
Study Session #1

“An Introduction”

SESSION GOALS:

To have participants begin to view discipline as a process of helping students develop new behaviors and to introduce participants to course content.

GROUP ACTIVITY:

Review Chapter 1, in the course text 21st Century Discipline. After your review think about what the message of the chapter was and then meet with your team for a discussion. Some suggested discussion questions follow.

As a team, decide what the message of the chapter was.

- Consider the statement: A teacher is very busy, and the quickest way to deal with a discipline problem is to tell a student what to do rather than help the student figure out what he wants. Do you believe an effective approach to school discipline can be based on helping students "figure out what they want?" Does this sound too permissive to you? Does this sound impractical? Why?
- Perry Good, author of *Helping Kids Help Themselves*, states that teachers will become frustrated if they think punishing students will make them stop behaving inappropriately and get them to do what they want them to do. Have you used consequences or punishment in your approach to discipline? Has your approach been effective with students who frequently act out or withdraw? Is there room for improvement?
- Do teachers use fear and guilt in their attempt to control students? In what ways do students react to such coercive approaches? In the short term? Long term?

- From reading and discussing this chapter, what would you conclude about the effectiveness of our contemporary (coercion based) discipline system?

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY:

Please read pages 19 & 20 in the text, 21st Century Discipline by Dr. Jane Bluestein:

GROUP ACTIVITY:

Meet with your Study Team to discuss what you have read.

- In what ways did your own experience as a student reflect the values, skills and relationships of the Industrial Age?
- In what ways did your experience as a student reflect the values, skills and relationships of the Information Age?
- In what ways have your experiences affected your values and priorities as a teacher?
- What implications do you believe Dr. Bluestein's comments regarding Information Age values and priorities have for classroom and behavior management?
- If the Industrial Age approach to school discipline was authoritarian, then what do you believe the approach to discipline should be for students of the Information Age?
- Does this shift in values have anything to do with the discipline problems that you are experiencing in your own teaching situation?

OVERVIEW:

As educators, you are confronted with discipline problems every day. There are numerous theories as to why discipline problems

continue to be a pressing, time-consuming diversion for today's teachers. The core of the problem may be, as Dr. Bluestein suggests, a shift in societal values. Then, again, it could be the deterioration of the family unit and the lack of parental support. But whatever the cause, discipline problems persist and society in general is looking more and more to the education system to solve its every day discipline problems and to create more responsible, productive citizens at the same time. This is a heavy burden to place on an education system that is also mandated to cope with a rapidly changing information base, skyrocketing technology and diminishing financial and political support. So in terms of dollars and priorities where does this leave discipline problems? Right where they have always been, in the hands of the classroom teacher.

If you agree with Dr. Bluestein's position on this matter, then learning to deal more effectively with discipline problems is a solution that makes good sense. Not only should teachers deal effectively and efficiently with problems in their classrooms, they should do so in a way that helps students become caring, responsible and productive adults prepared to enter the Age of Information. As hard as it sounds, and as challenging as it is, this is not an impossible task. In keeping with the explosion of information in today's world, there are new theories about brain function, learning and behavior that can provide new and helpful ideas for solving discipline problems more effectively. The problem we face is that educators are seldom presented this new information in a format that helps them to put it to use in a timely and effective way. The transition from theory to practice is usually left for them to create or discover on their own.

The goal of this course is to correct that problem by providing new information about student behavior and problem solving strategies in a way that bridges the theory-to-practice gap. The course begins with an exploration of new theories that deal with brain function, intelligence and behavior.

This information challenges educators to look at student behavior from new points of view and explore new explanations of how and why students chose to do what they do. Following the new information, the course presents a series of real-life discipline problems in a framework that provides educators an opportunity to analyze both the student's and the teacher's behavior as part of the process for deciding how to handle the problem more effectively.

This approach to dealing with discipline problems is unique. In the past, teacher-training discipline programs have been superficial at best. They have given teachers techniques for stopping unwanted behavior without ever exploring why the student chose the behavior in the first place or presenting teachers with ideas of what they need to do to help the student choose more responsible behavior in the future. This course is designed to take educators beyond methods for controlling students. Participants will gain knowledge and skills that enable them to teach students to control themselves. Teachers will learn to identify the problems that are causing misbehavior and plan strategies that help students learn to solve their own problems.

GROUP ACTIVITY:

Preparation for Video Viewing.

As a team, prior to viewing the video, discuss each of these issues/questions.

Most educators believe that producing responsible citizens is a noble goal for education. However, with all of the other concerns you have as an educator, do you think that this is a practical goal? What is the rationale for your response?

In a recent Gallup poll, the majority of parents agreed that it should be the responsibility of the school to teach values to children. Discuss the pros and cons of this finding. What are your conclusions?

Considering your answer to the preceding item, what should be the role of parents in the education of their children? What has been your experience as to the role they actually play? How much of a concern should the parent's role be to teachers?

Some people argue that teaching students to be responsible for their own behavior is a "permissive" approach to discipline. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

As you begin this course, what are your expectations? In the area of discipline, what are your most pressing needs? Share your expectations and concerns with your study team.

VIEWING ACTIVITY:

As a team, view the first part of the video for Session #1, "An Introduction." In this video, you will be presented with an overview of the course. You will learn about the new knowledge and skills you will gain and will preview a sample of the different discipline situations presented through the videos for this course. You will also perceive the value of using the knowledge and skills gained from these situations after hearing the opinions of experts on effective ways of dealing with these discipline problems.

