations of the survey responses that produce scores that serve to assign each teacher to his or her true group. Of course, with three groups up to two scores (i.e. two discriminating functions) can be used to discern membership.

2) Provide graphs for this concept of group separation.

3) Identify the variables (survey questions) that contribute most dramatically to the discriminating function, i.e. find the survey characteristics of school climate that highly correlate with Conscious Discipline practice.

RESULTS

To begin the analysis, address the first query above regarding the determination of linear discriminant functions. Table 2 contains the p-values for testing the significance or worth of one and/or two scores for discernment based on Wilkes lambda statistic (Morrison, 2005). School entity 1* clearly requires two scores to explain group membership. Although, for school entities 2* and 4* teacher group membership can be distilled into one score computed from the school
climate responses and classroom management queries, they, too, were looked at in two dimensions. For teachers in school entity 3* there appears to be no relationship between the attitudes toward school climate and their usage of Conscious Discipline. Thus, three of the four study environments exhibit significant correlations between teachers’ perceptions of school climate and their state of emotional intelligence (as measured by answers to classroom management inquiries). Visual interpretations for school entity 1* are given. Discussion of school entity 2* and 4* will be eliminated since results are similar to that of school entity 1*.

<insert Table 2>

The two-dimensional separating function for school entity 1* appears in the scatterplot in Figure 1. Each plotted point represents a teacher with his or her two scores (an X and a Y) derived from the aggregation of survey responses calculated from the linear discriminant functions produced by SPSS. A square plot icon represents a teacher in the post-training, self-declared high-usage of Conscious Discipline group 2. A circle represents a teacher in the post-training, self-declared low-usage of Conscious Discipline group 1. An x represents a teacher from the pre-training group 0. The small p-values give confidence that the discriminant functions produced would demonstrate good discerning power in a repeated experiment at school entities 1* and 2* and 4*.

<insert Figure 1>
It is informative to ascertain which of the 45 questions on the survey were most influential in separating the groups. These influential factors reveal the school climate attributes that are most interwoven with the tenets of Conscious Discipline and emotional intelligence. This can be quantified by viewing the ten survey questions that have the largest absolute value of the correlation \( r \) with the scores (i.e. stripping \( r \) of its sign). The plus and minus signs on \( r \) are interpreted as movement along the X and Y-axes in Figure 1. High agreement (a response of 5 on the survey) paired with a positive correlation indicates a right or upward movement and paired with a negative correlation indicates a left or downward movement; low agreement (a response of 1 on the survey) paired with a positive correlation indicates a left or downward movement and paired with a negative correlation indicates a right or upward movement. The attributes described in Table 3 are the ones that tend to have the highest influence on discriminant scores. The ten most important correlates of the 45 are shown for school entity 1*. Table 3 contains results that include the correlations as well as the mean vector of scores for the three groups. The means are plotted as stars within the previously discussed Figure 1. Additionally in Table 3, noted next to each variable, is an indication of whether it was extracted from the school climate survey developed by Roberts, Hom & Battistich (by SC) or whether the survey question was designed to measure Conscious Discipline principles (by CD).

<insert Table 3>
DISCUSSION

Figure 1 and Table 3 present the conclusion that the pre-workshop teachers who have no knowledge of Conscious Discipline (group 0) in school entity 1* also felt there were bad relations between teachers and students, and found no support among or good advice from their colleagues. The group did not enjoy their students, did not think that teachers provided stimulating environments for their students, and did not feel that it was fruitful to try different teaching approaches in order to affect student achievement. The pre-workshop teachers of group 0 also felt that not everyone at the school was working toward a common goal. This same group was not cognizant of the tenets of Conscious Discipline, as evidenced by their agreement with the ideas of rewarding individuals and the class for good behavior, and punishing them for bad behavior. In essence, group 0 represented, relatively speaking, participants who were at the low end of emotional intelligence and who perceived an inadequate school climate.

The post-workshop teachers of group 2 who are the ones declaring that they were practicing more than 50% of the Conscious Discipline methods exhibit a moderate and statistically significant increase on the second dimension (school climate) of the discriminant functions (see Figure 1 movement along the Y-axis) when compared to the pre-workshop group 0. All of the standard errors of the means are less than .3 score units. It is evident from the mean values of <-.7, 1.9, -.1> for group 0, group 1 and group 2, respectively, that the groups differ significantly on this dimension. Additionally, this group 2 has a large and significant score in the emotional intelligence realm (see Figure 1 movement along the X-axis, Conscious Discipline). Those in group 2 who are practicing the most Conscious Discipline find they enjoy
and have good relationships with their students, sensing that they are positively affecting their achievement. They are following the tenets of Conscious Discipline by dealing with behavior issues as learning experiences rather than via the more traditional reward/punishment system. The post-workshop teachers of group 1 who are implementing very little (less than 50%) of the workshop skills differ from both groups 0 and 2 on the second dimension, their perception of school climate (see Figure 1 movement along the Y-axis). This group perceives a better school climate than the pre-workshop group 0 and the post-workshop heavy Conscious Discipline users of group 2. They can be identified from their counterparts most prominently through their perceptions of community with other teachers. Another study found heightened colleague support for program participants in a reading enhancement endeavor (Ross & Smith, 1994). This perhaps only points up the usual result of increased interpersonal association stemming from organized activities. A potential synopsis of Figure 1 would be that there were two distinct groups 1 and 2 emerging from the training: group 1 who spent time socializing with the outcome being the benefit of perceived improvement in school climate and group 2 who spent more time learning, receiving a smaller but significant perceived improvement in school climate and a large improvement in skills associated with emotional intelligence.

