

# A THEORETICAL DISCIPLINE MANAGEMENT FOUNDATION: THE MISSING LINK IN SECONDARY TEACHERS' PRACTICE AND PREPARATION

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## *Introduction and Problem*

The hallmark of quality teachers appears to be the ability to integrate student discipline within the teaching practice. Over the past decade discipline has been cited as the major problem for classroom teachers (Chiodo & Chang, 1999-2000). Results of several national Gallup polls clearly document both public and teacher agreement that a major problem for public schools is lack of student discipline in classrooms (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1996; Langdon, 1996; Rose & Gallup, 2003, 2004). Teachers also have reported that discipline was the major reason why they left the teaching profession (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Langdon, 1996). Recently, authors have linked classroom discipline directly to student learning outcomes (Marzano & Marzano, 2003; Wolk, 2003). A major gap appears to be lack of teacher understanding and use of theoretical perspectives in classroom discipline management practices.

According to experts in the area of classroom and discipline management, theoretical perspectives provide teachers a means for effective practice by providing a way to formulate their personal discipline philosophy (Bushist & Gerbing, 1990; Darch & Kame'enui, 2004; Edwards, 2004). Edwards (2004) suggests that many teachers consider students to be the main reason for discipline problems while Darch and Kame'enui (2004) suggest that both special education and general education are fraught with inconsistent discipline management interventions based upon

teachers' opinions and unsound research. An identified need for research was to investigate classroom teachers' perceptions of their discipline management practices. A review of the literature covering discipline models and strategies follows.

### *Review of Literature – Theoretical Perspectives*

Theoretical discipline management models form a continuum ranging from total teacher control and responsibility for student discipline to student responsibility for managing their own behavior (Edwards, 2004). Five different theorists were selected to represent the continuum of discipline perspectives. Discipline philosophy perspectives and associated strategies representing Skinner, Canter, Dreikurs, Gathercoal, and Glasser follow.

B.F. Skinner's behavior modification discipline model is based on the assumption that humans respond to environmental stimuli (Skinner, 1971). Skinner developed and researched his model during the 1960s and 1970s. This model is a teacher control model relying upon either positive reinforcement consequences or punishment to shape observable student behavior (Edwards, 2004). Examples of positive reinforcement could be candy, stickers, or working on the computer. Examples of punishment could be time-out where a student is temporarily isolated from peers, placing the student's name on a list, or withdrawal of privileges such as attendance at a school function (Charles, 1992; Darch & Kame'enui, 2004; Edwards, 2004). Baer (1988) found that behavior modification is especially prevalent in special education settings. Punishment is the most common discipline strategy used in classrooms today (Edwards, 2004).

A second teacher control discipline model is the assertive discipline model developed by Canter (1989). Canter's basic assumptions associated with assertive discipline focus upon rules for providing a framework for a discipline management plan. The teacher is in control and is expected to become assertive as necessary using eye contact, verbal warnings, proximity control, and manipulatory student behavior through use of positive reinforcement and punishment. The Canter model encourages both parent and administrative support for teacher discipline management.

The model has been popular across campuses nationwide and many schools have provided teacher training on the model (Darch & Kame'enui, 2004; Edwards, 2004). The focus upon rules and schoolwide discipline plans associated with the Canter model has found support in the literature (Horsch, Chen, & Nelson, 1999; Marzano & Marzano, 2003; Taylor & Baker, Jr., 2002).

The logical consequences discipline model of Rudolf Dreikurs is more students oriented. Dreikurs emphasizes the need to determine the cause of student misbehavior such as the need for attention, revenge, power, or student inadequacy. Dreikurs then works one-to-one with the student to develop and implement logical consequences (Dreikurs & Grey, 1968; Dreikurs, Grunwald, & Pepper, 1982). The Dreikurs model encourages a democratic approach to both development and enforcement of rules (Erwin, 2003). The teacher's role is more as a leader who has the responsibility to help students understand motivation for misbehavior. Logical consequences should be distinguished from punishment, e.g., students who do not study for tests get poor scores. This model does not help teachers organize a classroom or use instruction to shape student success (Darch & Kame'enui, 2004; Edwards, 2004).

