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AUTHOR	Tomal, Daniel R.
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a Five-Styles Teacher Discipline Model for helping teachers manage discipline. The model was developed based on a study of 120 teachers from a public school district in northeast Illinois. The students in the two participating urban schools were predominantly African American and from a lower socioeconomic status. Data were collected through group and individual interviews and limited teacher-student observations. The interviews focused on types of disciplinary problems, ways of handling them, typical discipline situations, student responses to discipline, and teacher's style with the students (assertive to supportive). The five styles for the model (enforcer, abdicator, supporter, compromiser, and negotiator) were formulated based upon the degree of a teacher's enforcing of rules and supporting of students. The results indicated that teachers utilized all five discipline styles in disciplining students. Those who used the negotiator discipline style exhibited a high degree of emphasis on enforcing and supporting, taking a win-win approach to disciplining students. They had the least amount of difficulty handling disciplinary problems. The negotiator style may offer the most effective approach to classroom discipline. (Contains 17 references.) (SM)

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Running Head: Discipline Styles Model

A Five-Styles Teacher Discipline Model

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Daniel R. Tomal
Concordia University
River Forest, IL

D. Tomal

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Abstract

This paper presents a Five-Styles Teacher Discipline Model for assisting teachers in managing discipline. The model was developed based upon a study involving 120 teachers from a public high school district in northeast Illinois. Data were collected through group and individual interviews, and limited teacher-student interactions. The five styles, *Enforcer, Abdicator, Supporter, Compromiser, and Negotiator* were formulated based upon the degree of a teacher's *enforcing* of rules and *supporting* of students. The results indicated that teachers utilized all five discipline styles in disciplining students, but that the *Negotiator* style may offer the most effective approach. Further study on this topic is recommended.

A Five-Styles Teacher Discipline Model

The problem of managing student disciplinary behavior continues to be a major problem for teachers today. Violence, aggression, defiance, fighting, and classroom disruption consistently plague our schools (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1996). While there have been a number of different strategies and techniques used by teachers to manage discipline, teachers continue to search for more effective means of disciplining their students (Harmin, 1995).

The burden of handling disciplinary problems has led to significant teacher stress and attrition, and reduced student academic achievement (Charles, 1996). Teachers have resorted to using a range of discipline styles from very assertive to accommodating based upon an amalgam of factors such as student needs, school policies and procedures, the disciplinary situation itself, the safety of students, and the overall influence and impact of the disciplinary incidents upon the behavior of other students.

How can teachers reduce disciplinary problems? How can teachers successfully restore safety and sanity in our schools? What are the best disciplinary styles of teachers? These are just a few of the questions teachers continue to explore in managing discipline in their classrooms.

Method

Purpose of the Study

The study was conducted in an attempt to assist teachers at a public school district in northeast Illinois in becoming more effective in managing student discipline. This action research study was conducted over a period of one year at an urban public school high school district servicing over 3,000 students. The study was conducted primarily at two large high schools involving about 120 teachers from the district. While the schools represented a diverse ethnic background, the majority of the students were African American and from a lower socioeconomic status. Also, while many of the teachers had been trained in using various discipline models, surveys revealed that teachers desired additional training and skill development in this area.

Procedures

Data were collected through the use of individual and group interviews, and limited teacher-student observations. The term disciplinary problem was loosely defined as any offense or behavior by a student that was deemed by the teacher to hinder student learning or compromise the educational process. Therefore, while most of the descriptions of disciplinary problems were the typical offenses committed by students in schools today, some of the disciplinary behaviors related to student academic performance such as failure to complete assignments, apathy, low motivation, careless work, absenteeism, and disinterest in school.

The individual and group interview sessions consisted of a series of open-ended questions such as "What are some of the most difficult aspects in handling disciplinary problems?" "Describe a typical discipline situation" "What methods seem to be most effective in handling these problems?" "Describe some typical student responses when you are dealing with a disciplinary situation," and "What style (e.g., assertive to supportive) do you take with your students?"