As you view the video, make notes of the points that you will want to discuss with your group:

GROUP DISCUSSION:

- After completing the opening activities and viewing the first video, in what ways can this course help you deal with discipline problems more effectively?
- What is your team's role in this course? Your role?
- In *Creating Effective Schools* Wilbur Brookover, et. al. list a set of "myths" held by some teachers and schools with

respect to maintaining good discipline. These myths are:

- "Those kids" - low achieving, low SES, minority, the emotionally disturbed - are "different;"
- Children in general are uncontrollable because of the permissiveness of society;
- Parents are no longer supportive of schools
- Parents cannot control their children;
- Court cases, giving due process to students, have tied the hands of the schools; and
- Teacher training institutions do not deal adequately with the problem.
- First of all, do agree that these are "myths?" Do you believe that any of these points are valid with respect to preventing you from helping students behave responsibly?
- The authors go on to suggest that teachers' beliefs in these myths lower their expectations for behavior; for example, "Nothing I try makes any difference. These children simply will not listen." Are you aware of colleagues who have lowered their standards? Do you think they did this because of a belief in one or more of the above listed "myths?"
- With respect to teachers who lower their standards for behavior, the authors also say that this "results in trying one 'gimmick' after another, without using any one strategy consistently. Subsequent failure of each new plan, for want of consistent enforcement, then confirms in the teacher's mind the hopelessness of trying to deal with 'problem' children." Discuss this statement with your study team.

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- Consider the following statement: "All students can behave if they want to, they just choose not to behave." What is your reaction to this statement?

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY:

In this course you will be examining how students take in information from the real world, how they process that information and then develop a behavior. The following Worksheet will help you to begin to think about this process and how it affects your students.

Worksheet

Please read the following situation:

A teacher is meeting with two students about a problem they both have with respect to talking and visiting with friends in class instead of getting their work done:

TEACHER: "Morgan and Matthew, when I gave the reading assignment today, what were you doing?"

MORGAN: "Nuthin'."

MATTHEW: (DOESN'T RESPOND)

TEACHER: "Well, this is what I saw you doing. You were both choosing to spend the time talking with your friends. Isn't that correct?"

MORGAN: "They were talkin' to me. I wasn't talking to them."

MATTHEW: (SHRUGS)

TEACHER: "Is talking with your friends during reading helping you to get your work done, and learn interesting things?"

MATTHEW: "No."

MORGAN: "I told you it was the other kids. Why aren't you talking to them?"

TEACHER: "Matthew, I know your friends are important to you, but school work is important, too. I'll tell you what. It's best that you read quietly by yourself, it's easier to concentrate that way. But during math, I'll allow you to work with your friends during problem-solving time. Is that OK?"

MORGAN: "Hey, what about me?"

MATTHEW: "Yeah."

TEACHER: "Okay, Matt, we'll give that a try for the next day or so. You can go to recess now."

MORGAN: "Great!"

TEACHER: "No, not yet, we have some more talking to do..."

In this scenario, you have two students with the same problem behavior, being asked the same questions, but responding in very different ways. In this course, you will see that students can only behave based on what they know. What students know can come from out of school as much as in school. In this Information Age, students are barraged with ideas, concepts, behaviors and supposed outcomes by all sorts of media, not the least being television. They also learn from their family, friends and, for that matter, just living in a sometimes chaotic world.

To complete this activity, think about the responses of the two students. What could they have learned outside of class that could be prompting that behavior? Also, consider where they could have got this information?

First, speculate as to the type of information and/or experiences you believe the student Morgan might have been exposed to outside of school.

Now, speculate as to the type of information and/or experiences you believe the student Matthew might have been exposed to outside of school.

Have you ever thought about the type of information and experiences that students bring with them to school? Do you think this could be an important concept that should be considered?

GROUP ACTIVITY:

Share the above activity with your study team. Discuss your speculation as to the outside-of-school experiences of the two students.

- What are the similarities?
- What are the differences?
- Do you see this type of analysis as having any relevance to understanding student behavior in your own situations? Why? Why not?

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY:

Review the following summary of the key points for this session before proceeding to the Classroom Application Assignment. As you review the key points, consider which of them seem to be most applicable to you and your teaching situation.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS:

- While the quickest way to deal with discipline problems is to tell students what to do, the best way (for students) is to let them figure it out for themselves, giving them help when needed.
- In the past, Industrial Age students could get ahead through obedience, dedication, persistence and the ability to avoid making waves.
- Now, in the Information Age, to succeed in life, students need to learn to negotiate, to innovate, and to communicate effectively.
- Modern society is calling for educators to produce citizens who can think for themselves and take responsibility for their own behavior.
- Educators need to learn new strategies for dealing with discipline problems that help students achieve the personal, responsible growth they need for success in school and in life.

CLASSROOM APPLICATION ASSIGNMENT:

In the Worksheet activity completed earlier in this session, you analyzed a scenario between a teacher and two students with respect to what could have been learned outside of school. Your classroom assignment is to go into your teaching situation and find students whose behavior is somewhat similar to that of Matthew or Morgan.

After you have identified the students, do a real-life analysis similar to that completed in the worksheet activities. To accomplish this, ask yourself the following questions: What type of information could this student have gained outside of school that is affecting his behavior in school? If you know something about the background of the student, try to identify what these information sources are? If you do not know the student that well, speculate as to what you believe these sources could be. In your analysis consider the student's family and friends, the community he lives in as well as society as a whole.

After you have completed your analysis, proceed to the Learning Report for this session.

LEARNING REPORT/INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY:

Please turn to the Learning Report in the back of this book and record your answers as directed.

Please Note:

1.) All Learning Reports will be at the back of the book for easy removal so that they can be submitted for grading.

2.) These must be written as an individual report, not as a study team activity. These reports are important, as they constitute 50% of your final grade.

3.) Learning Reports must be typed or written legibly to ensure that evaluators can read and understand them. If you wish, you may replicate the Learning Report on a computer or word processor.