Forrest Gathercoal created the judicious discipline model which is student-centered. This model is a classroom management model based upon ethics, professional practices, and student constitutional rights and responsibilities (Gathercoal, 2001). This model is appropriate for secondary students and provides them with an opportunity to understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Teachers are encouraged to model responsible behaviors and develop judicious rules and consequences within democratic learning communities. One strategy used in this model is class meetings where discipline infractions are discussed and students encouraged to gain personal autonomy and social responsibility (Edwards, 2004). The Gathercoal model is addressed in recent literature and support provided for the establishment of a democratic classroom community and democratic governance (Berman, 2003; Hanson, 2002; Torney-Purta, 2002; Wolk, 2003).

William Glasser developed the choice theory of classroom

discipline. This model is the most students centered of those reviewed. The basic assumption is that humans are basically self-regulating and can manage their own behavior. This model recognizes that each student has a unique way of satisfying their need for control, freedom, and fun (Glasser, 1998). Glasser believes teachers should ignore student excuses for bad behavior or asking why but directly address the problem with student, identify consequences, and creating a plan. Democratic rule making, class meetings, individual student meetings, and cooperative learning strategies are encouraged in this model. Other basic tenets of the approach include using noncoercive approaches, taking responsibility for one's own behavior and establishing a safe environment (Edwards, 2004; Marshall & Weisner, 2004).

### *Purpose of Paper*

The purpose of this paper was to present the results of a study to investigate secondary teacher perceptions of their knowledge and use of discipline models and associated strategies.

### *Methods*

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Topics covered in the Methods section include instrumentation, the sample and data collection, analysis and results, conclusions, recommendations, and limitations.

### *The Instrument*

A survey instrument was developed for use in a larger study. Based upon the response of 153 teachers, total instrument internal consistency reliability was established at .91. A panel of experts comprised of teachers in the field, behavior specialists, and university professors from teacher education established content validity. Content of the instrument was based upon discipline strategies associated with the theories of Skinner, Canter, Dreikurs, Gathercoal, and Glasser. Respondents were asked to rate their perceptions of competency with each strategy using a Likert-type scale with 1 being least competent and 4 being most competent. Respondents also were asked to judge the amount of time they used each strategy utilizing the same type scale with 1 represent-

ing limited or no use and 4 representing total use. The instrument contained 37 items and a principal axis factor analysis was used to identify five factors from the items: social reinforcement, positive reinforcement, punishment, rules, and documented warnings. (See copy of survey in appendix.)

### *The Sample and Data Collection*

Four secondary schools (grades 7 through 12) in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex volunteered to participate in the study. One hundred twenty-five survey instruments were distributed to principals in each school. Principals put the surveys in teacher's boxes and returned completed ones to the principal investigator. Fifty-eight surveys were returned, yielding a 46% return rate.

### *Sample Characteristics*

Sixty-four percent of the respondents taught at the middle school level and 36% taught at the high school level. Sixty-nine percent were general education teachers and 31% represented special education. The majority of the respondents were Caucasian with 48%. Thirty-five percent were African American, 12% were Hispanic, and 5% Asian. Fifty-five percent of the sample had a bachelor's degree, while the remaining 45% held a master's degree. Seventy-six percent were female. Sixty percent held secondary certification for grades 7 to 12 and 40% held elementary pre-K through grade 6. Thirty-eight percent fell within the 46 to 55 years old range and 29% were between 31 and 35 years old. Forty-three percent reported having more than 7 clock hours of behavior management training.

### *Analysis and Results*

A one-way ANOVA was used to determine mean differences with respect to responses within each factor across the independent variables of current position, ethnicity, certification, school type, and education level. Significant findings follow.

ANOVA results comparing teacher education levels by knowledge of punishment were significant  $F = 4.058 (1, 57)$ ,  $p < .05$ . Bachelor level teachers rated themselves higher ( $M = 2.53$ ,  $SD$

= 1.11) concerning knowledge of punishment than master’s level teachers (M = 1.93, SD = 1.13).