The group interviews appeared to offer a synergistic element to the session by allowing the participants to question each other and further elaborate on the various opinions and viewpoints. On the other hand, the individual interviews allowed the teachers the opportunity to be more open with their inadequacies in handling certain disciplinary problems. Also, actual observations of teacher and student discipline interventions were limited. None of the interviews were recorded.

Results

During the interview sessions, the teachers appeared to be open and candid in their responses and opinions about their experiences with disciplinary problems. They accepted responsibility in their role as a teacher to manage their own problems. Typical teacher responses to questions about classroom disruption included "Basically you have to try and get them to do what you want them to do--it takes a lot compromising," "Students will exploit you if you are not consistently assertive.

Many teachers indicated that dealing with those few "trouble students" could be become overwhelming and that sometimes they would try and avoid confronting a discipline incident. These teachers tended to be "burned out" with the profession.

When teachers were asked questions about student apathy or poor academic performance, typical responses included "Students seem to always want to bargain with you--more time to complete homework, desiring another chance to perform work--"They often displace blame to others to avoid responsibility," and "They are always giving you some excuse or to give them a break. Therefore, you have to do a lot of compromising with them."

An analysis of the data revealed an intriguing pattern of teacher discipline styles. Much like the administrator who develops a defined leadership and conflict management style (Blake & Mouton, 1969; Kilmann & Thomas, 1977), the teachers appeared to handle student disciplinary problems with a similar characteristic style (Tomal, 1997; Tomal, 1998). These discipline styles were categorized based upon the degree of the teacher's *enforcing* of rules and *supporting* of students (see figure 1.1).

Insert figure 1.1 about here

The enforcing term can be defined as the degree of assertiveness a teacher expressed in disciplining students. A teacher who had very high enforcing attributes appeared to place a high value on asserting his/her position. Likewise, a teacher who had a low concern for enforcing placed little emphasis on asserting his/her own position.

The supporting term can be defined as the degree to which a teacher accommodated students. A teacher who had very high supporting attributes placed high value on accommodating students. The teacher with low supporting attributes placed little value on accommodating the student.

Based upon the combination of the enforcing and supporting attributes, the teachers' styles were categorized into five primary styles--the enforcer, supporter, abdicator, compromiser, and the negotiator. Characteristics of these discipline styles are listed in figure 1.2.

Insert figure 1.2 about here

Enforcer. If a teacher had a high degree of enforcing and low degree of supporting, the teacher's style was called the "enforcer." This teacher was much like a dictator in demanding that his/her students obey his/her rules and allows

little room for discussions. The enforcer's attitude was "It is my way or the highway!" This style was very directive and assertive.

The enforcer appeared to take a "zero tolerance" approach to disciplinary problems. The enforcer style was characteristic of teachers who took a consistent hard-line approach with their students and gave little lee-way to them. They made comments like "The students know the rules the class and if they break them they know the consequences," and "I run a tight ship in my classroom--there's little room for approaching a disciplinary problem on an individual basis!" Enforcer-style teachers appeared to have little regard for individual circumstances and tend to make comments like "If I give one student a break, then I have to give all students a break."

Enforcers appeared partial to the "hot stove law," which indicated that disciplinary action be consistent with the consequences of a person touching a hot stove--the consequence is immediate, consistent, and impersonal. They seemed to place a very high value on order and control and little regard for concern for the individual student's personal problems. This style had characteristics of being autocratic, self-righteous, over threatening, intimidating, and demeaning.

For example, if a student failed to bring in an assignment to school but had a very good excuse, these teachers indicated

that they would not accept any excuses and would give little time for listening to the student. The negative consequences of this type of style appeared to vary. The impression was that some students may become "yes students" in order to tolerate the threatening style. It also seemed that some students kept their distance from the teachers and seemed to have difficulty becoming personable with these teachers. The enforcer was one who imposed strict rules and seemed to desire the creation of a confining and controlling climate within the classroom.

Abdicator. The "abdicator style" was characteristic of those teachers who had low supporting and enforcing attributes. They tended to be apathetic towards handling disciplinary problems and had little interest in their students. These teachers appeared to be "burned out" with the teaching profession and were awaiting retirement or were seeking another job. Abdicators tended to tolerate a great deal of misbehavior in the classroom.

