

Clarifying Teachers' Beliefs About Discipline

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Using a simple instrument, teachers can choose an approach to classroom discipline compatible with their own values.

Student discipline is consistently a primary concern of teachers and citizens.¹ In fact, teachers' inability to manage students effectively is the main source of dissatisfaction for two-thirds of today's teachers.² Numerous books have been written to assist teachers with discipline problems, and there are many courses and workshops to choose from, ranging from "behavior modification methods" to "reality therapy" to "teacher effectiveness training." But the increasing number of choices makes decisions more difficult, especially for beginning teachers whose teacher preparation programs gave them little exposure to discipline strategies, and who have yet to develop their own styles.

We have developed a way for teachers to clarify their beliefs on discipline so they can select strategies with which they are comfortable. Self-concept theorists, including Lecky³, Kelley⁴, Snygg and Combs⁵

¹ George Gallup, "Eleventh Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," *Phi Delta Kappan* 60 (September 1977): 33-45.

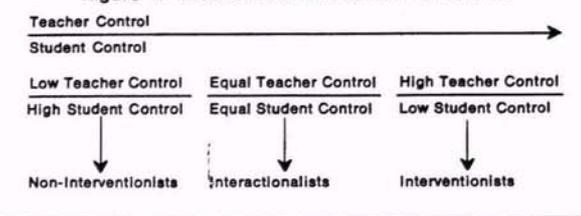
² "Who is the Classroom Teacher?" *Today's Education* (Nov.-Dec. 1977): 11.

³ P. Lecky, *Self-Consistency: A Theory of Personality* (Long Island, N.Y.: Island Press, 1945).

⁴ G. A. Kelley, *The Psychology of Personal Constructs* (New York: Norton, 1955).

⁵ D. Snygg and A. W. Combs, *Individual Behavior* (New York: Harper & Row, 1949).

Figure 1. Teacher-Student Control Continuum



posit that individuals strive for consistency and unity in their values and beliefs, and threats to this consistency produce feelings of distress. Epstein wrote:

... that the individual, as he goes about the business of attempting to solve the problems of everyday living, proceeds in a manner similar to that of the scientist who is attempting to solve more impersonal problems. Both continuously make and test hypotheses and revise their concepts. ... If experience were not so arranged, it would be impossible to behave effectively in a complex world with innumerable conflicting demands.⁶

When these concepts are applied to beliefs on discipline, we can infer that teachers hold hypotheses about discipline, and that they desire to behave toward students in ways to validate or reject their hypotheses. Because of the daily pressures of teaching, however, they may lose sight of their beliefs and therefore lack standards by which to judge their own disciplinary actions. They need a way to identify their hypotheses and test the extent to which they function according to those hypotheses.

Three Schools of Thought

Glickman and Wolfgang⁷ have identified three schools of thought along a teacher-student control continuum (Figure 1). The *Non-Interventionists* look to such disparate psychologies as psychoanalysis and humanism for their beliefs about student behavior. They believe that misbehavior is the result of unresolved inner conflicts. Individuals who are given the opportunity and appropriate support will be able to bring to the conscious level their inner difficulties and will be able to solve their own misbehaviors. In other words, students are masters of their own destiny and have the inherent capability to solve their own problems. Teachers should not impose their own rules but should allow students to reason for themselves. According to this school of thought, the student is given high control and the teacher low.

The *Interactionalists* look to the works of social and developmental psychologists to understand students' actions. They believe that students learn to behave as a result of encountering the outside world of objects and people. Students must learn to accom-

modate to others as others learn to accommodate to them. Thus, the solution to misbehavior is a reciprocal relationship between student and teacher (or classmates). One does not make one's own solution but rather is confronted by the realities of living with others and abiding by rules of behavior that are satisfactory to all parties. Both teacher and student share equal control over each other.