When a survey question exhibits a positive correlation in Table 3, then the larger response value (like 4 or 5 for agreement) will place that teacher farther to the right in a positive direction on the X-axis and/or farther up in a positive direction on the Y-axis in the plot in Figure 1. Conversely, negative correlations move the plotted point left and/or lower on the grid when there is a large response value (agreement). Summarization of Figure 1 would be facilitated by labeling the X-axis (first dimension) the “CD-use-for-student&teacher-enhancement” direction
and labeling the Y-axis (second dimension) the “teacher-camaraderie” direction. The pre-workshop group 0 scores low on both of those dimensions. The post-workshop teachers of group 1 who use some of the Conscious Discipline teachings score nearly the same as the pre-workshop respondents on the CD-use-for-student&teacher-enhancement, but higher on teacher-camaraderie. In contrast, those fully utilizing Conscious Discipline exhibit moderate improvement in the teacher-camaraderie dimension, with a most dramatic increase in their scores for the CD-use-for-student&teacher-enhancement.

LIMITATIONS

Due to strategic data collection difficulties a matched pair analysis was not feasible, thus the data was handled as if the group responses were independent observations. The control group 0 consisted of the 206 teachers who took the survey in September prior to the Conscious Discipline exposure. Statistically, this is a less powerful approach, i.e. existing differences in groups needs to be greater in this unmatched pairs analysis than in a matched pairs analysis in order to uncover a difference, yet, differences were uncovered (see RESULTS). In future work, effort should be expended to track each teacher individually so that the changes in responses is absent the variability due to within person differences.

Criticism regarding bias due to self-selection (both for participating in the training and then for electing to execute the Conscious Discipline methods) is understandable. Perhaps the conclusions should include the caveat that improved perceptions of school climate and high use
of Conscious Discipline principles among teachers who are motivated to learn and try new things is evident.

It is not possible to control for all variables in an educational setting, but by using teachers of similar educational background and socio-economic status for the comparative groups within the same schools, a reduction of complications due to overwhelming variability from non-study factors is assured. A more stringently designed and administered scenario of workshop execution over a more concentrated time period, with in-class mentors/helpers for the teachers or other incentives to feel comfortable in practicing what is learned may lead to even more informative results.

SUMMARY

The philosophy of Conscious Discipline is that children can be trained to handle their own behavior issues in socially acceptable ways with the teacher acting as facilitator. This research expected to reveal that teachers who had mastered the methods of Conscious Discipline would respond most positively to the survey questions that directly reflected Conscious Discipline tenets and also to those questions related to teacher/student relationships and other components of school climate. Positive responses to the school climate questions should arise from the fact that teachers gain confidence by acquiring knowledge about classroom management techniques, allowing for more ease in interacting with their school environment (Haynes, Emmons & Ben-Avie, 1997). This research definitely determines that pre-workshop, post-workshop low-Conscious Discipline users, and post-workshop Conscious Discipline users are statistically
different and can be delineated by factors associated with the use of Conscious Discipline principles interleaved with positive views of school climate.

The purpose of this research was to isolate any beneficial effect associated with mastering relationship-based classroom management skills that foster the emotional intelligence of teachers and students. The expectation was that acquiring these skills would lead to an improvement in a teacher’s perception of the school climate and a reduction on the reliance of external, tangible, reward-and-punishment classroom management systems. The study was designed to assess, via survey, these activities and the opinions of teachers both before and after workshop instruction. The analysis was able to confirm a relationship between healthy components of school climate and the ability of teachers to develop relationship expertise in classroom management.

This study has important implications for educators exploring ways to improve school climate. It is shown that the quality of interpersonal interactions within the school community paralleled the increased adherence to tenets used by Conscious Discipline-trained teachers. Since prior studies have shown the positive contribution of improved school climate, it is logical to seek ways to help teachers improve themselves and thus their surroundings. This desire to identify and facilitate the enhancement of proper school attributes is longstanding. Good, Biddle & Brophy (1976) wrote “the existence of effective teachers suggests that teaching could be improved by the systematic collection of information describing how these teachers accomplish their results (p. 371).” They cite many studies that support the positive associations between teachers’ demeanors and student learning. One links teachers’ “willingness to push pupils to achieve” with greater learning at their schools and another illustrates “the importance of
teachers’ affective behavior…(on) pupils’ reading achievement.” The outcome of this study on Conscious Discipline workshops serves to advocate the training of teachers in classroom management approaches that wean teachers away from reliance on tangible rewards and toward fostering more intrinsic motivation to behave, learn, and excel. The research suggests that educators need to examine the impact of currently used external rewards systems that purport reduction in behavioral problems and pay attention to changes in other variables that indicate a decline in overall school success. In essence, relying on competitive classrooms based on rewards and punishments may solve one problem and pose others.
REFERENCES


SPSS for Windows (1999), Release 9.0.1, Chicago, IL: SPSS, Inc.


Table 1. Sample Sizes, Means and Standard Error of the Means for Years of Experience and Grades Taught for the Eight Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Entity</th>
<th>September Survey Sample Size (pre-workshop)</th>
<th>April Survey Sample Size (post-workshop)</th>
<th>Years Experience Mean and S.E. (pre-workshop)</th>
<th>Grade Taught Mean and S.E. (pre-workshop)</th>
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<td>11</td>
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Table 2. Levels of Significance (p-values) for Testing Number of Dimensions for Discriminant Analysis

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<tr>
<td>1*</td>
<td>1=X -0.5, -0.4, 3.0</td>
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Table 3. Survey Questions and Their Correlations with the Discriminant Function Along with Overall Mean Scores For Each Group in School Entity 1*
Figure Caption

Figure 1. Two-dimensional Plot of Discriminant Scores for School Entity 1*
Scores from Function 1 (Conscious Discipline)

Note: Ellipses are not statistically derived and appear only as a visual aid.