Typical statements by the abdicator included: "If they want to sleep, I just let them sleep," "If they don't complete the work, I just flunk them--the heck with them," and, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make them drink--if they come to class, fine; if they don't, it's their own problem." These teachers tended to avoid confrontation in addressing disciplinary problems.

The abdicator had the characteristic of the stereotypical teacher who has taught for many years and has become disgruntled with the profession. The abdicator seemed to be somewhat reclusive, did little to motivate students, and did not seem to care whether the students behaved or not. Abdicators indicated they would rather send their problem students to the school disciplinary dean rather than deal with the students themselves.

It appeared that when students recognized this discipline style in a teacher, they would attempt to get away with as much as they could. They seemed to realize that this teacher had poor classroom management, and they, in turn, could display little respect towards the teacher. This style of discipline appears to lead to student demotivation, poor academic achievement, and class disruption.

This type of teacher exerted the minimum amount of effort needed to manage students within the classroom. Not only did they have a low regard for maintaining discipline, but their apathy seemed to carry over towards their attitude for student learning as well. The teachers also tended to have low support towards the students unless they have to.

Compromiser. Teachers who had the style of the "compromiser" exhibited a moderate degree of enforcing and supporting characteristics. They tended to engage in a great deal of give-and-take when disciplining their students. These teachers appeared to be more willing to compromise their own positions for those of the students. Therefore, these teachers appeared to be somewhat wishy-washy and inconsistent in enforcing school discipline policies. Examples of typical statements by the compromiser included, "Dealing with students is a give-and-take process; otherwise, they'll shut down on you and you'll get nowhere with them," and, "I guess I find myself working with the student and compromising all the time."

The compromiser tended to be inconsistent in enforcing policies and gave the impression of being manipulative and confusing. At times they seemed more concern in empathizing with students, while at other times they may embrace a more assertive discipline style. They seemed to place a high value on the necessity of balancing strict enforcement of classroom rules and trying to allow student freedom in the classroom.

There seemed to be some negative consequences of this type of style. Students appeared to be confused and did not seem to know where they stood in dealing with this type teacher. Given the teacher's inconsistency in managing behavior, the teacher might be viewed as a wheeler dealer by the students. Students

may become frustrated in seeking a balance between their own behavior and the expectations of the teacher. As a result, these teachers may create conflict among the students. Students may also feel pitted against other students and develop resentment toward their classmates because of inconsistent rule enforcement. Students may perceive other students as getting receiving preferential treatment.

Supporter. Teachers who had a "supporter" discipline style exhibited a high degree of supporting and a low degree of enforcing characteristics. They took great efforts to talk with students about a disciplinary problem and gave a great deal of latitude in the disciplinary action they may administer. These teachers placed a high degree of empathy and concern for the student but showed little assertiveness. They seemed very concerned about the personal feelings of the student and had a difficult time enforcing strict policies.

Typical statements of the supporter included: "I listen to my students; and if there are extenuating circumstances, I'll give them a break," and, "I have a deep concern for the feelings of my kids and do my best to work with them--every kid is different and you can't treat them all the same." The supporter appeared to take a soothing and unassertive approach in handling discipline problems. They tended to give the impression that they gave the students the benefit of the doubt and that they were reluctant to take strict disciplinary action against a student.

The negative consequences of this style seemed to be that the classroom were somewhat disruptive, since these teachers typically placed the needs of students over the need for rules and regulations. These teachers seemed overly concerned with insuring that the students were very comfortable and that there was an atmosphere of great care for students vs. the need for insuring high performance and academic achievement. This type of teacher appeared to sacrifice learning for the personal attention and feelings of the students.

Negotiator. Teachers with the "negotiator" discipline style exhibited a high degree of emphasis on enforcing and supporting. They took a win-win approach to disciplining students. They appeared to strive to create a learning environment where students would excel to their fullest potential. They seemed to demonstrate a balance of empathy and assertiveness with their students. These teachers also seemed to make use of many approaches to discipline such as parent/teacher conferences, listening to students, enforcing rules and policies, parent/telephone discussions, and counseling sessions with their students.