The *Interventionists* draw their rationale from experimental psychologists who believe that human action is a matter of external conditioning. Students learn to behave only as certain behaviors are reinforced, so a student's misbehavior is the result of inadequate rewards or punishments. The teacher must set the standards and go about efficiently and consistently shaping the appropriate behavior. The way students learn to behave is for a teacher to systematically teach those standards. The inner or reciprocal worlds of the student are not important. The teacher exerts high control over the student.

The above descriptions are somewhat arbitrary and oversimplified, but the classifications are consistent with other models developed to explain teacher behavior, educational ideologies, and psychologies.⁸ The essential factor in this classification is the degree of control assumed by the teacher and student.

Teachers may be able to identify some of their own beliefs using a general model such as the one outlined here, but still might not be able to identify the areas of confusion, or incongruity. The Beliefs on Discipline Inventory was constructed to help them clarify their own beliefs.

The Inventory

The Beliefs on Discipline Inventory (Figure 2) is a self-administered, self-scored instrument that can be used to make a general assessment of a teacher's beliefs on discipline according to the three schools described above. There are three parts to the inventory: prediction items, forced choice items, and self-scoring and interpretation.

The prediction items ask the teacher which school of discipline dominates his/her beliefs. Responses to these items, which represent one's hypotheses about discipline, are later compared with one's

⁶ S. Epstein, "The Self-Concept Revisited: Or a Theory of a Theory," *American Psychologist* 28 (1973): 404-416.

⁷ C. Glickman and C. Wolfgang, "Conflict in the Classroom: An Eclectic Model of Teacher-Child Interaction," *Elementary School Guidance and Counseling* (December 1978): 82-87.

⁸ A. Berlak and others, "Teaching and Learning in English Primary Schools," *School Review* (1975): 215-243; L. Kohlberg and R. Mayer, "Development as the Aim of Education," *Harvard Educational Review* 42 (1972): 449-496.



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actual beliefs as indicated by responses to the second part, the forced choice items.

Each forced choice item in part II pits a belief or technique from one school of thought against a belief or technique from another school. The teacher selects the belief or technique closest to his/her own.

An assumption of the Inventory is that individuals believe in and use techniques from all three schools of thought, although usually one predominates. Thus, a score is derived for each school of thought. The percentage point score represents the ratio of the number of times one school of thought was chosen over either of the other two, compared to the number of times it might have been chosen. This relative ranking of the three belief systems enables

the teacher to identify which predominates in his/her thinking.

The scoring procedure includes comparing results of the forced choice with the predictions made in part I. Discrepancies between one's predictions and one's actual score make explicit the inconsistencies between one's hypotheses and one's actual beliefs.

Interpretation

When a teacher has completed the Beliefs on Discipline Inventory, there are several things he/she may do, depending on the outcome.

Probably the most dramatic result that can occur is a discrepancy between what one predicted in part I

Figure 2. Beliefs On Discipline Inventory

Part I. Prediction

INSTRUCTIONS: Rank order the discipline models according to how you think you generally believe. Place 1 next to the model you think most dominates your beliefs, 2 next to the second, and 3 next to the third.

1.A. Model	Rank
Interventionist	_____
Non-Interventionist	_____
Interactionalist	_____

Next, answer the following questions:

1.B. In handling classroom discipline, how often do you think you take an Interventionist position rather than either a Non-Interventionist or an Interactionalist position?

1.B. Nearly 100% _____ About 75% _____ About 50% _____ About 25% _____
of the time of the time of the time of the time
Nearly 0% _____
of the time

1.C. In handling classroom discipline, how often do you think you take a Non-Interventionist position rather than either an Interventionist or an Interactionalist position?

1.C. Nearly 100% _____ About 75% _____ About 50% _____ About 25% _____
of the time of the time of the time of the time
Nearly 0% _____
of the time

1.D. In handling classroom discipline, how often do you think you take an Interactionalist position rather than either an Interventionist or Non-Interventionist position?

1.D. Nearly 100% _____ About 75% _____ About 50% _____ About 25% _____
of the time of the time of the time of the time
Nearly 0% _____
of the time

Part II. Forced Choices

INSTRUCTIONS: For each question below, there are two statements, A and B. Choose the statement that is closest to how you feel. You might not agree with either choice, but you must choose one. Circle either A or B, but not both. Please be sure to answer all 12 items.