Several ANOVA results comparing teachers by level of certification were significant. Elementary certified teachers utilized social reinforcement significantly more than secondary certified teachers,  $F = 3.88 (1, 57), p < .05$ . Elementary certified teacher means were compared (M = 3.26, SD = .68) to secondary certified teacher means (M = 3.02, SD = .83). Elementary certified teachers utilized positive reinforcement strategies significantly more than secondary certified teachers,  $F = 4.29 (1, 57), p < .05$ , with elementary certification means (M = 2.52, SD = .57) versus secondary certified means (M = 2.09, SD = .88). Elementary certified teachers used documented warnings such as name on the board significantly more than secondary certified teachers,  $F = 4.74 (1, 57), p < .05$ , with elementary certified teachers means (M = 2.58, SD = 1.03) and secondary certified means (M = 1.91, SD = 1.23). Elementary certified teachers used rules significantly more than secondary certified teachers,  $F = 6.06 (1, 57), p < .05$ . Elementary certified teacher mean (M = 2.84, SD = .59) and secondary certified mean (M = 2.33, SD = .86). Table 1 showing means by cluster and teaching level for significant findings follows.

Table 1  
Mean Cluster Scores by Teacher Level

	<u>Elementary</u>			<u>Secondary</u>		
Clusters	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
<b>Use</b>						
Social Reinforcement	21	3.26	.68	37	3.02	.83
Positive Reinforcement	21	2.52	.57	36	2.09	.88
Document Warnings	21	2.58	1.03	37	1.91	1.23
Rules	21	2.84	.59	37	2.33	.86

One significant finding was noted with ethnicity of teacher and the frequency which punishment was administered,  $F = .840$  (3, 57),  $p < .05$ . A Tukey comparison of multiple means was used to differentiate among ethnicity of teachers. Mean differences at the .05 level of significance were noted between African American and Caucasian teachers. Caucasian teachers used punishment significantly more often than African American teachers.

One significant finding was noted when comparing the current position of teachers and their knowledge of documented warnings,  $F = 4.07$  (1, 57),  $p < .05$ . Special education teachers professed significantly more knowledge about documented warnings ( $M = 3.05$ ,  $SD = .89$ ) than general education teachers ( $M = 2.40$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ).

Results also showed that teacher respondents were most knowledgeable about punishment and least knowledgeable about positive reinforcement. The most used discipline strategy was punishment and the least used strategy was rules.

### *Conclusions and Recommendations*

The long tradition of punishment in schools has been supported by this study. Perhaps the significantly higher level of knowledge of punishment strategies by bachelor level teachers could be explained by their lack of discipline management experience and insecurity precipitating a need for control. The differences between elementary certified and secondary certified teachers may be explained by the differences in student development and by differences related to elementary and secondary teacher preparation. Elementary teachers frequently use concrete positive reinforcement in the form of food, parties, or stickers. They also frequently use verbal praise, teacher attention, and documented warnings such as placing a student's name on the board. Special education teachers are highly trained in behavior management strategies and their use of documented warnings supports the literature. Lack of knowledge about positive reinforcement strategies for general education secondary teachers is not surprising since their preparation focuses more upon content rather than pedagogy.

The finding that rules was the least used strategy was dis-

turbing since rules form the framework for all the different discipline management models. Secondary teachers may feel that rules are emphasized by primary and elementary teachers so that they do not need to spend time directly teaching rules again. In general, results of this study support findings in the literature suggesting that teachers select different teacher behaviors intermittently without a consistent plan, resulting in overuse of punishment as a discipline strategy to address immediate problems. Some effective teaching practices to increase student awareness of conflicts included having students analyze and respond to the conflicts in stories as part of literature/language lessons additionally, students may learn processes for managing broader political questions, war, and controversial issues in social studies classes. Results of this study suggest a need for secondary teachers to develop an individual discipline philosophy so they are aware of where they are on the continuum for teacher control with respect to discipline models. Implications of the study suggest a need for more in-depth professional development with field-based requirements linking theoretical discipline perspectives with effective teacher practice. Replication of this study with a larger sample of teachers is recommended.

### *Limitations of the Study*

Limitations are those commonly associated with survey research. The sample population may not generalize to other areas except north-central Texas. The participants were secondary teachers and volunteered to participate, limiting generalizability. Responses from volunteers may differ from those who did not participate. Responses were perceptions of the individuals and may be biased. Responses were collected at only one point in time.

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