The negotiator placed high value on giving extra time after school to talk with students and parents in an effort to maintain a collaborative win-win environment as typified by such comments as, "Working with the student involves a collective process of

parents, teachers, and the student in coming to a consensus as to what is best for the student," and, "I try to take an objective approach in disciplining students."

The negotiator appeared to be objective, committed, responsible, and interested in taking charge in maintaining discipline in the classroom. They did not seem to subscribe to a zero tolerance policy but seemed recognize that all situations may warrant different disciplinary actions because of extenuating circumstances. They often stated that they would investigate the facts of a given disciplinary situation prior to administering discipline. While these teachers appeared to value assertiveness in maintaining control, they also seemed to have respect towards their students.

The negotiator teachers appeared to have the least amount of difficulty handling disciplinary problems and negative affects on their students. They seemed to exhibit a high degree of commitment to maintaining discipline without belittling and intimidating students.

Discussion

The notion of teachers negotiating with their students should not be a foreign concept. Every interaction a teacher has with a student has a negotiating element. These situations are similar to the daily interactions people have with each other in an attempt to come to agreement on something--similar to disciplinary interactions among teachers and students.

Negotiators, depending upon the discipline situation, need to emphasize varying degrees of enforcing and supporting attributes. For example, in times of life-threatening situations, the negotiator may exhibit high enforcing. At other times, the negotiator may exhibit high supporting with little need for enforcing. For this reason, it appears that the negotiator style may be the most effective style as compared to the others, but it may depend upon the discipline situation itself, the needs of student, and the teacher's own style.

An instrument (see Figure 1.3) has been developed which can assist teachers in understanding their use of the discipline styles, help them with discipline improvement, and for further study. For example, a high reliance of any the discipline styles, other than the negotiator, may indicate need for improvement. The need to alter a teacher's degree of enforcing or supporting may be beneficial.

Summary

Managing discipline is an art the requires teachers to understand the needs of their students, school policies, and their own discipline style. While there are several limitations of this study such as limited teacher-student interactions, lack of using a valid discipline-styles research instrument, and a limited sample population further investigation into this model appears warranted. Understanding the five-styles teacher discipline model may offer a viable approach in assisting teachers in more effectively managing their discipline problems.

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Figure 1.1 Teacher Disciplinary Styles

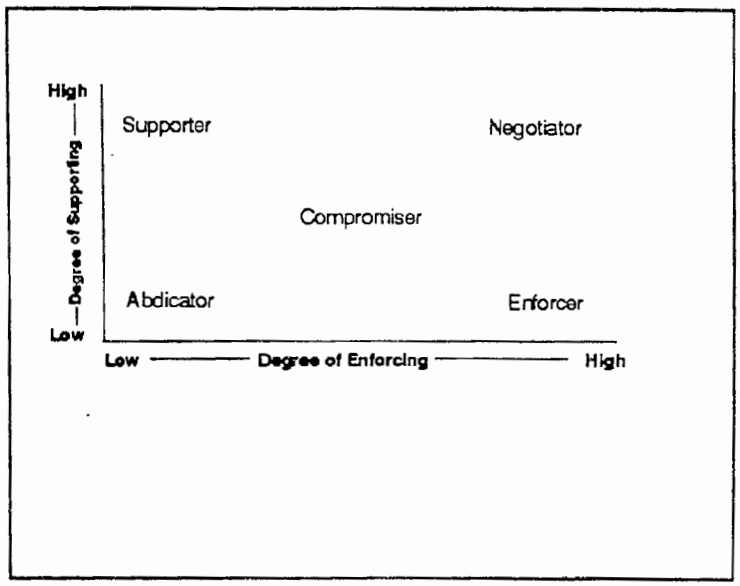

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Figure 1.1 Characteristics of the Five Teacher Disciplinary Styles

Characteristics of Teacher Discipline Styles

Supporter

* Seeks harmony
* Helpful, gracious
* Indecisive
* Evasive
* Personal
* Unassertive