- 1.A. Students are not always capable of making rational and moral decisions.
- B. Students' inner emotions and capacity for decision making must always be considered legitimate and valid.
- 2.A. Generally, I assign students to specific areas or seats in the classroom.
- B. Generally, my seating (or work area) assignments are open to negotiation.
- 3.A. Even though students are not fully mature, teachers should give them responsibilities and choices.
- B. Students should not be expected to be fully responsible for their decisions because they are strongly influenced by teachers, parents, friends, and TV.
4. When the noise level in the classroom bothers me, I will most likely:
 - A. Discuss my discomfort with the students, and attempt to come to a compromise with them about noise levels during activity periods.
 - B. Allow the activity to continue as long as the noise is not disturbing or upsetting any student.
5. During class, if a student breaks a classmate's portable 8-track tape player, I as the teacher will most likely:
 - A. Scold both students, one for disrespecting others' property, and the other for breaking a rule prohibiting personal radios and tape players in school.
 - B. Avoid interfering in something that the students (and possibly their parents) need to resolve themselves.
6. If students unanimously agree that a classroom rule is unjust and should be removed but I (the teacher) disagree with them, then
 - A. The rule should probably be removed, and replaced by a rule made by the students.
 - B. The students and I should jointly decide on a fair rule.

7. When a student does not join in a group activity,
 - A. The teacher should explain the value of the activity to the student, and encourage the student to participate.
 - B. The teacher should attempt to identify the student's reasons for not joining, and to create activities that meet the needs of the student.
8. During the first week of class, I will most likely:
 - A. Allow the students to interact freely and initiate any rule making.
 - B. Announce the classroom rules and inform students how the rules will be fairly enforced.
- 9.A. Student's creativity and self-expression should be encouraged and nurtured as much as possible.
- B. Limits on destructive behaviors have to be set without denying students their sense of choice and decision.
10. If a student interrupts my lesson by talking to a neighbor, I will most likely:
 - A. Move the child away from other students and continue the lesson; class time should not be wasted on account of one student.
 - B. Tell students about my annoyance and conduct a discussion with students about how they feel when being interrupted.
- 11.A. A good educator is firm but fair in disciplining violators of school rules.
- B. A good educator discusses several alternative disciplinary actions with a student who violates a school rule.
12. When one of the more conscientious students does not complete an assignment on time,
 - A. I know the student has a legitimate reason, and that the student on his/her own will turn in the assignment.
 - B. I tell the student that she/he was expected to turn in the assignment when it was due, and then with the student, we will jointly decide on the next steps.

Part III. Scoring and Interpretation

Step 1. Circle your responses on the following table and tally the totals in each table:

Table I		Table II		Table III	
2A	1A	4B	1B	2B	4A
3B	5A	6A	5B	3A	6B
7A	8B	9A	8A	7B	9B
11A	10A	12A	10B	11B	12B

Step 2. Multiply the totals from each table above by a factor of 8½.

- 2.1 Total responses in Table I _____ × 8½ = _____
- 2.2 Total responses in Table II _____ × 8½ = _____
- 2.3 Total responses in Table III _____ × 8½ = _____

Step 3. Before interpreting your results, check to see that the sum of your responses in Table I, Table II, and Table III is 12.

The product you obtained in Step 2.1 above is an approximate percentage of how often you take an Interventionist approach to discipline rather than either a Non-Interventionist or Interactionalist approach, as indicated by the forced choices format.

Compare this value with your predicted percentage for Interventionist from part 1.B. of the Inventory.

The product you obtained in Step 2.2 above is an approximate percentage of how often you take a Non-Interventionist approach to discipline, rather than one of the other approaches. This percentage value can be compared to your predicted percentage from part 1.C.

The product you obtained in Step 2.3 is an approximate percentage of how often you take an Interactionalist approach to discipline rather than one of the other approaches. This percentage can be compared to your predicted percentage from part 1.D.

By comparing the three percentage values computed in Step 2 above (2.1, 2.2, and 2.3), you can assess which discipline model predominates in your beliefs. If the percentage values are equal, or close to equal, you may be eclectic in your approach.

Your percentage values for each of the three models (Step 2) could be compared with your predicted rank order of the discipline models (Part 1.A. of the Inventory).

and the actual beliefs indicated by the score on part II. This may indicate that the individual does not fully understand the three schools of discipline, but more likely, his/her hypothesis does not accurately reflect his/her actual beliefs. Individuals who show this discrepancy may choose to reexamine the forced-choice items to pinpoint some of their specific belief discrepancies.

Reexamining one's responses can be a starting point for reflecting on incongruities between beliefs and actions. Some items in the inventory are belief statements (items 1, 3, 9, 11) and others are specific disciplinary actions or techniques (items 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12). In reviewing the items, one may discover that one school of thought dominates on the items involving beliefs while another school of thought dominates on items involving techniques.

The pattern of responses in part II is also instructive. The most frequent pattern is for one school of thought to predominate. (For example, Interventionist 67 percent; Non-Interventionist 17 percent; Interactionalist 17 percent). In this case, the individual may wish to think and act more in accordance with the predominant school of thought and reduce the role of the other two schools. This involves studying and learning additional strategies and reasoning of the school of thought that predominates one's beliefs. Another direction is for one to expand one's repertoire of techniques on discipline by considering and possibly using techniques from the non-dominant schools of thought. This involves learning the beliefs and strategies of those schools of thought and integrating them with one's predominant beliefs.

Individuals whose pattern of responses in part II is even (for example, Interventionist 33 percent; Non-Interventionist 33 percent; and Interactionalist 33 percent) may be eclectic in their beliefs on discipline. That is, they may act on the basis of situational cues, age or developmental stage of the stu-

"Individuals who are given the opportunity and appropriate support will be able to bring to the conscious level their inner difficulties and will be able to solve their own misbehaviors."

dents, the teacher's own immediate inclination, or some other undetermined criteria. These individuals may want to reflect further to identify the basis by which they decide on discipline issues. Or they may have the more difficult task of using approaches from all schools of thought coherently.

When teachers have analyzed their responses, they can make an informed decision about which of the popular theories on discipline will be most informative and useful for them.

Non-Interventionist: The following writers have in common a belief in students' ability to solve their own problems if given the proper support by the teacher:

1. Gordon⁹ suggests that the teacher use active listening, nondirective statements, door openers (and re-openers), "I" statements, and Method III problem solving found in *Teacher Effectiveness Training*.

2. Harris¹⁰ offers a way to analyze verbal and nonverbal transactions between teacher and student in order to improve communication.

3. Raths,¹¹ Simon,¹² and others suggest that the teacher learn how to conduct formal classes and informal discussions about personal values. In books such as *Values Clarification and Values and Teaching* they suggest that as students explore and internalize a personal code of behavior, misbehavior will decrease.

The Interactionalists: The following authors believe in a teacher actively limiting a student's behavior to choices within socially approved rules and regulations. Solutions to misbehavior are dealt with as a matter of reciprocal agreement between student and teacher:

1. Dreikurs¹³ has the teacher finding out through a series of questions what the misdirected goal of misbehavior is (attention, power, revenge, or helplessness). When the goal has been identified, the teacher is to use encouragement and logical consequences to help the student redirect his/her behavior.

⁹ T. Gordon, *Teacher Effectiveness Training* (New York: Peter H. Wyden, Publisher, 1974).

¹⁰ T. A. Harris, *I'm OK—You're OK: A Practical Guide to Transactional Analysis* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969).

¹¹ L. E. Raths, M. Harmin, and S. B. Simon, *Values and Teaching* (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1966), p. 30.

¹² S. B. Simon, L. W. Howe, and H. Kirschenbaum, *Values Clarification: A Handbook of Practical Strategies for Teachers and Students* (New York: Hart Publishing Co., Inc., 1972), pp. 58-75.