Negotiator

* Seeks resolution
* Win-win approach
* Objective
* Responsible
* Committed
* Collaborates

Compromiser

* Manipulative
* Inconsistent
* Wishy-washy
* Limits creativity
* Gives and takes
* Open-ended

Abdicator

* Does nothing
* Avoids problems
* Reclusive
* Ignores students
* Bottled-up
* Apathetic

Enforcer

* Self-righteous
* Intimidating
* Controlling
* Threatening
* Demeaning
* Dictatorial

TEACHER DISCIPLINE STYLES INVENTORY

Directions: Indicate how often you exhibit each of the behaviors when disciplining your students by placing a check in the column next to each statement according to the scale below.

Scale: A=Almost Never S=Sometimes F=Frequently V=Very Frequently

	Discipline Behavior	**Frequency**			
1.	I am unassertive in disciplining students.	A	S	F	V
2.	I tend to ignore discipline problems.	A	S	F	V
3.	I manipulate my students to motivate them.	A	S	F	V
4.	I exhibit high control over my students.	A	S	F	V
5.	I counsel my students on their misbehavior.	A	S	F	V
6.	I am indecisive in disciplining students.	A	S	F	V
7.	I tend to intimidate my students.	A	S	F	V
8.	I try to avoid disciplining my students.	A	S	F	V
9.	I can be "wishy-washy" with my students.	A	S	F	V
10.	I am personal, but assertive with my students.	A	S	F	V
11.	I am accommodating with my students.	A	S	F	V
12.	I tend to avoid discipline problems.	A	S	F	V
13.	I tend to be a dictator with my students.	A	S	F	V
14.	I tend to collaborate with my students.	A	S	F	V
15.	I tend to compromise with my students.	A	S	F	V
16.	I am "soother/supporter" with my students.	A	S	F	V
17.	I tend to be apathetic in disciplining students.	A	S	F	V
18.	I am very assertive with my students.	A	S	F	V
19.	I am inconsistent in disciplining students.	A	S	F	V
20.	I take a "win-win" position with students.	A	S	F	V
21.	I "look the other way" with discipline problems.	A	S	F	V
22.	I am very sensitive about student's feelings.	A	S	F	V
23.	I aggressively take charge of discipline.	A	S	F	V
24.	I try to find "middle ground" with my students.	A	S	F	V
25.	I view discipline as a team approach.	A	S	F	V
26.	I try to be helpful and gracious with students.	A	S	F	V
27.	I send students to the disciplinary dean.	A	S	F	V
28.	I like to "give and take" with students.	A	S	F	V
29.	I can be threatening to my students.	A	S	F	V
30.	I talk with my students to reach a mutual result.	A	S	F	V

SCORING OF TEACHER DISCIPLINE STYLES SURVEY

Directions: Score each of the questions by giving a number for each question, using the point system below.

Very Frequently = 4 points; Frequently = 3 points; Sometimes = 2 points; Almost Never = 1 point

Write the number of points for each question in the scoring line for each of the questions. For example, if you answered question number one with "Very Frequently," place a 4 on the line designated for question number one. If you answered "Frequently," give yourself 3 points. If you answered "Sometimes," give yourself 2 points, and if you answered the question "Almost Never," you would place 1 point on the designated line for question number one.

Place a point for each of the questions on the lines, respectively. When finished, add all the numbers for each column and put the total for each column on the line at the bottom.

	Supporter	Abdicator	Enforcer	Compromiser	Negotiator
1.	_____				
2.		_____			
3.				_____	
4.			_____		
5.					_____
6.	_____				
7.			_____		
8.		_____			
9.				_____	
10.					_____
11.	_____				
12.		_____			
13.			_____		
14.					_____
15.				_____	
16.	_____				
17.		_____			
18.			_____		
19.				_____	
20.					_____
21.		_____			
22.	_____				
23.			_____		
24.				_____	
25.					_____
26.	_____				
27.		_____			
28.				_____	
29.			_____		
30.					_____
TOTAL	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____