¹³ R. Dreikurs and P. Cassel, *Discipline Without Tears* (New York: Hawthorne Books, Inc., 1972).

2. Glasser¹⁴ provides techniques for confronting a student's misbehavior and pressing the student for a commitment to carry out a mutually agreed upon plan. He advocates the use of three levels of isolation ("off to the castle") with a new plan re-emerging after each. He also tells how "classroom meetings" can be used to encounter a disruptive student.

The Interventionists: The following authors believe that classroom management involves setting clear standards of behavior and using appropriate reinforcers, positive and negative:

1. Blackhan and Silberman,¹⁵ Homme,¹⁶ Madsen and Madsen,¹⁷ and others provide the teacher with experimental tools of behavior modification. The teacher is told how to use the techniques of various reinforcers (primary, social, or token), saturation, extinction, contingency contracting, and isolation ("time out") to shape desired student behavior.

2. Dobson and Engelmann¹⁸ are advocates of behavior modification but they also recommend the restrained use of punishment. They provide the teacher with ways to set a firm tone when explaining expected rules and regulations. Punishment (negative reinforcement) is used according to certain criteria.

Eclectic: Eclectics believe there is no one explanation for how students grow, learn, or behave. They may use the strong reinforcement tools of the Interventionists with a student in one circumstance and the non-judgmental, empathetic tools of the Non-Interventionist in another. They must be knowledgeable about various approaches and know when to use which.

An eclectic teacher should be acquainted with the ideas of at least one author from each school of thought (for example, Gordon, Glasser, and Dobson). In addition, he/she might refer to the writings of Wolfgang and Glickman¹⁹ to learn how to assess a student's stage of social development in order to apply eclectic discipline.

Uses For the Inventory

The Beliefs On Discipline Inventory is probably most beneficial when it is used as a starting point, rather than as a "one-shot" strategy. For example, after a teacher has read a book on discipline or tried some new strategies in the classroom, he/she might retake the Inventory and compare results of the second round with those of the first.

Another way to use the Inventory is for teachers to compare their beliefs with others' perceptions of their behavior. A teacher would first complete the Inventory according to the directions. Then, an observer—the teacher's supervisor, principal, or another

teacher—would complete the Inventory according to how the observer had seen the teacher in action. A fruitful discussion could emerge between the observer and the teacher when their responses were compared.

Principals and curriculum specialists could also use the Inventory in connection with planning in-service meetings. The forced-choice section could be used as the basis for polling teachers to determine which school of discipline predominated among them. A workshop on discipline that approached the topic in a manner consistent with the teachers' beliefs would probably be accepted more warmly than an arbitrarily selected approach.

The Beliefs on Discipline Inventory is quickly administered and scored, and it has good face validity.²⁰ Although designed primarily for assessment, it also has instructional value. For these reasons, educators are likely to find other ways to use it constructively. *ET*

¹⁴ W. Glasser, *Schools Without Failure* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

¹⁵ G. Blackhan and A. Silberman, *Modification of Child and Adolescent Behavior*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., Inc., 1975).

¹⁶ H. L. Homme, *How to Use Contingency Contracting in the Classroom* (Champaign, Ill.: Research Press, 1973).

¹⁷ C. H. Madsen and L. Madsen, *Teaching Discipline: Behavioral Principles Towards a Positive Approach* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1970).

¹⁸ J. Dobson, *Dare to Discipline* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tynedale House Publishers, 1970); S. Engelmann, *Preventing Failure in the Primary Grades* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969).

¹⁹ C. Wolfgang and C. Glickman, *Solving Discipline Problems: Alternative Strategies for Classroom Teachers* (Boston, Mass.: Allyn & Bacon, 1980).

²⁰ The instrument has been field tested with 61 pre-service teachers and 63 in-service teachers. Responses to one option (for example, A) for each item ranged from 29 percent to 71 percent, which suggests good item discrimination. The items were also critiqued by teachers, curriculum specialists, and college professors in education for theoretical consistency.



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